Professional Resource:
Center for International Media Assistance Research Report: Media Literacy (2009)

Jessica Roberts

Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

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Media literacy is undeniably an important component of civic education in the United States, but it may be even more crucial in developing countries where an informed and active citizenry can help support fledgling democratic governments and monitor serious human rights abuses or corruption. That is the impetus behind a three-part series of reports commissioned by the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy. The reports examine global trends in media literacy with three areas of focus: the general public, citizen journalists and youth.

The Media Literacy reports may not offer obvious applications for educators in the United States--since the goals of CIMA are international and the reports focus on issues in developing countries and policy recommendations—but the value of an informed and active citizenry is universal, and the lessons taken from the case studies in these reports can be applied in any context.

In the first report, "Understanding the News," Susan Moeller points out differences in how funders use and understand the term "media literacy"–or fail to use it at all, but all find themselves doing what could be considered media literacy education or providing support for media literacy initiatives. She quotes a former policy advisor for the United Nations Development Program describing how media literacy is an effective tool for organizations fighting propaganda and "infotainment":

It's more useful and practical to try and educate the citizenry to be on guard against hate speech and rumor-mongering or whatever, and have them report it than to try to control the ever-expanding supply of news.
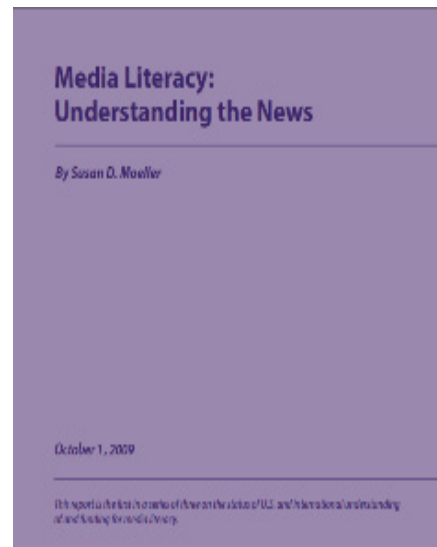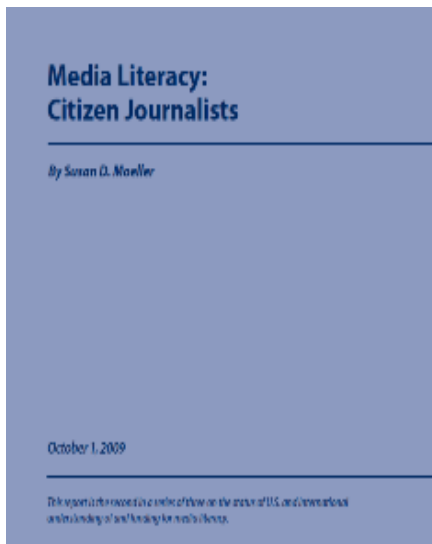
Moeller's explanation of the role of media literacy initiatives in development projects around the world provides a strong grounding in the field and examples of how media literacy goals can be operationalized. The recommendations in "Understanding the News" may be of interest to media literacy scholars, particularly a call for more research, qualitative and quantitative, and inter-disciplinary work that could "bring not just attention but greater comprehension of a situation" (20).

In fact, there is not much quantitative research available to inform any of the reports, so the authors rely largely on interviews and case studies to describe the impact of media literacy projects around the world and to make the case for including media literacy programs in media development projects. Interviews with leaders in the field of media development offer strong support for the importance of media literacy initiatives and the effectiveness of those programs.

"Citizen Journalists," the second report in the series, also serves as an introduction to the concepts of citizen journalism and its significance to media literacy. The potential of citizen journalists to contribute to news is still being explored in the United States and the rest of the developed world – and media literacy educators may not have incorporated either the study of citizen journalists as contributors to the information media or the need for media literate citizens to understand their role in recording, creating and distributing information. If citizens are indeed to be not just media literate consumers but active producers of journalism, media literacy education must prepare them to do both. Moeller provides convincing support for this need, pointing out that "new media platforms mean that not only the audience and traditional journalists need to be educated about what media can and should do. Citizen journalists need the same education" (11).

**Media Literacy:
Citizen Journalists**

By Susan D. Moeller

October 1, 2009

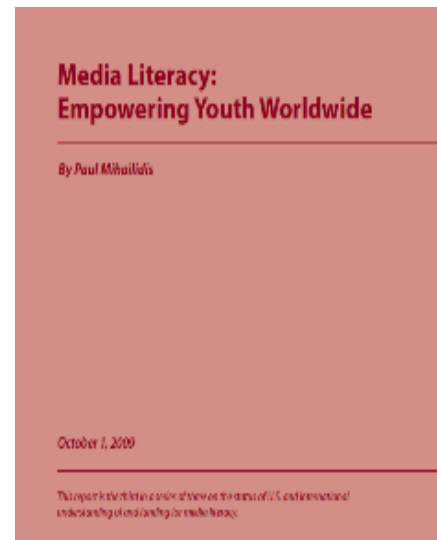http://cima.ned.org/reports/media-literacy-citizen-journalists.html

Moeller's focus on the information model, wherein citizen journalists can contribute informational content, ignores the potential for citizen engagement and ultimately deliberation, but emphasizes the impor-tance of citizen journalists' abilities to gather information in contexts where freedom of information is of greater concern, such as countries in conflict, new democracies, or societies with repressive governments.

Perhaps the report titled "Empowering Youth Worldwide," by Paul Mihailidis, will be most relevant to and useful for educators. This third report describes current media literacy education programs for young people, and attempts to highlight for policy makers "the essential need for media literacy education for youth and young adults as the next generation of citizens" (4). Media literacy educators may find the report useful for guidance in not only planning courses, but in justifying the inclusion of a media literacy component in communication, civic or other courses. Of particular interest is the importance of civic education in media literacy courses. Mihailidis cites his research showing that, "Unless students are specifically taught about the basic rights of free speech and free press in the context of their media literacy courses, they may become more cynical and disengaged about their social institutions, including the government and media" (9).

**Media Literacy:
Empowering Youth Worldwide**

By Paul Mihailidis

October 1, 2009

http://cima.ned.org/reports/media-literacy-empowering-youth-worldwide.html

The broader applicability of the recommendations is questionable given the lack of data to support claims of success and the diversity of media contexts in which educators may find themselves. Mihailidis claims that media literacy courses can teach students to "value access to information and work to develop students' critical capacities in comprehension, analysis and evaluation" based on studies of K-12

students in the United States (9). However, whether these practices might be transferable in developing nations, where freedom of expression and democratic institutions are not yet fully established, is difficult to determine.

The references listed in both the report on citizen journalists and youth would be helpful to any educator looking for learning resources or examples for lessons. Mihailidis surveys media literacy initiatives around the world and several successful programs in the United States, any of which could serve as a model for educators. Although, again, it is unclear how success was measured in these cases.

His framework for successful media literacy initiatives is an excellent resource for those in need of guidance creating effective programs. While there is little quantitative data to support the guidelines, Mihailidis points out that the benefits of media literacy "are not immediate and are hard to assess in terms of quantifiable outcomes." (26)

Above all, the reports offer an excellent overview of media literacy programs worldwide, and give educators a good understanding of how media literacy is being actively promoted by international media aid organizations – and where that work is lacking. More significantly, these reports provide a clear vision of the goals of media literacy education, the important role media literacy plays in democratic and developing states, and how both could be made relevant to students in the United States. They also offer guidance for future implementation and study of media literacy programs.

References

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