

BOOK REVIEW
The Media Education Manifesto



Book review

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Media, it would seem, is changing every time we blink. Moreover, this ever-changing media landscape appears to be at the core of many current issues that we are facing as a society. These issues include disinformation and fake news (Buckingham, 2019; Mason et al., 2018), the datafication of our personal information and social interactions (Livingstone, 2019; van Dijck, 2014), and children's increasing use of technology (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2019). If we, as individuals and part of society, want to understand, discuss and face these fast-changing challenges, we must be media literate. *The Media Education Manifesto* by David Buckingham intends to make us, the readers, recognize the urgency of this task.

David Buckingham, a renowned media scholar from the United Kingdom, draws from his experience and expertise to write a compelling case for the promotion of critical media education. The author defines media literacy beyond the mere access and use of media devices and forms to also include "in-depth critical understanding of how these media work, how they communicate, how they represent the world, and how they are produced and used" (p. 3). The book is intended for anyone involved or interested in media and/or education, including both practitioners (either as students, teachers or parents) and scholars. The author has two objectives: first, he seeks to explain why we need critical media literacy, laying out its basic principles and aims; second, he proposes a "plan of action" in which he describes methodological tools to promote and exercise critical media literacy.

The first section of the book outlines the limitations of some of the previous visions of media education, focused on either the risks or the benefits that are inherent to media. This approach, Buckingham argues, presents a deterministic view of the role of technology in society and does not allow us to understand critically the complex relation of media and us, the users and producers. Further, it tends to dichotomize a world vision that is either inside or outside media. He proposes then to change the focus from media (as a noun) to mediation (as an ongoing process). This view leads to a wider vision of the complex and nuanced factors that determine the relation of media and society.

One aspect that is worth highlighting from this section is Buckingham's explanation of the complicated relationship between media education and policy. The author explains how, on one hand, media literacy has been regarded as an alternative to state regulation, which has led to the passing of the responsibility to the individuals instead of the government. On the other

hand, some experts and policymakers have emphasized strong media regulation (see, for example, MacBride, 2017), without contemplating media literacy as a way to empower citizens. He argues that both visions must go hand-by-hand, and that promoting media literacy allows people to "exercise a degree of power and control that we might otherwise be denied" (p. 39). For Buckingham, being media literate includes both an individual vision of media and a collective view of its implications in society.

After discussing why a critical approach to media literacy is needed, the second section of the book focuses on Buckingham's plan of action. Buckingham views critical thinking about media as a reflexive and dialogical process, where students must constantly ask about their "own preconceptions, interpretations and conclusions" (p. 55). In order to think critically of media (including but not limited to digital media), he proposes four concepts as tools of analysis in media education: *media language* (including how language is used in each medium and how it is used to convey meaning); *representation* (talking about what is being represented, how it is being represented and who is being represented); *production* (talking about how the media is created and distributed, who is involved and how they are profiting from it); and *audiences* (including how audiences are reached, assumptions that are made about audiences, how media is being accessed, and who is using the media). Then he proposes three dimensions of how media education must be approached pedagogically: *reading* (textual analysis), *writing* (creative production) and *contextual analysis* (understanding the broader social context). This complete framework is not meant to be a "monolithic account of media power" (p. 63), but a set of guiding questions that act as critical tools for the promotion of critical media education.

While Buckingham's book effectively illustrates the need for media literacy and outlines some essential elements that should be a part of a comprehensive plan for action, two critiques could be made of *The Media Education Manifesto*. First, further explanation is needed to understand how these critical tools can be adjusted to different contexts, especially those that vary from the author's experience in the United Kingdom. An example is Latin America, where the realities of media and education are different in many aspects to other regions of the world, as exemplified by Mateus et al. (2020). Second, while the author recognizes that there is a difference between critical literacy and action, saying that "media education seeks to promote critical

understandings; but critical understanding should also lead to action” (p. 115), more explanation is needed on how this critical view of media literacy would translate to the empowerment of the learners –how to go from experiencing, conceptualizing and critically analyzing media to the change of its use in real-life settings (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). This disconnection between criticality and empowerment has been highlighted before (see, for example, Stromquist, 2014). Approaches to media education should no longer ignore these extra skills and actions needed to move from a critical citizenship to an active one.

Overall, Buckingham’s book achieves what it intends to do: show readers both how urgent and how important the promotion of critical media literacy is, and outline a plan of action about how this vision of media education should be approached. His examples about the application of the framework (which include discussions on social media, disinformation and fake news) show that media is a phenomenon that affects all of us, and that responses to the challenges that arise from it must articulate both world-wide views and localized initiatives, both individual action and institutional responsibility, both traditional and digital technology. Media, as the author explains, is more a symptom than a cause of modern issues, and it should be treated as such. This book is a call for media literacy and why we need to make it happen soon: “If we want a rich, diverse and healthy media environment, we clearly need critical, discerning audiences” (p. 115). In the current global landscape, Buckingham’s call cannot wait.

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