Training and Assessing Media Education Competence in Professional Training Programs for Teachers. The Case Study of Romania

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I. The European context of the necessity for media education

In 2019, the European Union decided to establish the European Digital Media Observatory in order to provide a core service platform of a digital service infrastructure which will serve fact-checkers and academic researcher with expertise in the field of online disinformation, and open to collaboration with media organizations and media literacy practitioners. This is all done in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relevant actors, vectors, tools, methods, dissemination dynamics, prioritized targets and the impact on society. The platform will advance the development of an EU market of fact-checking services, increase the scientific knowledge available on online disinformation and support public authorities in charge of monitoring digital media and developing new policies.

At the same time, in Romania, one of the latest social studies, representative nation-wide[2], shows that a third of the Romanian children live under the minimum level of severe poverty, and approximately 150 000 children go to sleep hungry every night. Beyond these brutal data, there is a strong correlation between the level of poverty and the access to information, respectively to quality education (including media education). Other studies (Reports of Save the Children Organization –

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[2] Badescu Gabriel, Petre Niculina, Angi Daniela, *Bunastarea copilului din mediul rural 2016* [The welfare of the child of the rural area] (World Vision Report Romania, Cluj Napoca: Risoprint, 2016).

Romania[3]) reveal that there is a consistent exposure of children to physical, psychological and online violence (1 of 3 children). Why are these data relevant for researching media education training programs, respectively for the curricula analysis of media education training programs of the Romanian educational system? It is our concern that the high level of poverty and insufficient funding of Romanian education represents one of the main causes of the lack of any formal training initiated by the state, not only in the field of media education, but in the larger one of communication (media and online). When we tackle the issue of poverty in relation to the lack of civic participation and democracy and media education, we have to take into consideration the technological, structural, social and educational context.

The Romanian educational process and the social context represent a fragile system due to several variables: lack of structural and technological infrastructure in schools, home and private high speed internet and the increasing of internet use time; lack of trained and educated human resource etc. If we discuss the structural and technological framework, the Romanian school reaches very low standards regarding the access and the use of technology in school, the digitalization of the classroom and of the educational resources, we must accept that it represents more an ideal that a reality. The digital division appears with a greater force when we analyse marginalized communities and Roma children. In the marginalized areas (rural and urban) the lack of access to this technological infrastructure draws a strong barrier that occurs in the life of children that will leave deep marks on their future active participation to the community life and the civic involvement (participative democracies). The second component refers to the socio-cultural context: the so-called digital natives group excludes this category of young people and exile them into the category of digital immigrants as their parents and other family members; their access to knowledge, to information and to resource is profoundly affected. Last but not least, the discussion on the educational context is the key to the role and place of critical citizenship within the Romanian national training curricula. Very simply put, with the help of digitalization, access to education and qualitative learning would have been the decent solution for answering

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[3] *** Save the Children Romania Organisation. 2019. Study on children use of the internet, https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sci-ro/files/78/780e38b4-9f55-4114-9448-ab496 37d51cc.pdf (last accessed March, 2019).

the pressures outlined above. Unfortunately, the situation is quite the opposite and it needs special attention and measures. In our opinion, the human resource (teachers, experts and young students) is key in implementing the training curricula and practicing the skills of civic citizenship. School as the main education provider may and can affect the changes from passive learning to active engagement in order to turn youngsters into active citizens and consolidate participative democracy.

II. Media education – theoretical framework

The European Commission perspective underlines the practical aspect of media competence on three dimensions: access, analyze and multiplication/ producing. This definition is part of the pragmatic perspective by underlying the two most important elements: competence and literacy.[4]

If we agree with Wheeler's perspective that we are witnessing the 3rd world revolution (2019), that is shaping in fast manner our nature of work, personal privacy, education and media, all the aspects of our modern life, then the need for understanding media and IT giants represents a way of understanding our "present future".[5]

In the context of definitions, the official perspective of the Romanian educational system is very restrictive and the concepts are not explained or mentioned[6]. The general framework of competencies only refers to the digital one, respectively to the use of new technologies of information and communication. One formal definition is missing.

A more thorough definition is provided by the German educational system in Cities for Children (2011)[7]: Agenda for Media Literacy. Policy Recommendations for European Cities to support Children and Young People. There is a distinction between the two fundamental concepts: media education and media literacy. Media literacy refers to

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[4] Ileana Rotaru, "Media Pedagogy: Challenges of an Interdisciplinary Research Field in Social Science", *Romanian Journal of Sociology* 30:1-2 (2019): 53-65.

[5] T. Wheeler, *From Gutenberg to Google. The History of our Future* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2019).

[6] Rotaru Ileana, *Virtual* Communication (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

[7] Cities for Children: Agenda for Media Literacy. Policy Recommendations for European Cities to support Children and Young People. 2011 (Last accessed June, 2012, from http://www.citiesforchildren.eu/fileadmin/media/PDF/Konferenz_2011/CfC_Agend a.pdf).

competencies, knowledge/information and critical thinking that can be spontaneously developed and trained. Media education refers to something more than critical thinking and knowledge, that is, to the creative participation in media production. Media education is comprised within the German *bildung* for education as training, as part of personal development, the individual as a whole accordingly with the harmonization between personal needs and the society's demands. We consider that this perspective is more suitable and it tackles the essence of media education: life-long training and an extended public.

Understanding media is not a process that focuses only on mass-media, but also on its effects and content. Buckingham[8] underlines that once the online has emerged in our lives and our children's everyday lives, the attention must be turned on towards the person, the content that everybody shares and creates, towards the virtual communities are build and developed, and how the social interactions occur. The idea of a national curriculum on media literacy is to overcome the binary, analogical debate on the risks and uses of the media, but to focus more on civic education and understand the social relations and structures that media produces within the online. In this context, media education becomes not a necessity, but an emergency.

In a recent study[9], we analyzed the media literacy competence within the Romanian National Curriculum, starting from the general definition of media literacy provided by the most common definitions and from the eight key competencies of education at the European Union level (see Table1).

Table 1. Digital Competence

Competence	Definition	Skills Set
Digital competence	1. Apply Technology Effectively: technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information.	S1. Critical use of information technology for work S2. Basic skills in ICT

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[8] D. Buckingham, *Media Education Manifesto* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2019).
[9] Ileana Rotaru, "Media Literacy as a Key Competence of 21st Century. A Case Study of Romania", *Professional Communication and Translation Studies Proceedings* 12 (2019): 1-6.

	2. Use digital technologies, communication/networking tools, and social media appropriately to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to function successfully in a given environment. 3. Fundamental understanding of the ethical and legal issues surrounding the access and use of information technologies.	S3. Understanding the role, opportunity and risks related to ICT in everyday life. S4.Ability to use and handle technological tools and machines.

Media education/ media literacy encounters a very low level of understanding and it is insufficiently operationalized from the Romanian Formal Curricula (competencies, scientific content, educational resource or didactic strategy). The media education training programs are needed as the key role is played by teacher/ school in order for the students to spend quality time during educational activities and in their spare time.

A gap and inconsistencies between the EU level (policies, regulations and strategies) and the national level (e.g., digital agenda, human rights, education etc.) are evidently underlined by this type of research and the social and educational reality shows a stringent need for correlations.

III. Romanian national training programs – an overview

Recent Romanian national representative studies[10] have underlined the increasing of media consumption (internet); the decreasing of the age of children in internet use; as well as strategies on answering to the internet risks (cyberbullying, safety etc.). The themes refine the media (internet) effects on children and the relation between school (teachers, educational process, educational resources) and students. The relation is becoming fragile as the internet and media actively used by the digital natives are overwhelming and the answer provided by the educational authorities is

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[10] Anca Velicu, Bianca Balea, Monica Barbovschi, *Acces, utilizări, riscuri şi oportunităţi ale internetului pentru copiii din România. Rezultatele EU Kids Online 2018*. EU Kids Online DigiLiv-REI (last accessed September 2019 from http://rokidsonline.net/wp/2019/01 /16/eu-kids-online-lansarea-raportului-pentru-romania/).

defensive instead of proactive. The idea of training and national educational training programs has become more powerful within the discussions on these results.

Adding the fact observed and analyzed by our previous researches[11] that demonstrated the lack of media education and media-communication competence within the Romanian National Curricula, it is our conclusion that in the Romanian educational system, the media literacy competence is not aimed in any educational curriculum. Few efforts have been realized in the past ten years, efforts that were initiated by the civil society experts which have not yet been adapted to the national curriculum. Based on the literature review and on the content analyses of the national curriculum, the previous study contrived media literacy strands and standards including performance objectives and basic teaching and learning contents. Two models of media education programs are presented and analyzed in the aspects of objectives, curriculum and state of implementation. Both of the training media education programs were elaborated and implemented at a national level by two non-governmental organizations, one at a local level and one at a national level. These are the only training programs for teachers nationally recognized and implemented in Romania at this moment.

We will present in an exhaustive manner two training programs, in chronological order.

A. Media Education Program – Kreativ Research

The media education program was recognized by order of the National Ministry of Education in 2018. Since then, during 2018 and2019, 95 teachers (4 groups) graduated from the training. The program was located in a local area of West Romania, targeting teachers of the rural area and disadvantaged schools. The program has been accredited for 4 years, until 2022. It is expected that minimum 50 teachers per year will attend and graduate from the training.

According to the national regulation regarding the process of national accreditation and recognition of the training programs for teachers, the methodology includes the items below:

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[11] Ileana Rotaru, "Media Literacy as a Key Competence of 21st Century."

- Scope

  As a result of a small scale sociological research (a mandatory need analysis), the scope of the training program is formulated: Training and developing skills of analysis, access, assess and use (production) of media content by using smart technologies and internet (including social media platforms, applications etc.) creatively within the educational process of the classroom and in an innovative manner in order to develop students' learning skills (including non-formal education).

- General and specific objectives

  According to the general purpose of the program, the objectives were elaborated on four dimensions: Analyze, Access, Assessment/ Evaluation and Production/ Creation. These dimensions are operationalized on the next criteria: Specific Competences – categories; Concrete/ Applied activities and ways of achievement; Applying context: schools, classrooms, non-formal education/ projects

The specific pinpointed competencies that are to be developed by the media pedagogy program are to be found in the following media dimensions: Access, Analyse, Assess, and Produce.

For the dimension of the Media Analysis, the general objectives are:

- To analyse the media context of the media message;
- To draw up media content interpretative tests and analysis criteria;
- To devise didactic activities in view of a useful and quality education approach.

For the dimension of the Media Accessing, the general objectives are:

- To identify optimal and legitimate information sources depending on personal and professional needs;
- To decode and interpret perturbing pathological message contents;
- To use communication and information means in a diversified way.

For the dimension of the Media Assessing, General objectives are:

- To establish evaluation objectives and criteria in view of observing efficient and authentic information and communication principles;
- To use evaluation techniques and tools, specific to the educational process in the context of communication and mass media education;
- To evaluate the educational approach in view of identifying the media and technological informational requisite.

For the final dimension of the Media Production, general objectives are:

- To use the new and the traditional media creatively and ingeniously in the instructional educational process;
- To conceive NICT- and media-oriented didactic materials and strategies;
- Exercising action schemes to acquire/polish practical skills;

From the point of view of the correlation between general and specific objectives, thematic categories and content, specific competences - at the same time, achieving the training program objectives will lead to the extension of the media literacy competence and its application for the education process. In this manner, it is intended the introduction and consolidation of a holistic vision on the educational activity that endorses and includes in all of its levels and specialties the media and digital competencies. The training program adapts the social reality of information society to the school's needs and pressures (see Table 2)

Table 2. Correlation between: general and specific objectives, thematic categories and content, specific competences

General/ specific Objectives	Learning Unit/ Thematic categories	Specific competences
GO.1Analyse GO 2. (Access) GO.3 (Assess)	U1 – Media pedagogy. Strategies and techniques of analysing, accessing and assessing the media content T1 – Media Pedagogy	1.The proper use of concepts and theories of media education field and media literacy and the production of media

	T1.1.New media. Characteristics T1.2. Media pedagogy. Definition and characteristics T2 – Strategies and techniques of analysing, accessing and assessing the media content T 2.1. – Five Key Questions Model T 2.2. – Forms of deconstructing the media content	content by using new technologies and new media applications in an interdisciplinary manner; 2. To design interactively the educational contents by using new technologies and media 5. To access and critically select the information sources from diverse environments; 8. To realize specific charts of analysing media content (proper, smart, easy to use, trustful etc.) and media support
GO 2 Access GO 4 Production	U2 – Using media and NTIC within the educational process – digital competence T.1. Digitalization in education T.1.1. Digital competence and the contemporary society T.1.2. The educational process in the information society T.2. Current use of NTIC in education T.2.1.Using NTIC by teachers T.2.2. Applications, educational software and platforms as support for learning and teaching	2. To design in an interactive manner the educational contents by using new technologies and media 3.To include specific didactic strategies in order to allow the efficient use of media as didactic auxiliaries within the educational process 9. To develop team-work skills and innovative spirit by increasing the students' and teachers' involvement in joint projects of the community;
GO 1 Analyse GO 3 Assess	U3 – Online violence. Communicational pathologies: bullying, cyberbullying, hate speech, fake news	4. To manifest an emphatic behaviour and a helping orientation in the online world

	T1. Media effects T.1.1. Types of online violence T1.2. Communication pathologies T2. Prevention and fighting online violence online. Interventions T.2.1. Psychological mechanisms of prevention and fighting against online violence T2.2. The role of the school-family partnership in fighting the negative effects of media use	7. To enlarge teachers' knowledge horizon by exercising media analysis skills and by specific psychological theories and mechanisms in order to tackle issues and cases of bullying, online violence, symbolic violence etc) 9. To develop team-work skills and innovative spirit by increasing the students' and teachers' involvement in joint projects of the community;
GO.3 (Assess) GO. 4 (Production)	U4 – Media Literacy. Media message production T1.Principles of media literacy T1.1. 5 principles of media message production T1.2. Models of production T2. Genres of media T2.1. Informational type: Interview, Reportage, Investigation T2.2. Comment type: Editorial, Comment	1.The proper use of concepts and theories of media education field and media literacy and the production of media content by using new technologies and new media applications in an interdisciplinary manner; 2. To design in an interactive manner the educational contents by using new technologies and media 8. To realize specific charts of analysing media content (proper, smart, easy to use, trustful etc.) and media support 9. To develop team-work skills and innovative spirit by increasing the students' and teachers' involvement in joint projects of the community;

		10. To show an open interest in improving own strategies and communication behaviour when receiving media content and using new technologies

B. The useful, safe and creative use of the Internet (acronym: FUCSI) – Save the Children Romania

This program results from a long effort and research realized by the Save the Children Organization Romania in the field of safe internet and cyberbullying. The necessity of a training program for teachers has been acknowledged and addressed by several other connected projects (community ones) in schools that were implemented by the above mentioned organization. As a direct consequence, the training program focuses on the internet use, the virtual world that children are submersed into it and the risks and benefits of being digital native. The program is conceived as a partnership between Save the Children Romania and local institutions of the Ministry of Education (Training Centers for Teachers) in all 42 counties of Romania. Special attention was awarded to the training of trainers as special training sessions were organized and didactic materials were delivered in order to facilitate and to improve the FUCSI program implementation. The program will start from 2020 for four years, and it prognosticates to train at least 1000 teachers/ year.

- Scope - as a result of a small scale sociological research (a mandatory need analysis), the scope of the training program is formulated: training and developing the digital competence of the teachers of the undergraduate level, respectively the skills of useful, secure and creative use of the internet and the NTIC within their didactic professional activity and the learning process
- General and specific objectives
  The following general objectives were elaborated according to the needs analysed and the general scope of the training program (described in Table 8):

GO1: Training the digital competence of the teachers by using internet securely and creatively within their didactic professional activity

GO2: Forming and training interactive didactic methods and strategies and digital content in the educational process by using new technologies and virtual applications

GO3: Valorise the student and his/hers capacities in order to assure his/ hers critical and selective thinking in relation with internet use and with the partnership between school-family-community;

GO4: Disclosure of an empathic behaviour against aggressive and abusive online behaviours and to show a critical spirit against the exposure of one person to illegal content, especially in school or of school colleagues.

Table 3. General and specific objectives of FUCSI training program

General Objectives	Specific objectives
GO1: Training the digital competence of the teachers by using internet securely and creatively within their didactic professional activity	To identify and to argue the recommendation for digital citizenship from the human rights and eSafety principles; To describe the main rights and responsibilities of one person using the internet (personal data, reputation, cyberbullying etc.) To recognize and actively use methods of critical analysis of the online media content (fake news, trolling, unwanted content exposure etc.) To identify the adequate methods of fighting hate speech and online violence between students
GO2: Forming and training interactive didactic methods and strategies and digital content in the educational process by using new technologies and virtual applications	To become familiarized with the main evolutions and pressures made by the digital society on the educational process To use interactive didactic methods and strategies and digital content in the educational process

	To practice the digital competence by using NTIC and virtual applications due to the process of learning To promote creativity and media production by using internet during the teaching-learning process
GO3: Valorise the student and his/her capacities in order to assure his/ hers critical and selective thinking in relation to internet use and with the partnership between school-family-community;	To stimulate the interest for activities and creative behaviour of the members of the virtual communities To respect and to encourage the freedom of expression and the right of private life in the online environment by realizing educational projects and encouraging proactive behaviours
GO4: Disclosure of an empathic behaviour against aggressive and abusive online behaviours and to show a critical spirit against the exposure of one person to illegal content, especially in school or of school colleagues	To recognize and to active use methods of critical analyse of the online media content (fake news, trolling, unwanted content exposure etc.) To express critical against online aggressions and violence, recognizing the methods of fighting against it and offer the proper support for the victims To apply eSafety principles

The correlation between general and specific objectives, thematic categories and content, specific competencies is described in Table 4.

Table 4. General objectives, learning units and specific competences of FUCSI training program

General/ specific Objectives	Learning Unit/ Thematic categories	Specific competences
GO2 GO3	U1. Institutional intervention and partnership between school-family-community	Competences of online communication and cooperation

		Competencies of information and management of the online content Competences of using digital methods in the educational process
OG 2 GO4	U2. Online Safety	Competences of identification the potential online risks Competencies of information and management of the online content
GO1 GO4	U3. Digital citizenship. Media Education	Competences of identification the potential online risks Competences of online communication and cooperation Competencies of information and management of the online content
GO1 GO3	U3. Media resources used within the educational process	Competences of using digital methods in the educational process

IV. Interpretation and further discussions

The two media education training programs analyzed in the above section demonstrates the predominant themes and competencies aimed to be trained. The comparative analysis was structured on the next dimensions: context and necessity of the training programs, scope, objectives and the correlation between objectives, content and competencies.

From the perspective of context and necessity, we appreciate the liberty of the educational providers to tackle the media education field

from different backgrounds (theoretical and practice) and to offer a variety of themes. Nevertheless, there are some core themes that emerged from social studies and researches. These offer a red wire and unity of understanding for the importance and gravity of these themes: communicational pathologies, online safety, media education didactics.

From the perspective of didactics, we observe a diversity of methods and didactic strategies meant to encourage creative and critical thinking skills that are in fact, the main scope of both programs. It is underlined the position of proactive use of media and internet in both programs, but with the proper understanding and deconstructing mechanisms for fighting and responding to internet use and media consumption dangers. In the Media Education program, we detect a scale of increased familiarity for teachers to comprehend the field for all the specialties, level of studies and didactic experience. At the same time, there is a level of interiorization the scientific content (on the 4 dimensions) so that teachers will be able to propose and to provide creative input for original media content realized by students for different purposes and according to their needs. In the FUCSI program we observe the accent on the effective use of the internet and of the digital technologies within the educational process, a fact that underlines the digital competence of media education too.

From the trained competence point of view, the FUCSI program focuses more on digital competence as Media Education operationalizes communication competence in the context of media consumption and information society, as media literacy becomes the core competence of one citizen of the contemporary society. A particular module/ learning unit is allocated for New technology use within the Media Education training program, while the FUCSI is entirely dedicated to the internet use. A difference may be observed from the number of specific competences that each program intends to form and train.

In the matter of curricula, the number of learning units is formed equal in both programs. Everyone has 4 learning units/ learning modules. Instead, the number of hour allocated for each module, divided in hour of theory, applications and evaluation, differs between 60 hours (FUCSI) and 100 hours (Media Education). There is no restriction for educational providers to allocate the training hours stipulated in any rules or regulation. As a consequence, each provider elaborates the training

program according with its own resources and availability but there must be preserve and respected for the entire period of implementation.

By theoretical systemizing media literacy, this study is expected to promote the understandings of media education training programs in schools and promote its implementations in the classrooms.

The utility and novelty of such training programs lies in: the complementarity of developed competences and dimensions that might constitute educators' media competency training standard effortlessly; the applying modalities of specific competences underpinned by the four dimensions; overcoming school's formal setting by its implications. In this way, a wish modern pedagogy looked after is fulfilled, respectively by the new education, where school's influence, formal education be exercised more forcefully and consistently outside its walls (in the family, community, etc.) to formulate answers and train students adequately to the pressures of society. Education for communication and mass media, the vast domain of media pedagogy bears, in core, the development of necessary values and competences not only in the area of the multitude of media, but also in the area of optimising and freeing communicational process.

At the same time, in a period of social disruption and of rebirth of extremist wings political parties, as correlated with a period of elections in Romania, the need for implementation of media education training programs is mandatory. The rise of populism and of nationalism is connected with the deepest poverty and with the lack of education of many social classes. Of course, media education programs may become a tool that schools and teachers may use to promote active citizenship and true moral values of democracy.

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