

## **Equipping citizens with critical skills for a multi-channel world**

### **Introduction**

It is of utmost importance that newspapers are taken into account in any discussion or policy aimed at improving media literacy skills throughout Europe. The European news media not only promote reading proficiency by aiding in the development of necessary literacy skills, but the authoritative range of information provided daily is also indispensable to European citizens who wish to inform themselves about the important issues facing society today. Newspapers and news media have the ability to reach broad audiences on a daily basis, providing individuals with the necessary information to be fully engaged citizens who contribute to democratic debate and fulfill their role in an open society.

Publishers have embraced the opportunities of new technology to provide their readers with authoritative news, views and opinions in a multi-channel world. Today, print editions operate alongside newspaper websites, which are often among the most popular portals in their country, as well as news services to smart phones and applications for tablets.

The European Newspaper Publishers' Association (ENPA) has a dedicated Media Literacy Working Group, chaired by Danièle Fonck, director general of Editpress, Luxembourg SA.

ENPA calls on the European institutions to:

- Recognise the important role that newspaper publishers' content on all platforms plays in both functioning and emerging democracies by encouraging active citizenship and an open exchange of opinion and information;
- Take account of the role that newspapers and news media play in supporting development of the cultural industries;
- Ensure that newspaper publishers' content (both in print and digital formats) is included in media education programmes managed by the European Union, since such programmes are incomplete without news media components;
- Link the "digital literacy" initiatives under the EU Digital Agenda to the promotion of "media literacy", so that citizens can critically access the content they access online;
- Shift the focus from a technology-only debate to a comprehensive strategy that includes news literacy (in which the importance of informed citizenship and the use of media to promote civic engagement is emphasised);
- Develop campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the need for respect of copyright;
- Encourage a level playing field between the press and technology platforms, to allow the press to remain economically viable and fulfil its democratic role online.

## European context for Media Literacy Initiatives

The 2009 Commission Recommendation on media literacy (2009/625/CE) recognised the valuable role of publishers in promoting media literacy, both in the print and increasingly in the digital environment. ENPA believes that newspapers have a fundamental role to play in developing media literate and socially engaged citizens who have an understanding of local, national and global events.

With the development of new technology and broadband deployment, consumers today have access to an ever-increasing amount of content and data. The aim of media literacy should therefore be to equip people of all ages and from all social backgrounds, with the skills required to analyse and evaluate this content, across all platforms.

One of the relevant EU initiatives in this context is the European Commission's EU Digital Agenda (2010), which is one of the flagship projects of the EU 2020 Strategy. An important goal of the EU Digital Agenda is to promote "digital literacy", as a means of ensuring that everyone can obtain the knowledge and skills they need to be an active part of the digital era. In ENPA's view, these skills are important for the newspaper readers of the future, since public and political debate increasingly takes place in the digital, as well as the print, environment. We would stress, however, the need to link digital literacy to media literacy.

The European Parliament Report on "Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries"<sup>1</sup> (adopted May 2011), recognised this important link when it called on the Commission to promote digital media literacy. The Report stressed that publishers should be closely involved in such initiatives. This is a positive development, since past policy papers tended to focus on audiovisual media with the written press only mentioned marginally. However, ENPA urges a stronger emphasis on the active use of the exchange of information provided by news media. Civic engagement may be facilitated by technology, but it is triggered by information. News media help citizens to identify important information, understand the context and become engaged in world events.

## Education *with* newspapers

An important distinction should be made between "educating with newspapers" and "educating about newspapers". Educating *with* newspapers should be a lifelong learning experience. Newspapers can contribute to lifelong education because they constantly keep people informed about the latest developments, long after they have left full-time education.

There already exists a plethora of Media Literacy initiatives across Europe, many of which are financially supported by newspaper companies or national newspaper associations. These include WAN/IFRA's "Newspapers in Education (NIE)" programme, designed to stimulate young people's awareness of the diversity of news sources. These projects operate in an open and transparent way. Many schools appreciate the delivery of free newspapers, especially since education budgets are often very tight.

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<sup>1</sup>EP report on "Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries" available at:  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2011-0143&language=EN>

Educating *with* newspapers can also mean that newspapers help to promote literacy amongst the young and beyond this, skills in mathematics, the natural sciences and problem solving. A 2006 study from Finland's University of Jyväskylä's Institute for Educational Research, focusing on a sample of 6000 Finnish 15-year olds found that reading newspapers is beneficial to such skills for young people because all of these require an ability to comprehend drawings, charts and pictures alongside text.

Moreover, education with newspapers includes the following concepts:

- **Newspapers serve a vital purpose in encouraging reading and literacy**, at a time when one in five 15 year olds and many adults cannot read properly, according to a July 2011 study by the Eurydice network for the European Commission<sup>2</sup>.
- **Reading newspapers helps people to become socialised as members of their immediate community**, according to the OECD's Programme for International Studies Assessment (PISA,) as well as promoting the development of critical thinking and media literacy skills that are decisive in acquiring other knowledge and abilities.
- **Inform people that newspapers offer a diverse menu:** newspapers not only provide citizens with the information that they were looking for, but also news, opinion and research that they might never have realised they would be interested in.
- **Smart and sustainable growth of the European economy depends largely on citizens having a high educational level.** Newspapers promote media literacy and make an indispensable contribution to the education and lifelong learning of European citizens. A highly educated and literate workforce is vital to achieve the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy for economic growth.

## Education *about* newspapers

The role of media literacy in educating *about* newspapers refers to the development of critical analysis skills, as well as the ability to distinguish between different types of media. Media literacy projects should aim to achieve the following key objectives:

- **Equip people of all ages with the skills required to analyse and evaluate the content of individual articles or publications of the written press.** A reader needs the skills to distinguish between a news article, an opinion comment, news taken from secondary sources and first-hand reporting, or being able to understand why some news items take precedence over other news. The reader should also be well equipped to interpret the editorial line taken by a publication overall. Critical thinking skills can also apply to the ability to appreciate the distinction between advertising and editorial content.

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<sup>2</sup> Eurydice report on Teaching Reading in Europe, is available at:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/130EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/130EN.pdf)

- **Educate readers vis-à-vis the central role that the written press plays in a democratic society** (as the fourth pillar of democracy) and in upholding the principle of freedom of expression. Making the public aware of the role of the press in holding authorities to account for their actions e.g. through rigorous reporting and in-depth analysis. One of the basic duties of the press is to inform, which is connected to the professional rights of journalists to receive information as well as the duty of public authorities to provide information. All citizens have the right to be informed.
- **Raise awareness that the press promotes the dissemination of the European culture<sup>3</sup>**. The European Parliament Report on “Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries” (2011) recognised that newspapers and magazines are components of cultural industries as well as a pluralistic and diverse European media landscape. Newspapers also help to create interest in and understanding of culture by writing extensively about new books, theatre, music, film and architecture.
- **Increase understanding of the role of news media in the community:** newspaper publishers and editors are an essential part of the communities in which they work. Newspapers and news media reflect the highs as well as the lows of the community and are in many ways instruments that support social cohesion. At the same time, the news media helps to empower individual citizens, including immigrants, in their efforts to inform themselves and actively participate in their community.
- **Encourage active participation by citizens in democracy and the exchange of information.** Newspapers and the news media provide interactive platforms enabling citizens to enter debates and interact with each other both in print editions and in online fora hosted by newspapers, as well as on occasion public debating sessions.
- **Promote respect for copyright and value of content:** newspaper publishers want digital users to enjoy using and in some cases adapting or contributing to professionally produced content. This requires a renewed understanding through online media literacy of principles of copyright and the value of content.

Finally, ENPA believes that the EU institutions should play a role in promoting the consumption of all media. It is in the interest of societies that individual citizens use professional news media in order to be able to establish, analyse and evaluate opinions on political, social and economic developments around the world that affect them. This is also essential for the quality of public discourse on the Internet.

**European Newspaper Publishers' Association (ENPA) is a non-profit organisation representing the interests of the newspaper and news media sector on all platforms. Our members represent some 5,200 titles from 26 European countries. More details at: [www.enpa.be](http://www.enpa.be)**

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<sup>3</sup> “Study on the Economy of Culture in Europe” by KEA/ Media Group (Turku School of Economic and Business Administration) /MKW Wirtschaftsforschung GmbH, October 2006. Web: [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc873\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc873_en.htm)