Critical Thinking in the Age of Emoji's

Does History Education Play a Role for Media Literacy?

Event Report

Commuters reading their morning newspapers on New York's subway en route to work, on April 1, 1963 after the end of the city's 114-day newspaper strike. Associated Press Photo/Jacob Harris, edited image

Dutch Institute for Sound and Vision
Hilversum
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09:00-18:00

Introduction

The invention of the internet proved a pivotal point in history. It has dramatically influenced the way news is consumed around the world. Terms like "fake news" and "alternative facts" are used on a daily basis, and have become so widely used that the current social landscape has been dubbed a "post-truth" society. A large contributor to this post-truth sentiment is the abundance of disinformation found online. Fake news is everywhere. And though it is by no means a new phenomenon, the way news circulates online – in filter-bubbles and echo chambers – has made the question of how to deal with fake news more important than ever.

Media literacy in education is frequently seen as the answer to this major question. Students have to be made literate in media. In this post-truth society filled with fake news and ready to use information from unreliable sources, it is important that students learn how to navigate these resources.

But what does this mean for history educators? Is there a role for media literacy in history education? Or even better, can history education play a role in media literacy? On 2 February 2018 over 70 history educators and students gathered in Hilversum to dive into these important questions at the event *Critical thinking in the Age of Emoji's. Does History Education Play a Role for Media Literacy?* organised by EUROCLIO as a part of the project *Media and History: From cinema to the web, studying representing and teaching European history in the digital era* funded by Erasmus+, in the Dutch institute of Sound and Vision.

Project Summary

Media and History: From Cinema to the Web. Studying, Representing and Teaching European History in the Digital Era.

In the Media and History project specialists in history and media education from Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands and United Kingdom work together to encourage history educators to use multimedia resources to help students become more media literate. By achieving this, students will be able to use digital tools to make their own presentations of the past, better realize that historical (re)presentations are not exact copies of the past, and improve their research skills (in making judgments about the reliability of information they find online).

Media and History's main objective is to enrich and innovate history education (mainly at secondary school level) by transmitting new didactical methodologies that are based on

the use of the web and ICTs for teachers, teachers' trainers, researchers and students of history and media. The project specifically aims to:

- Interest a younger generation in learning about the humanities, such as history, to better understand the present, encourage their democratic participation in Europe, and promote a more conscious use of the web and its resources.
- Demonstrate how history and media are influencing each other by researching the way the past is presented on TV and the Web and by analysing how history is use in public debates today.
- Develop, test and promote open educational resources (audiovisual materials, teaching approaches) that meet the learning needs of digital natives and promote its use by teachers, trainers and students.
- Increase the professional skills of teachers (on media literacy, historical thinking, new technologies and new media) through a series of local and transnational training events and joint work on the development and testing of teaching resources.
- Strengthen cooperation between institutions / educational institution working on media and history education across Europe.

Disclaimer: This event report reflects only the authors views and the NA and the Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Event Summary

After the welcoming speeches by Steven Stegers (EUROCLIO, deputy director) and Bas Agterberg (Expert on media history at Sound and Vision), the day officially started with a lecture by key-note speaker Maria Grever, from Erasmus University Rotterdam, professor in theory and methodology of history. In this lecture she emphasized how the reliability of different forms of media is increasingly questioned by its audience. She shared how one of

her students made the statement that historical reality does not exist, as historical reality can only be represented by personal views and interpretations. The "complete story" is unattainable. This of course raised the question on how to guide young students in navigating historical sources when boundaries between true and false statements are becoming more and more blurry. In the end, Grever concluded, students have to be able to discover when lies are taken for truth, should be able to unmask fake news and discuss all sorts of different interpretations of the past.

In the following lively, sometimes heated debate moderated by Bjorn Wansink (Utrecht University), educators and students had the opportunity to ask questions to the panellists consisting of History teacher of the year Tom de Kruif, Bas Agterberg and Maria Grever. How do you stimulate children to question their sources? And how can education best connect to the everyday experiences of students? In his teaching Tom de Kruif uses video games, specifically Call of Duty, to try and give his pupils a glimpse of how WW2 was experienced. On the basis of this game they discuss, evaluate and question the accuracy of the game they played together, to see how this relates to reality.

Many more questions arose in the debate, for instance about the role of social media in spreading fake news: can any sort of news distributed via social media still be reliable? Or how can an educator deal with extremism in the classroom? Students are generally looking for reliable sources and facts to hold on to, but in the face of the enormous amount of fake news online they look to their teachers for help. How can a teacher assist them in distinguishing between what is true and what is false? And what about the growing

sentiment among young students that the traditional media outlets are not catered towards young people?

Almost all questions asked in this debate were rooted in the increasing confusion that comes with the current abundance of online news outlets and large amount of fake news that circulates online.

This morning plenary session with lecture and panel discussion was generally well received by the audience, with participants describing the discussion as pleasant and lively. However, what appeared somewhat problematic was the level of English that was spoken. Catering to a multilingual audience in a second language can be challenging, which led in this case to some arguments being lost in translation.

Following the panel discussion participants were invited to join a guided tour through the archives of the Dutch institute of Sound and Vision. Parallel to the tour the participants had the opportunity to visit the temporary exhibition "News or Nonsense?", aimed especially towards students to show them how their view of the world can be influenced by media outlets and filter-bubbles. After the plenary morning sessions and the tours, participants were able to get a more hands-on approach in the two workshop rounds and think about ways to incorporate media literacy in their own practices in the classroom.

<u>Workshops</u>

In the workshops participants were invited to dive deeper into the main question of the project Media and History in a more practical way, where specific results of the project were shared with the participants. Both national and international experts were invited to share their views and specific teaching strategies on this subject. The workshops by the international experts, invited by EUROCLIO, were specifically made for the day and were based on the Competence Framework EUROCLIO has developed in the framework of the Media and History project. This framework attempts to pinpoint exactly how good history education can result in different competences in young students which will increase media literacy.

Now playing (in a classroom near you): Teaching history students how to be critical when analysing media content – Alexander Cutajar

In Theater 2 the workshop *Now playing (in a classroom near you): Teaching history students how to be critical when analyzing media content* took place, led by Alexander Cutajar from the University of Malta. The workshop started with a photograph of a number of teenage students on their phones. Alexander used this photograph to demonstrate how important and monumental technology was in the lives of young people today. Along with this technology comes social media and news from the internet of what much can be fake.

The focus of this workshop was how the use of broadcast media content can be used in history lessons to teach students about the prejudice it may contain depending on the source it is coming from. Among the issues that were discussed were the issues of reliability, the challenges of teaching students, the ability to view every source through a critical lens the and tendency of educators not being as critical of visual sources as they are of written sources.

Lastly, the participants were shown a clip of a British newsreel discussing the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. Participants then deliberated within their groups how reliable this

newsreel was and which bias it entails. This footage was used as an example which can be utilized in the classroom to teach students to always critically approach visual sources.

Vision and Reality – Gonnie Eggink

In her workshop *Vision and Reality* Gonnie Eggink - teacher in journalism at Windesheim College in Zwolle, the Netherlands – explained that in an increasingly medialized society, learning to judge and evaluate information is more important than ever. "Fake news" may very well be the term that defines the current era. Therefore, Eggink stressed that being able to distinguish between what is fake and what is real is to be more prioritized in teaching, and she made an important distinction between various sorts of fake information (incorrect, misleading and harmful) and what this can say about the intentions of the maker.

After this theoretical introduction there was time for the practical assignments, demonstrating how media sources can be used and checked for credibility in the classroom to increase a critical approach towards information found online. Participants were asked to use several checking tools like Google reverse image search, news-checkers and a game developed to raise awareness amongst students on how easy it is to make and spread disinformation. The workshop concluded with a short discussion and exchange of experiences in the classroom.

Struggling with Media Titles and Images – Yulia Kushnereva

During the seminar led by Russian history teacher Yulia Kushnereva entitled *Struggling with media titles and images*, the discussion focused on questions of what makes us click on certain online articles over others, and how the titles and images of online stories relate to their content. Using examples such as a news story about events in Moscow which in fact used a photo taken in Vladivostok as its headline image, Yulia highlighted the importance of looking beyond the titles and images of the stories we view online. Participants were able to take part in example exercises that could be used in the classroom to teach media literacy in this regard. One such exercise involved analysing the text of a news article and attempting to rewrite a portion of the article in as neutral terms as possible, thus highlighting the prevalence of author biases in what is usually perceived to be neutral or factual pieces of news.

In the workshop Yulia used sources from Russian news outlets as examples to illustrate her presentation, this led to a discussion with some participants who felt that – due to the perceived lack of press freedom in Russia – these examples were unfit to use in teaching media literacy.

The presentation and subsequent example exercises provoked interesting discussions among the students and educators present about the realities of how students consume online news, and what the most appropriate ways to encourage a critical approach to online information could be. Most of the students commented that they paid more attention to the headline or summary of a news story when deciding whether or not to read it, rather than the accompanying picture, but that the picture can act as a means to grab their attention in the first place. These observations were built upon throughout the workshop as participants addressed issues of what is there to make us click on certain stories over others, and highlighted the importance of verifying the information displayed prior to sharing it among wider networks.

1+1=3? Potentials of collaborative working in the history classroom – Daniel Bernsen

In Beng Lab 1 Daniel Bernsen, a History Teacher from Germany gave his workshop *1+1=3? Potentials of collaborative working for the history classroom.*

In this workshop participants worked with laptops or tablets and focused on how to use these as a tool for collaborative working in the classroom. Daniel introduced the participants to Etherpad, a program that can be described as a simpler alteration of google docs, which allowed all participants to contribute on their own tablets and it would show up together on the projector. He discussed the advantages of using such a program which included working together, exploring different viewpoints, encouraging input from everyone within the group and the synergy of ideas. Some of the disadvantages includes the tendency of some students to drop out and an imbalance of student's efforts.

Working with "Nieuws in de Klas" – Chris van Hall

In the workshop Working with "Nieuws in de Klas" (News in the Classroom) Chris van Hall presented the initiative of News in the Classroom and how this can contribute to the media literacy skills of young students. News in the Classroom offers educators the opportunity to subscribe to a number of Dutch news media free of charge, to use in their classes. This increases students' general development and perception of the world, and equips them with the ability to contextualize and analyse sources on a higher level.

Following the introduction, participants were able to experience the practical use of News in the Classroom by completing already existing assignments – like a news-quiz – made by the team of News in the Classroom. Subsequently they were asked to work together in groups and discuss different ways to use the initiative in their own practice and what kinds of practical assignments could accompany their teaching practice.

Vlogging in History Class – Stefan Rops

In the session led by Stefan Rops, *Vlogging in History Class*, participants were given a hands-on workshop on the practice of vlogging, and specifically how these practices could be used in the history classroom. Rops himself is both a history teacher and vlogger and relayed his own experience of using vlogs in the classroom in order to provide inspiration to both educators and students present in the workshop. Following an explanation of the practicalities involved in vlogging, as well as some tips on how to make vlogs both interesting and relevant in the classroom, participants were then able to put what they had learnt into practice by making their own vlogs. In groups, they first brainstormed what elements a good vlog should incorporate, before trying to encapsulate that in practice. The hands-on nature of the workshop kept participants engaged and eager to learn about a medium of teaching many had not previously considered.

Conclusion

In sum, the event *Critical thinking in the Age of Emoji's. Does History Education Play a Role for Media Literacy?* proved an interesting day. The plenary sessions – the introduction by Maria Grever and the panel discussion – were generally well received, though somewhat chaotic, and the level if English that was spoken was not always up to par.

The workshops aimed to equip educators with tools to apply in their own teaching, ranging from engaging students with historical vlogs and letting them create their own fake news, to using different tools in the classroom like Etherpad or Nieuws in de Klas. The evaluation of the workshops was generally good, though comments were made about the thoroughness and scientific value of the workshops, adding that the seminar could have been more focused on what media literacy entails and how that translates into different aspects of teaching. This is a very valid argument. Media literacy is a very contemporary theme, and is such a large and diffuse subject, that the essence of it is almost impossible to catch in a single seminar.

Dutch History teacher on Daniel Bernsens workshop:

All parts of the workshop activated my thinking process on collaborative learning. The ict parts were partly new and partly known. The combination was great. Also room for differentiated learning and learning from experiences of new colleagues.

Dutch History teacher on Yulia Kushnereva's workshop

Yulia opened up a set of russian information in english and open to all participants. She focussed on 'check information' with content knowledge and cultural knowledge. She gave explicit examples of fake news to unravel. The interpretation of cartoons and photos used known analytical steps. It became very interesting as her knowledge on russian culture, showed the importance of multiperspectivity in education and the importance of the exchange of cultural knowledge between teachers.

Dutch History teacher on what they will apply in their own practice

In my future teaching I will definitely apply multiperspectivity, and will be using IT materials in my lessons and using the multicultural perspective in assessing cartoons and news items. I will research using games as source in my lessons, and lastly I will ask students to keep asking questions in unravelling fake news items.

However, throughout the day it became clear that history education indeed has a large role to play in increasing media literacy amongst students. The subject of History in particular shows how important a critical stance towards sources can be: history is always an interpretation, which makes a critical assessment of sources and reasoning behind why certain sources are reliable indispensable. This critical

assessment and reasoning can also be used for current information like news and blogs found online. In our post-truth society where fake news is omnipresent, questioning sources and a critical assessment of media is crucial.

But in the end it is precisely this critical stance that evokes the question "should we teach students to question everything?". If we teach students to question everything, how will we make sure that not all authority is questioned, including scientific authorities? This is a particularly interesting question in the light of radicalization amongst young people and rising extremism. How do we find balance and nuance in these matters?

It is obvious that the question of how to deal with media, news and fake news in the classroom will stay an important issue. Though this major question could not be resolved in one day in Hilversum, this event can be seen as a step in the right direction. Through practical workshops and discussions with students, peers and experts, educators were given the opportunity to assess and compare different approaches towards media literacy in the classroom, and identify elements that can be implemented in their own practices.