The Media & Learning Brussels 2016 Conference was organised by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the Media & Learning Association with the support of the European Commission, DG Connect. It took place on 10-11 March 2016 in the Ministry Headquarters in Brussels and involved 290 participants from 30 countries who came together to discuss the impact of media in teaching and learning and media literacy.

Eleven core themes were chosen to underpin the programme:

- Media literacy and radicalisation
- Pedagogically effective use of media and film in schools
- Media literacy in practice
- Innovative use of video in MOOCs
- Making media matter for science education
- Social media policies and practices
- Providers and platforms for media education and media literacy at scale
- Special needs education supported by media and digital tools
- Using media in higher education
- The role of media in cultural education
- Building design thinking skills through making games

The main theme for 2016 was "Enriching learning through media education and media literacy" and the conference set out to meet two objectives. First, to highlight the value and impact of media in enriching learning and secondly to reflect on how best to promote critical understanding of the media as well as the skills to interact with it in a mindful way amongst citizens of every age.

Aimed at policy-makers, service-providers and practitioners, this sixth annual conference featured inspirational talks, broad-ranging discussions, specialist master classes, and practical demos in relation to media-supported learning as well as the awards ceremony for the annual MEDEA Awards.

The organisation of the annual MEDEA Awards prize-giving ceremony to coincide with the Media & Learning Conference provided an opportunity for participants to see for themselves excellent examples of media-supported learning which included both professionally produced as well as user-generated examples from all over Europe.

Media & Learning 2016 was sponsored in part by Kaltura, LEGO Education, Mediasite by Sonic Foundry, Evens Foundation, Adobe and Moovly.
The programme

The 2016 conference programme included screenings of educational media productions, discussion opportunities and presentation sessions where leading experts and practitioners shared their experiences, insights and know-how. Four master classes were also included, providing participants with an excellent opportunity to go in depth into a particular subject. A total of 132 people from 21 countries contributed to the programme in 35 different sessions. Sessions in the main auditorium were streamed allowing people to follow parts of the conference online.

All 8 finalists in this year’s MEDEA Awards showcased their entries in six different sessions and many conference participants joined invited guests for the MEDEA Awards Ceremony where this year’s winners were announced with ‘Labhair Linn! Cabhraigh Linn! - Speak with Us! Support Us!’ submitted by Edel Crosbie from Ireland winning the MEDEA Award for User-Generated Educational Media, and ‘Multimedia Wismo’ produced by Nicolas Burlet from Nadasdy Film in Switzerland winning the MEDEA Award for Professionally Produced Educational Media. Five special prizes including the Audience Favourite Prize were awarded as well.

Three very popular pre-conference workshops were held on Wednesday 9 March in the same location. The first, organised in collaboration with SURFnet Media Education in the Netherlands, was a full day workshop on the use of Video in Higher Education which attracted over 60 participants and featured examples of best practice, a hands-on practice session and a series of short ‘share and compare’ sessions on different tools, applications and approaches. The second workshop on media supported science education attracted about 35 participants, many of them teachers who met to discuss different ways of utilising media to support the teaching of science and maths. This workshop was a joint effort between the conference organisers and the Inspiring Science Education project. The third workshop which attracted about 30 participants was entitled Mind over Media: analysing contemporary propaganda and was led by media literacy expert Renee Hobbs, Professor of Communication Studies and Director of the Media Education Lab at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island in the US.

Keynote speakers and main themes

Core topics of this year’s Media and Learning Conference included the role of social media in youth radicalisation and how media literacy education can become a key factor in dealing with extremism and alienation in youth. The role of media generally in democratic society was also a central theme of the conference.
Luc Delrue, Secretary General of the Department for Culture, Youth, Sports & Media, Belgium in his opening speech indicated that knowledge of media and media literacy is the central challenge to our educational systems, and the lifelong skill that we need to teach children in today’s society. In his speech he expressed his own strong opinion that government can no longer avoid the topic of media literacy. Roberto Viola, Director General of the European Commission’s DG CONNECT, described how media literacy is an umbrella expression that embodies the creative capacity of people, to critically look at and discuss media. He talked about how critical perception of media is an essential skill for citizens in a democracy where you need to be well informed, especially in times of populism. Roberto described how the European Union works on two directions in supporting this: through law, they ensure that every social media platform/media provider should support the values of the European Union (against hate speech, terrorism etc.), while at the same they focus on education to empower users so they understand the critical use of media.

MEDIA LITERACY IN EDUCATION

Barend van Heusden from University College Groningen in the Netherlands presented his research on a cognitive theory of culture. He elaborated on the central discrepancy that generates the human condition: we experience an unstable actuality (reality) but we recognise it on the basis of our stable memories. There is a doubling of experience. We distinguish the difference between stable memories and the unstable actuality through different cognitive strategies, resulting in a media of culture: from perceptual body to imaginative artefacts to conceptual language and analytical graphics. We see the same progression in the development of culture, as well as in the development of children.

Barend argued that we live in a theoretical form of culture, where the discovery of the flat surface has allowed us to visualise concepts in an abstract way, see visual abstractions and teach something about the underlying structure of a concept. Having insight is a prerequisite for theory and theoretical culture. Provocatively, you could say that the “whole educational system and school is about theory.” Theoretical cognition is not inborn, but has to be learnt in school. Our brain (the visual cortex) must learn to discover and see structures – and “that’s why learning hurts.” Democracy requires theoretical thinking, as it is a theoretical, abstract concept. He finally noted that screens give the impression of flat surface, but that they are not: moving images do not support insight into the underlying structure. Theoretical thinking has developed devices that undermine theoretical thinking itself. Finally he reflected on culture education as education in cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is so important because it provides the basis for conscious action. Cultural awareness is personal (individual), shared (collective, historical) and human (universal). In cultural education (media literacy, arts, history), cultural awareness is developed.

Jeff Rubenstein from Kaltura gave examples of how teachers can raise the bar in what can be done in education with
media, for example, by bringing in reflection through questions embedded in the media, making tools available to learners and making the tools democratic.

**Diana Bannister** from the University of Wolverhampton in the UK spoke about the responsibilities of teachers and school leaders for bringing about change in school practice. Introducing results from the Living Schools Lab, she talked about how schools want to change by having better access to technologies; better connections between home and school, involving parents in a different way; giving students feedback that will inform their individual progress; giving the teachers high quality professional development and training, working with likeminded people to share and develop ideas and involving students in whole school change. Using a process of “Showcase, Demonstrate and Validate”, teachers can be motivated to introduce changes in their teaching practice, in a practice-based research methodology, gathering evidence of their progress and planning their next steps. She emphasised her view that the individual teacher has to take responsibility for their personal professional development.

**Gary Jones** from LEGO Education spoke about organising learning in primary school in such a way that it maintains playfulness to get kids to “learn to learn.” Structured play and learning defined by the learner can be highly creative and used to support learners to apply their critical thinking skills to solve real life problems.

**Matt McCurdy** from Mediasite gave us insight into using the right tool for the right job and described how facilitators of instructional media can be motivated to think about using media in a better way, by viewing the technology not only as a means to offer information but as a tool to be given to the students so that they can be creative.

Urban myths in education was the topic of **Pedro De Bruyckere’s** talk. He demystified some omnipresent and generally claimed educational tenets such as the learning pyramid, learning styles, digital natives and the dual-channel theory on multimodal information provision. He invited the audience to be critical of prevailing urban myths in education, and to build their practice on scientific studies and research. He ended with the first law of Kranzberg stating that “technology is not good or bad but (when used) it is not neutral.”

**ROLE OF MEDIA IN SOCIETY**

**Aidan White** from the Ethical Journalists Network widened the scope of the opening plenary with his talk in which he spoke about the extraordinary technological capacity at our disposal set against the very profound political crises and crises of uncertainty that we face. He posed the central issues of media literacy (can we trust media? which media can be trust? can we create trustworthy media?) and called for an understanding of open information, i.e. information that is communicated publicly (not personal information). He argued that one of the four pillars of the open internet, journalism and media (which should help us understand, analyse and review what is going on) is under pressure from the government, the corporate sector and the citizens’ online voice. Market models for journalism are being broken, and it is no longer profitable,
resulting in an open information crisis. Set against this background he argued that the ethical principles of journalism still need to be maintained: i) journalism is not free speech, but constrained expression: there is a fundamental understanding that the publishing of a piece has consequences, and how to deal with the consequences; ii) journalism has ethical values: truth, accuracy and fact-based communication, independence, impartiality, humanity, iii) journalism is accountable and transparent.

Aidan put forward his view that the ethical values of journalism can inspire media literacy education: with its focus on truth and accuracy (through fact-based communications); humanity (avoid malice and do not harm); and accountability (transparency and self-correction). Anonymity is a right for people who are vulnerable, but is it a right for everyone who wants to do anything on the Internet?

Aidan focused on the role of propaganda in making war, which feeds on ignorance. Is free speech applicable when it is offensive? As regulation is so limited, he also invited the audience to consider how to control how people use media. He introduced a 5-point test for hate speech considering the (1) position and status of speaker, (2) reach of speech, (3) intention of speech, (4) content and form of speech and (5) economic, social and political climate. He ended with some core principles for media literacy for all: (i) strengthen attachment to core values of pluralism and ethics; (ii) recognition that citizens also have ethical duties in public communications; (iii) political, corporate and community leadership in promotion of tolerance and dialogue. In his closing words, Aidan reminded the audience that with an increased tendency towards personalised and targeted information, we have lost the serendipity of meeting news items that we would not generally seek out.

In her presentation, Alison Preston from Ofcom presented the results of a recent Ofcom study on media literacy where an increasing use of internet is shown, where 60% of the users used smartphones to go online, and 40% tablets. This study showed that 12-15 year olds missed their smartphones the most if they are taken away. The results showed that differences in accessing news platforms was defined by age. 77% of the respondents use three or fewer news sources and 23% thinks that search engines are gatekeepers of truthfulness of news. The biggest challenge that she saw was people’s need to know what they are doing online and what the tools they use do and do not do, as online activity becomes ever more ubiquitous. A big difference exists between people who are more or less news-savvy. Alison emphasised that even very young people should have access to a robust toolkit for dealing with what they see online.

Emmanuelle Machet from the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) continued on the topic of protection of minors in media literacy. She expressed a call to widen the role of regulators as mediators between service providers and citizens and as facilitators to empower users to engage with media and to protect themselves.

Margaret Boribon from the European Newspaper Publishers Association (ENPA) emphasised that young adults need to understand the mediated world they live in and the need to promote a free and independent press and reinforce citizenship and democracy. She called for media literacy to be prioritised in society, but also argued that it is not possible to establish a realistic digital agenda for
Europe without a serious investment in digital literacy. Finally, she contended that press freedom should never be taken for granted and that there is a clear need to promote the ethical values of professional journalism.

**Nathalie Labourdette** from the EBU presented a project of the Flemish public broadcaster with Google News, iMinds and newsmoney, which tried to understand how well news does on different channels. The intention is to uncover if and to what extent the news reaches the person it is intended for.

**Katia Segers,** Member of the Flemish Parliament professed to preaching to the converted, stating that media literacy goes hand in hand with regulation. She called for a multi-stakeholder governance in answering the need for media literacy for citizens, insisting that the industry needs to be involved in these types of platforms. As media literacy is an abstract concept, it is necessary to make it more concrete. Government expertise centres are subject to electoral bias, and things can change overnight. But moving on from the demands of a lobby group to real change requires political will.

Finally the panel lamented the fact that a lot of money is spent on devices to schools, but that no money was available to support and train the teachers. Many political decisions are not logical and therefore not empowering.

**MEDIA LITERACY AND RADICALISATION**

A number of sessions dealt with the topic of media literacy and radicalisation.

**Jordi Torrent** from UNAOC proposed that extremist narratives are propagated through different channels, but these are already reaching the converted. He questioned if current responses to prevent this is reaching the people who are being groomed and converted? The strategy of internet surveillance and removal of accounts is pushing these users to the dark web. How can the value of freedom of expression be married with necessary constraints?

Jordi contended that "Young people take the gun, not because they are poor, but because they are angry." Anger is central to political discourse these days, and anger is central to public and social unrest. This real or perceived feeling of social exclusion is leading to extremism. Jordi suggested that we need to "combat extremism by reassessing our society and promoting policies of inclusion." Youth inclusion programs are key policies in this. Given that 10-14 year olds are the largest group in our populations, it is contradictory to the needs of our time that education budgets are being cut - “Schools are the marketplace of ideas” he argued.

This discussion brought forward a number of ideas amongst those involved. The current political crises could be an opportunity to see media literacy taken seriously on a political level, encouraging more cooperation and collaboration between EU member states and non-members. However, media literacy is not considered a basic responsibility. Only two countries in the EU have made it a priority (England and Austria). Digital literacy is where the money goes, by opening up schools to commercial companies. A warning was issued by **Divina Frau-Meigs** from Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, France:
"research money is on radicalisation but we are missing our target and setting ourselves up for failure."

**Maria Ranieri** presented the results of an e-engagement study on violence with a focus on the rise of new online populism in Europe. By contrasting far right populism against promoting critical awareness in young people towards violent media content, her research group tried to understand how propaganda is used by extremist groups, and how young people interacted with these extreme views.

**Renee Hobbs** from the University of Rhode Island in the US presented her work on media literacy to engage young people not just to be spectators but to use media literacy as a means to critique authority. The link between media literacy and civic action is important to underline. Renee argued that high levels of apathy and disengagement are accompanied by increased political polarisation. She emphasised her opinion that propaganda works because it latches on to existing feelings in the listener. Context is one of the most powerful factors in media literacy, and deepening understanding of context is the biggest challenge in media literacy education.

The Closing Plenary of the conference was a panel discussion open to the public between **Renee Hobbs**, **Rudi Vrankx**, **Moad El Boudaati**, **Divina Fra-Meigs** and **Karin Heremans**.

The session kicked off with a question as to the role of schools in preventing radicalisation.

Panellists general agreed as to the nature of radicalisation. It happens quickly and is often difficult to distinguish from normal adolescent behaviour. Although social media is an accelerator of radicalisation, it has not been proven that it is the instigator of it. Rather, extremist views become connected to existing adolescent feelings of apathy, stigmatisation and a perception of adult hypocrisy. But the solution is also there: pre-radicalisation youngsters can be co-thinkers in creating policies to prevent extremism.

The hypocrisy of mainstream media can be addressed by using social media to get the unheard and hidden voices heard. The audience were reminded of the words of Mark Twain “No social revolution ever happened without the views of the youth”. The sense of agency that these radicals show is to be admired, but critical thinking needs to be added. Complexity of thought and opinion is to be valued. In some ways radicalism is a just response to injustice. And the question was posed as to how we can use this historic moment to address injustice, disengagement and hierarchies in Europe to become truly multicultural.
A second theme that came up on this panel was how Europe’s youth were represented in mainstream media. The difference between radicalisation (where everything is rejected in favour of violence) and radicalism was discussed. Radicalism is the answer, as it is a fight for alternatives. What schools and urban contexts can do, is to give this voice to these youngsters. Panelists generally agreed that radicalisation is only a small part of the problem facing young people. More problematic are the kids who are bored and dropping out of school, for which currently no answer exists. Real change will only come when young people take to the streets. Now, the mainstream systems are hacked/contaminated from within, because top-down change takes too long. However, it is important to recognise that this invisibility created because of incomplete stories in mainstream channels leads to alienation with groups who are left out. We need a new competence “savoir devenir”: without self-actualisation and self-esteem, you have apathy.

The role of the public broadcasters in this debate? The panel agreed that it needs to go to places where the new audiences can be found, which are not visible in the viewing numbers. Public broadcasters should become public platforms, where self-regulating communities are built, with strict measures and a deepened level of debate.

The slow speed of response of the educational system was lamented by one audience member (unlike in other crises like financial crises). However, the panel agreed that change is happening, with the focus moving away from content creation to promoting the continuous professional development of teachers, supporting innovation etc. The role of the media was emphasised again: young people deserve to be shown positively, and this current negative representation is affecting everything in our society. Radicalisation effects the minority of the minority of children of Europe, while most European kids are healthy, with aspirations and future “savoir devenir”. One of the most memorable moments of the discussion came at the end with Divina Frau-Meigs’ passionate call to “stop the damage to the self-image of children of Europe”

Master Classes
In addition to the pre-conference workshops, four Master Classes were included in the conference programme. These classes provided participants with an opportunity to go in-depth into a specific subject. They covered the following topics: putting scientific discovery into students’ hands, exploring virtual reality in a learning context, using the MIL/PEER Platform for the exchange of useful media literacy and media education resources and using video in the science classroom.

The Media and Learning Association AGM
The Media and Learning Association launched in 2012 had its third Annual General Meeting during the conference. It was attended by the members of the Association who voted to adopt the association bylaws and budget for 2016. The plan of activities for 2016 was also presented and accepted. This plan focuses on 4 main areas of activity: promotion of membership services amongst members, extension of membership, provision of opportunities for collaboration and ensuring the viability of the association.
Participants

The Media & Learning Conference 2016 attracted people from different backgrounds, with experience across all levels of acquaintance with digital media, ranging from novices to media-literate educators and broadcasters.

Participants were asked for their feedback after the conference and the responses have been very positive. When asked about the quality of the programme, 76% responded that it was excellent or very good. When asked to rate the extent to which they could gather new information and skills, 74% rated it as either excellent or very good. When invited to assess the quality of the organisation of the conference, 80% rated it as either excellent or very good.
Participants were also asked for their general comments about the conference and here’s a sample of some of the things they said

“This was not just an academy research conference, but one which also attracted industry and independent producers as well as policy makers” Agnaldo Arroio, University of São Paulo, Brazil

“Inspiring practices, tendencies of media and pedagogy, networking, new contests” Serge Linckels, Ministry of Education, Luxembourg

“Europe is doing some really interesting things with media education” Jennifer Fleming, California State University, Long beach, USA

“My key takeaway were the various best practices which were presented during the two day conference” Randolph Micalef, Broadcasting Authority Malta

“I loved the exchange of information and insights between the participants. I liked the clear distinction between Media literacy and learning by means of media in the program” Saskia Wenniger, Kritisch & Creatief, The Netherlands

“The best aspect was to network and get insights from other colleagues across Europe on the use of media for education” Manuel Frutos-Perez, University of the West of England, UK

“I found it a very interesting conference and collaboration. The sessions that I followed and the people that I met where very inspiring” Laure Van Hoecke, iMinds, Belgium

“I enjoyed myself tremendously and found the conference very interesting. I could also make some contacts which was very nice” Susanne Friz, FWU, Germany

Recordings and presentations available online

Most presentations, as well as recordings of all of the presentations given in the Hadewych Auditorium during Media & Learning 2016 are available for viewing on the conference website.