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Com uma mentalidade crítica em Google's Interland: a plataforma da alfabetização midiática[1]

With a Critical Mindset in Google's Interland: The platformization of media literacy

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Keywors: media literacy, mediatization, critical thinking

In the current media landscape, we are flooded with a constant stream of disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information. This, in combination with fake news sensationalism, rumors, and a variety of chaotic manifestations from "the digital underbelly of the networked web" (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 152), make a potent combination of information warfare and popular culture. When these currents mix with social and political gaps and tensions, the result may prove to be disastrous. One, perhaps predictable, aspect of this "post-truth condition" is a growing distrust in the models, ideals, and institutions of democracy. Hence we can all agree on the importance of giving children (and others) the skills and techniques to dismantle and counteract disinformation and misinformation, fake news, hate speech and uncivilized online behavior. Often these matters are as discussed under umbrella terms like "Media and information literacy" (MIL) or "Digital competence" (DC) (Carlsson, 2019).

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Over the last decade or so these aspect of the "citizen making enterprise" (REF) for new generations in a deeply mediatized has been emphasized as key to compulsory education (REF). EU has presented their *Action plan against disinformation*; UNESCO has initiated #FightFakeNews and moves to protect freedom of the press There are NGOs active in MIL through the production of campaigns, events, debates, teaching materials, in-service training of teachers. Different sectors of the media industry are engaged in compatible endeavors. In Sweden, digital competence was recently inscribed in to the curriculum for compulsory education (lgr 11) and a national MIL-coordinator and a MIL-network has been installed (ibid).

MIL and DG can be described as "21st Century skills" and they are also associated with life-long learning and employability, and belong to a wider discourse of empowerment and cosmopolitanism (REF). These concepts and ideals originates from the policy circuits of UNESCO, EU, OECD and can be described as "loose concepts" since they can be used for different purposes, by different interest, in different contexts, and still uphold certain interest and common future projections (freedom of the market, consumerism, technological progression etc.) (Illomäki, 2016). We can also register their presence within different national contexts of governance and citizens making. In Sweden and the Nordic countries MIL is strongly related to the ideals of the "Nordic Media Welfare State" (freedom of expression, public service, a competitive media market etc.) (Author, 2020). While this probably would be a challenge in some other countries (like Russia) where other decoding's of MIL are more prominent.

One of the key aspect of MIL as a term for the qualification, socialization and subjectification of "the emerging media citizen" is "critical thinking". Today, critical thinking in relation to the media often seem to equal "criticism of sources" and there are uncountable examples of online fact checking services and gamified training programs, accompanying a flood of educational material on how to be a good, safe and happy

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media citizen. A majority of these campaigns offer their target groups, teachers and students, quite instrumental and techno-centric approaches to media education (Author, 2018, 2019). However, the long term effects of these MIL-campaigns remain unclear, and there is a risk that these rather presentistic and individualistic approaches will reduce critical thinking to a consumer (prosumer) oriented skill that may legitimize rather than criticize imbalances and injustices of the current media ecology (e.g. datafication, commercialization). This neoliberal approach to media education also seem to replace some of the (indispensable) core values of the long media literacy tradition –Bildung, emancipatory epistemology, progressive pedagogics, civic action (Buckingham, 2019; Kellner and Share, 2019; Livingstone, 2003; Mihailidis, 2018).

It has been said that Modernity is "The Age of Criticism" and that critique and critical thinking has become a virtue (in some but not all cultures). Critical thinking has thus become a universal ideal while, at the same time, remaining a continual challenge (Butler, 2002). The challenge of today's "Post truth-condition" opens a discussion around how we can and should understand the meaning of "critical." One hint on this, is a recent mapping of significant MIL-projects in the 28 of the EU member states. 547 projects were listed and 402 (or 73%) of these were listed as connecting to "critical thinking" (EU 2016). A similar note can be taken from UNESCO's *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers* (Wilson et. al., 2011), where the term "critical" appear 42 times, and is defined as "the ability to examine and analyze information and ideas in order to understand and assess their values and assumptions, rather than simply taking propositions at face value" (op. cit., p. 182). This cognitivist and individualized understanding of is based on the functionalism and pragmatics of the cognitivist paradigm of media literacy (Potter, 2004). However, critical thinking can also be understood as "thinking about thinking" (Feuerstein, 1999) and it is thus connected to "the spirit of philosophy" (Hanscomb, 2017, p. 13) as well as to the "art of

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analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it" (Paul and Elder, 2014). In addition to this, comes a cultivation of critical thinking as a form of consciousness that can turn into the "enemy of an unjustifiable status quo" (op. cit., p. 18).

This double understanding of the concept of the *critical* is to be found at the core of media literacy, for example, in a special issue of the *Journal of Communication* from 1998 where Rene Hobbs (1998) describes the "seven great debates" of media literacy (at that time). One of these debates concerned the relationship between media pedagogics and possible collaborations with the media industry. In the same issue, Lewis and Jhally (1998) suggest that "the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (p. 109). To accomplish this, they suggest the combination of a textual approach (media as a construct of language and ideology) and a contextual, political, and economic approach, all of which should be combined with a cultural studies oriented understanding of media audiences (see Kellner and Share, 2019). Yet, this critical, even activist-oriented approach, to media literacy has been seen to adversely lead to cynicism (it is all about money) that, in combination with a lack of engagement, may lead to distrust (Buckingham 2003; Mihailidis, 2014). Worse still than this, is the pull of populism and conspiracy theories or alternative, radical media that lead people even further from both democracy and the values of humanism.

In order to be able to combine an instrumental approach to critical thinking with a more historical in-depth understanding, I want to suggest the neologism "the critical mindset". Which is a term that denotes the didactic combination of "critical thinking" (cognitive skills) and "critical consciousness" (the perception and critical exposure of social and political contradictions and misjustices) as the ground for reflective emancipation and commonality through civic action (c.f. Freire's, 1974 term "conscientization"). In order to describe this critical mindset as an alternative to the

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algorithmic mindset (of the computer) and the metric mindset (of the prosumer) I combine certain voices from the (long) tradition of media literacy (e.g. McLuhan, Postman) with progressive pedagogics (Dewey) and a post-marxian understanding of criticality (Butler, Freire) with the umbrella of mediatization theory (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Hjarvard, 2013; Krotz, 2014).

MIL and DC are signs of the educational systems' dependence on and answer to the challenges of mediatization, i.e. changes in the technologies, institutions, and logics of "the media" (Breiter, 2014). The relations between media system and educational system (for examples as this is played out in the formal curriculum) is a complex matter. So in order to illustrate and problematize what I would like to call "the dominant ideology of MIL" I use UNESCOS' "Curriculum for Media and information literacy" (Wilson et.al., 2013) and how critical thinking is toured within this as a ground for a critical discussion of Google's online campaign "Be Internet Awesome". This campaign want to "teach kids the fundamentals of digital citizenship and safety so they can explore the online world with confidence" and it is organized in five lessons (Share with care, Don't fall for fakes, Secure your secrets, Be kind online, Share doubts with adults you trust). One part of this safety-package is the "interactive and fun game" **Interland** that is an set in four different islands (Kind Kingdom, Reality River, Mindful Mountain, Tower of Treasure) where each feature a mini game and a lesson through which the player is supposed to learn about "digital safety and citizenship" by helping fellow "Internauts" to combat "badly behaved hackers, phishers, oversharers, and bullies".

My analysis of this campaign on how to be(come) a good "digital citizen" is based on the principles of immanent critique, i.e. critique that derive the standards it employs from the object criticized. In this hermeneutic mission, I also use the concept "utopia" in a critical meta-commentary on the relationship between the symptom (Google's MIL efforts) and its underpinning (neoliberal citizen making, datafication)

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within the projective framework of "the future". To contrast these dominant sociotechnical and educational imaginaries I suggest some alternative principles on how to train the "critical mindset". I end with the question, how to compare the critical mindset as part of the citizen making enterprise in Sweden and Brazil respectively.

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