



Teaching Media Literacy [in Germany], 31st May 2022

In my presentation I want to give you an overview of how media literacy is taught and developed in German schools.

First, let's have a look why we consider media literacy important in Germany at all. Next, which subjects or which organisations are responsible for media literacy in schools. Thirdly, we want to have a look at how media literacy can be or is developed or taught before inspecting some field examples. After that there will be a consideration of difficulties and a conclusion of media literacy in Germany where questions can be asked or remarks can be made.

So first of all: Why do we need media literacy? There are mainly two aspects we focus on in Germany.

One is of course the modern day perspective. Seeing that most of our students' lives take place „online“ or at least to some extent via the communication and self-discovery on social media, it seems necessary to teach close to their interest in school as well. And also to educate them about possible dangers arising from this new online media world but also to teach them how they can use media to serve their needs. Phenomena like fake news have been there before of course, but the Internet makes it so many times easier to spread news including fake news. Vice versa, they can also be detected easier. Generally, the borders between factual and post-factual have merged. The Covid-pandemic has proved that even more. So it is in our interest to teach students how they can check news and media sources themselves in order to become an enlightened member of our society.

Then there is also the historic motivation where we still remember the responsibility of the media in Nazi Germany when spreading propaganda instead of independent reporting contributed to the Shoah. Especially since neo-Nazis use social media as well to organise demonstrations or even crime against other people it is in the interest of our society to educate about manipulating techniques through phenomena such as fake news. History and present day examples also show the importance of independent media.

Which media do you use to inform yourself? Please participate in this quick and anonymous survey.

When having a look how young people in Germany inform themselves about current social and political events it is clear that online media holds the leading role.

Other than their parents or grandparents they do not rely as much on television or even newspapers at all. The fact that school also plays a minor role in the spreading of information should also strike us worried.

Comparing these statistics with the numbers of people who consider different forms of media credible or independent is even more worrying.

Not even 50% think that the media in general is independent. At least three quarters believe information spread is credible.

So which part do German schools play at the moment when it comes to media literacy?

Basically most of the work falls to the subject of German. This comes in various forms. The first would be reading novels or dramas that address the general topic of media. This can be done with young classes starting at the age of 10/11. The plots can vary from cyber bullying, over fake news and cyber crime including their consequences. Through the form of the narration students can identify with the protagonists and make „experiences“ without actually suffering the depicted consequences.



Another part of the German curriculum is the study of newspapers. Usually students would receive a local or national newspaper over the course of a month, read it daily and analyse it in German class. Many newspapers offer students to write articles of their own to finish the project which will then be published in the cooperating newspaper. This is always a great experience for students as it teaches them the amount of work that goes into good journalism as well as it gives them some credit and a sense of self-efficacy. This usually takes place with students at the age of 13/14/15.

As the curriculum of German class continues over the year, students will get more and more familiar with reporting. So, it seems only natural that discussing and analysing articles is even part of the German high-school diploma.

There are also some media related contents in history and social studies class, where students work with historic sources, or in social studies where politics and the media are combined into one unit of the syllabus. Students will discuss whether the media can be regarded as a fourth power of the state next to judicative, legislative and executive. In foreign language classes we usually have a look at the role of the media in the countries of origin also related to youth culture. We would also touch some recent issues of social media etc.

There is a subject that is dedicated to computer studies, however this mainly teaches technical skills and not media awareness which would lead to media literacy.

Another important role falls to independent projects on media literacy. These can be organised by independent organisations or as extra-curricular interdisciplinary projects. The topics are very varied and can easily be adapted or chosen to serve the needs or wishes of a particular class such as social media usage, digital detox, debating of media related topics, etc.

What I would consider a problem is this patchwork rug of competences in media literacy that is spread among the subjects. The independent projects sound very lucrative but in the end they take enormous amount of work and also time which is then lost for other curriculum related lessons.

So the question evolves: How do we actually aim to develop media literacy? As you can see from the picture, there are several aspects and strategies that are necessary. Not all can be achieved in one lesson and not all can be achieved by everyone to the same extent probably.

The statistic shown here reveals how important it is to educate people about strategies to check news themselves. This statistic shows that 48% rely on other media debunking fake news – which of course shows us the importance of reliable, independent media. Only second place comes that people actually check the facts themselves.

Let me present an idea of how to develop media literacy:

1. Students need to get actively involved (read different forms of media, compare them, compare different formats)
2. Students need to make experiences (creating content, consequences of fake news, cyber crime, ...)
3. Students need to become educators themselves (teaching parents at home/friends/others)
4. Exchange experiences on all these three fields and start from the top again

Before I can draw a conclusion there are some difficulties we have to keep in mind/overcome.



It is quite difficult in a quickly changing world of technology to decide which contents should be taught and which shouldn't/needn't.

Then there is also the question about teachers being prepared or being authentic to teach media literacy. Should every teacher do it, no matter if his/her personal ability or interest, or should only those who are engaged and thus authentic do this.

And finally: Why don't we ask students more what they want to discuss concerning media literacy..?

To conclude, teachers and students must work together in this field of rapid changes.

That means teachers need to be prepared or at least the subject should be taught by those who are interested, familiar and thus authentic. There needs to be a dialogue with students but also parents.

In the end it is our aim to make students the best communicators by equipping them with the best tools to achieve this goal.