



Creative Audiovisual Lab
for the promotion of
critical thinking and
media literacy

Policy Recommendations

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“Literacy has never been more necessary for development; it is key to communication and learning of all kinds and a fundamental condition of access to today’s knowledge societies.”

UNESCO (2013)

Introduction

Over the past two decades, significant changes in digital technology have greatly influenced how young people perceive the world, interact with others, and view themselves. This digital transformation has created a virtual environment where young individuals, so-called “digital natives”, are constantly exposed to audiovisual content and engage in interactions online. However, this has led to an environment where young people mostly consume entertaining digital media without critically reflecting on the content that contributes to their personal identity development. The constant exposure to a variety of audiovisual stimuli indirectly enhances their skills in understanding visual language. Unfortunately, although there’s easy access to information, many young people still lack adequate media literacy skills, meaning that they might be easily fooled by partisan, biased, or fake news. Thus, cultivating students’ critical thinking and media literacy can help them to better understand the world they live in and responsibly express their voices online and offline.

Clarifying the notion of media and audiovisual literacy

The concepts of information and media literacy were clearly differentiated in the past (Camarero, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018; Pérez-Rodríguez, et al. 2019). However, in 2014, UNESCO encompassed them in a single category of competencies, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for the personal and professional development of the personal: **media literacy**. This concept recognises the crucial part that media and information play in our daily lives. It embodies freedom of expression and information, as it enables individuals to understand the functions of the media and of other information providers, to critically evaluate their content, and to make informed decisions as users and producers of information and media content.

Media literacy is the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contexts, and to create communications in a variety of contexts.

European Commission

European Commission defines media literacy as the “ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contexts, and to create communications in a variety of contexts” (European Commission, 2007; 2023). Media literacy refers to different formats, including film and television, radio, music, the press, the Internet, and any type of digital technology designed for communication. Thus, it can range from simple text to complex forms of virtual reality. Nonetheless, one of the formats that has experienced major developments, and that will continue developing in the near future is **the audiovisual format**. Media literacy covers a complex learning process that involves skills and abilities that must necessarily include the ability to create audiovisual content (Camarero, Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018).

Considering that the audiovisual format is more prevalent in communication and information processes, the weight and significance of this format, as well as the need to learn how to use it as a tool for both personal development and positive social change is clear. When audiovisual media is used properly in social interactions, there are a variety of benefits that result from both the potential of such media to reach a bigger audience and the efficiency of this format in conveying a message or information. Thus, **the correct use of audiovisual content in and for education is essential**. The introduction of **audiovisual content both in formal and non-formal education is a necessary tool to guarantee young people have the skills they need to live and thrive in the digital age** and guard them against the threats posed by disinformation.

The critical nature of media literacy and the need to enhance and strengthen it has been recognised in different strategic documents on the EU level, such as the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan (MAAP), and Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP).



The CrAL Project

The project CrAL - Creative Audiovisual Lab for The Promotion of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy - addresses the need for media literacy and critical thinking among young people (14 – 19 years old) by providing them with the competences and skills necessary to reinterpret online and offline media contents, by creating audiovisual materials based on actual, serious, and concrete contents.

The project is based on the good practice “Creative audiovisual writing and reading” developed as a result of the research carried out within the Laboratory of Image and Creative Writing held at the University “La Sapienza” of Rome by Annio Gioacchino Stasi and Mery Tortolini. The project was implemented over 36 months (2021 – 2023), during which 7 partners from different European countries worked together. The partners on the project are ALL DIGITAL from Belgium, Centre of Technical Culture Rijeka, Croatia, Hellenic Open University, Greece, Istituto Centrale per I Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi, Italy, European Grants International Academy, Italy, Association Langas j ateit, Lithuania, and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

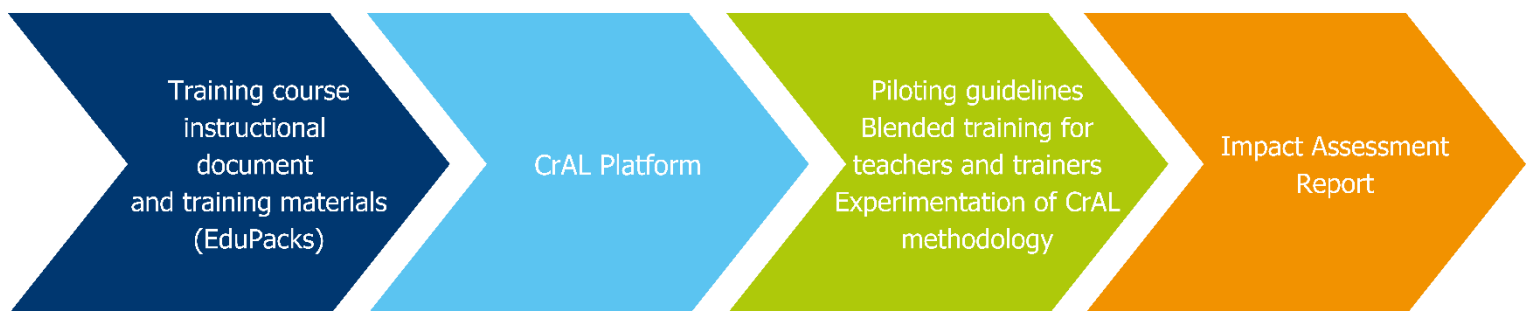
The concept behind the CrAL methodology is based on the idea that, in order to change the role of young people from passive to active consumers of online and offline content, their visual and critical thinking skills have to be strengthened. To achieve this result, young people need to also be the creators of audiovisual media content. Thus, the CrAL project applied learning by doing methodology based on the design and production of audiovisual content, where young people will be active protagonist of the media creation process.

Additionally, the CrAL project aimed to strengthen the knowledge of secondary school teachers and trainers working in non-formal settings on how to educate and train their students in the creative audiovisual reading, writing, and production to improve their media literacy skills, and critical thinking. To increase the influence of the CrAL project on a local, national, and European level, parents and members of the community were also involved in the project as active protagonists.

Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations presented below are built on the overall work of the CrAL project. Firstly, the partners adapted the good practice “Creative audio-visual writing and reading” to their contexts and design the model for setting up Creative Audiovisual Labs. This was done through the creation of the Training Course Instructional Document, training materials (EduPacks), CrAL Online Platform, and Piloting Guidelines. Then, the CrAL methodology was implemented in five national contexts (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain) and Impact Assessment Report was created to evaluate the methodology experimentation and provide a solid base for the policy recommendations.

The pilot experimentation of the CrAL methodology has been carried out from November 2022 to June 2023, and it consisted of two parts. Firstly, the teachers and trainers were trained to implement the Creative Audiovisual Labs. This happened through a blended course (online and face-to-face workshops) consisting of 10 modules covering technical, digital, and creative skills. Secondly, trained teachers and trainers worked with their students in producing audio-visual content on selected topics interesting to them and important for society today.



The ‘everywhereness’ of information, media, Internet, and other information providers requires a greater emphasis on youth empowerment by ensuring that they have the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to critically engage with all information providers and media sources (UNESCO, 2013).

These policy recommendations aim to create a comprehensive framework for fostering critical audiovisual literacy skills among young individuals, empowering them to navigate the complex world of media with the needed skills and confidence.

- Incorporate audiovisual media literacy in formal and non-formal education using a variety of approaches

The use of audio-visual materials is not a novelty in classrooms across Europe. Using films, video games, and social media for teaching and learning in formal and non-formal contexts has also been covered in many textbooks, papers, projects, and initiatives. It's crucial, especially in the digital era, to be open to new technology and **meet young learners where they are**, covering the topics relevant to their lives. Thus, **audiovisual media literacy should be included in both formal and non-formal education, emphasising critical analysis of audiovisual content**. This joint implementation of formal and non-formal educational experiences can help young people in developing knowledge and skills associated with active citizenship and the development of positive attitudes through interpersonal communication.

Learning with and about audiovisual literacy needs to be age-appropriate, student-centered and use a hands-on approach to analyse, evaluate, interpret, and create audiovisual content critically, and focus on the process, rather than on the output. Critical analyses of audiovisual content can provide the knowledge and skills necessary for students to navigate the digital world reflectively and confidently. They can also encourage both active participation and the promotion of democratic values (Pöttsch, et al., 2022). Furthermore, audiovisual content in learning activities supports the inclusion of young people in the contemporary world, and specifically facilitates their acquisition of **skills and knowledge to express themselves**.

Moreover, the use of **various student-centred approaches and strategies** (such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, competency-based learning, and gamification) may enhance the development of audiovisual media literacy and critical thinking skills with regards to global issues, respectful communication, perspective thinking and adaptability. Consequently, by enabling young people to critically evaluate the source of information and hence identify false or misleading content, media literacy can also be a useful tool in the fight against the spread of disinformation.

- **Support professional development of teachers and trainers in enhancing inclusive media literacy, critical thinking, and active citizenship**

Teachers and trainers have an important role in shaping media literacy and critical thinking skills of young people. To support and empower them, it is necessary **to provide professional development opportunities to enhance their own media literacy skills** and advance their teaching techniques. By strengthening their own skills, teachers and trainers can effectively take on the role of mentors and adequately guide students in their skills development.

The significance of offering continuous professional development opportunities to teachers and trainers is even more evident when considering **rapid digital transformation**. Thus, it is important to offer training and resources for educators to effectively teach critical audiovisual literacy skills and **to keep up to date with evolving media trends**.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that enhancing media literacy **education should not rely solely on teachers and trainers, nor it should demand a sacrifice of their personal time and motivation**. The insights gathered through the experimentation of the CrAL project revealed that in different EU countries teachers struggle with many administrative burdens, as well as the lack of time and economic incentives when it comes to the content not included in the regular scope of the pre-defined curricula.

To truly strengthen media literacy education, a multi-faceted approach is needed, including policy makers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. Simultaneously, providing

dedicated time and resources and including projects and initiatives such as CrAL, either within the school day or as part of structured professional development programs can reduce the barriers posed by external factors (such as time constraints).

- **Media literacy initiatives and programmes should actively work towards promoting social inclusion**

The way we portray and imagine one another in different audiovisual content (e.g., films, games) had an impact on the day-to-day conceptualizations and performances that shape the social environment. This means that those controlling the means of representation have **a decisive influence on how the world is perceived by others** and on the actions shaped by these world views (Pöttsch, Hansen, Hammar, 2022). Therefore, media literacy initiatives and programs **can have a critical role in fostering social inclusion** in the ever-changing digital world. As media landscape continues to diversify and expand, it is necessary to strengthen the skills of all young people to critically analyse, understand, and engage with various forms of media. Moreover, **media literacy initiatives can help in closing the digital divide by enhancing access to information and communication tools**, thus reducing inequalities in information consumption and expression.

By providing educational opportunities to foster critical media literacy, young people, regardless of their background, can learn how to understand the world around them, navigate digital media, and realise the power of their voice. Fundamentally, **these initiatives have the potential to transcend their educational scope and become a tool for a society that is more inclusive** and characterised by greater equity.

- **Foster collaboration with parents and members of the community while emphasising local support in addressing global challenges**

In order to create and foster a healthy and informed media environment for young people, it is important to involve parents and the community in the process. By engaging and including parents and members of local community in **learning about and with audiovisual content** and its value, **they can also better understand the challenges of audiovisual content creation and consumption** and make informed decisions when it comes to their children's media exposure. Moreover, **critical media literacy can be a powerful tool to enable intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and cultural understanding**. According to UNESCO (2013), engagement with and through media literacy can generate **cross-generational dialogue that might result in civic engagement, cohesion, and inclusiveness of different sectors and age groups**.

To make the engagement process meaningful and relatable for young people, it's crucial to tailor the discussions and content to address social and local issues that directly impact their lives. By aligning media literacy efforts with pertinent topics, such as environmental concerns, migration, digital citizenship, mental health, and cultural diversity, we can increase the relevance of the content to young people. **This approach not only promotes critical thinking, but also encourages youngsters to actively engage with the world around them.** By connecting media consumption with real-world issues, young people can become responsible digital citizens who are well-equipped to navigate both virtual and physical environments with empathy and understanding.

Lastly, to foster collaboration among wider community, **it is important to provide and establish space** to discuss media-related issues and share strategies for critical consumption. As an example, [the CrAL platform](#) offers space for such discussions and aims to bring together all sides involved in the learning process.

- **Provide opportunities for young people to become active digital citizens who can engage positively and responsibly in society, both online and offline**

Media literacy (including audiovisual media literacy) and digital citizenship education are overlapping content areas that should be integrated into cross-curricular learning. Through developing media literacy skills, young people learn how to think critically about the audiovisual content they encounter and create through different means. By adding a digital citizenship dimension to learning activities, students learn how to navigate digital landscapes in a **safe, responsible, and ethical way. Digital citizenship education encompasses the ethical creation of audiovisual content** and encourages young people **to create narratives that are inclusive, respectful of diverse perspectives and ethical considerations.** Moreover, audiovisual content encourages the use and access to banks of shared resources, thus, **raising awareness about copyright, the significance of intellectual property rights, and creative commons licensing.** By fostering respect for intellectual property, young people can contribute to an online environment that values the contributions of content creators.

Additionally, the creation of audiovisual content also encourages the use of Internet platforms that accelerate the creation and dissemination of audiovisual materials (i.e. YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, TikTok) and it is crucial that young people know how to navigate those platforms in a responsible way. It is also essential to teach young people about **online privacy**, safeguarding personal information in a digital environment, and how to make informed choices about what to share and what to keep private. This knowledge not only contributes to their own online safety but also cultivates the sense of digital citizenship as they learn how to become capable of **protecting themselves and their peers from potential cyber threats.**



Conclusion

Promoting critical audiovisual literacy requires a multi-faceted approach, including both formal and non-formal education and the wider community. It should be highlighted that these policy recommendations should be seen as a living document, and they should change with evolving challenges and experiences. Moreover, while the recommendations above are not exhaustive, they can serve as a starting point for fostering critical media literacy, acknowledging the need for ongoing dialogue, innovation, and collaboration.



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