

# Media Studies in School Curriculum : Obstacles, Challenges and Possibilities

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## Abstract

*Media studies as a subject has at last entered the boundaries of schools though little late. Disregarding media from the school curriculum has always bothered many experts who are working in the field of media studies. Many initiatives were undertaken to introduce children, parents and teachers to the concepts of media studies but all happened out of the schools. One of the key point made by the NCF, 2005, i.e., connecting knowledge to the life outside the school, has actually opened the door for media studies, a subject which has never in the past was given its due importance in school curriculum. It was realised that students' media experiences are as important as their experience with their parents, peers and teachers, and by allowing them to bring their media experiences in classroom, a creative environment can be created where they could get a chance to discuss issues which are very integral to their life. This paper focuses on why media should be a part of school curriculum, how it can be introduced, the present scenario, challenges it can face and some strategies to overcome those challenges.*

## INTRODUCTION

Media is a very important part of students' lives. They spend great deal of time watching TV, listening to radio, surfing net, reading magazines and newspapers and also take pride in owning a sophisticated toy called mobile phone which gives them an opportunity to do all these activities when they are on move. These mediums bombard them with images, words and sound. These media messages are designed to win their

heart and rule their mind. Students are also learning a lot from media. Mass media actually teaches whether media makers intend to do so or not, and students learn from it whether they are aware of it or not. Students are learning so much intentionally or unintentionally that it can be termed as omnipresent non-school textbook. In fact children learn in a variety of ways – through experience, making and doing things, experimentation, reading, discussion,

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asking, listening, thinking and reflecting and expressing themselves in speech writing. They require opportunities of all these kind in the course of their development. The sources through which they learn are innumerable, it is necessary for the educators to explore and understand all those sources through which children learn. Media is one of them.

Yes, it is a non-formal textbook or we can say another school away from school. But what role does these non-formal textbooks have in school. Can schools afford to ignore these textbooks which are very important part of their lives? This raises unavoidable challenges for schools and teachers. Can school teachers join hand with informal teachers and teach. As part of their mission to help young people to become better informed and analytical thinkers, educators should seriously consider media studies as essential part of school system.

#### **Why Media Studies Should be a Part of the School System**

Keeping in view the importance of media in society and students' continuous engagement with media, it is important that the students start understanding media rather than just being passive viewer or reader. The way we help children to understand language, social science, science and mathematics, similarly, the time has come that we have to make them understand media. It is contemporary, it is multidisciplinary, it can be easily assimilated into classroom, and it can promote critical thinking skills. It will enable the students to see behind the screen and read between the

lines and to be an active citizen of the world's largest democracy. The vision of democracy articulated by the Secondary Education Commission (1952) is worth recalling here and how media understanding fits into the vision is motivating enough for those who would be interested in taking this initiative forward.

"Citizenship in a democracy involves many intellectual, social and moral qualities... a democratic citizen should have the understanding and the intellectual integrity to sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda and to reject the dangerous appeal of fanaticism and prejudice..." This is what media literacy initiatives world over propagates. The strategies to implement them may vary in different countries but the idea is to make students reflect critically on media issues. It entails the acceptance of multiple views on social issues and commitment to democratic forms of interaction, and helps children to see issues from different perspectives, and understand how such issues are connected to their lives. The content and language of media products provide ways of looking at the world. The media is a hidden curriculum for students which should be explored.

This has been explored in many countries and is called by various names in different parts of the world like television literacy, critical viewership skills and critical viewing skills. These projects were started with the initiative of an individual or small group and later on it attracted like-minded people and became a success. In New Zealand over 100 schools offer media studies as standalone subject. In Britain media

studies has been a subject for over 30 years and is also well established in Canada. In fact media studies is one of the fastest growing subjects, which needs to be introduced not only at college or university level but also at school level.

### **What is Media Education?**

The big question is what is media studies? What does it include? World over various media education initiatives are defined differently and are interpreted in different ways, so it is important to make a distinction between these different ways of interpreting the concept of media pedagogy. Media and education have been combined differently by different people and this has been referred to by many names like media education, media literacy, educational media, television study, critical viewing skills, etc. Let us have a look at three ways in which media and education can be combined:

- 1. Media Education:** This is education in the subject of mass media. This includes teaching students how to use media, especially in order to prepare them for taking up a job in the media industry.
- 2. Media Socialisation:** Students know the world through media and they are experienced and competent media users. The objective of such projects is to develop more discriminating audiences.
- 3. Educational Media:** Education by means of media which include using various media forms in and for teaching.

In India all these three combinations have been explored. There are many government and non-government organisations and universities offering

course in media education. The objectives of such organisations are to train prospective media person.

Media socialisation has been dealt with seriously in NCERT social science text book for Class VII titled *Social and Political Life*. There is a chapter in the book on mass media and communication which includes how media sets agenda and how market has become central to its functioning. The chapter has covered all forms of mass communication including television, radio, films and newspaper and the Internet. Besides, areas like market, technology and media's role in society has been discussed in the chapter. The section on how media sets agenda also contains case studies to help students understand the concepts and exercises to critically analyse reporting by newspapers. In the same book, there is also a chapter on advertising which explains the concept of advertising along with various forms of advertising, and how it manipulates us into buying things we don't need. Similarly many textbooks have integrated media to explain the subject specific concepts.

In majority of the cases the media is used as tool to explain concept, but the idea of understanding media need to be further explored. There has to be a systematic and methodical media input at every stage from primary to upper primary to secondary and higher secondary. There is a need to develop critical media pedagogy.

As far as educational media is concerned, a lot has been done in this field. There are many organisations involved in making educational audio and video programmes, multimedia

packages and learning objects which is used in teaching-learning process.

Central Institute of Educational Technology, a constituent of NCERT, promotes utilisation of educational technologies especially mass media, viz. radio, TV satellite communications and cyber media, either separately or in combinations, to widen educational opportunities and improving quality of educational processes at school level.

#### **How to Introduce Media Education in Schools**

Media studies at school level can be offered in the following two ways:

##### **Option I**

##### ***Integration with already existing subjects.***

By integrating it with the subject that already exists in school curriculum. NCF-2005 says that the need for subject addressing contemporary concerns of society is important. But there has been misplaced tendency to address these concerns in the school curriculum by creating new subjects, producing related textbooks and devising methods for evaluation for them. These concerns may be far better addressed if they are incorporated in curriculum through existing subjects and ongoing activities. Needless to say adding new areas as subjects only increases the curriculum load and perpetuates undesirable compartmentalisation of knowledge.

Another concern with the subject like media studies is development appropriateness, logical sequencing and connection between grades. Till now the subject is introduced only at graduation and post-graduation level. If it has to be

integrated in school curriculum from lower grades then logical sequencing and connection between the grades is a great task which needs to be taken up with the help of teachers, media educators and media professionals.

##### **Option II**

##### ***Media studies can be a standalone subject.***

If it is introduced as a standalone subject then it will definitely increase the curriculum load. But it can be offered as one of the four elective subjects and also an additional elective in combination with any of the academic electives already available at senior secondary level. Introducing media studies at senior secondary level has its own advantages. The students in Class XI and XII will get exposed to various career opportunities this subject offers. Also, adolescents, who have lot of questions which are being answered by media, will get a chance to understand, question, appreciate media. It will also provide them an understanding on how they can express themselves through media. The idea is to provide students with an opportunity to develop life skills which will enable them to analyse these potent forms of modern communication and help students to become wise consumers of media.

Whichever option we choose from the above-mentioned ones, the course on media studies should focus on the following very important aspects:

- to develop an understanding of media in students and enable them to appreciate potential and limitation of various media forms.
- to encourage students to participate in contemporary social processes as active citizens, through their

awareness of the political, social, economic, historical and technological implications of the media.

- to develop skills in students and encourage them to produce creative media message.
- to introduce students to various career opportunities in mass media.

The course should be based on critical pedagogy as it will provide students an opportunity to see issues from different perspectives and understand how such issues are connected to their lives. The subject must provide them with means and opportunities to enhance their creative expression and the capacity for aesthetic appreciation.

### **The Present Situation**

Across the world media education always started outside the school and later it entered the formal education system. India is no exception to this. Institutes like Xavier Institute of Mumbai, Culture and Communication, Chennai and Media Centre of Bangalore introduced short courses in media education but it could be introduced formally at school level only in year 2010.

Now when the subject has entered the school boundaries and positioned itself in school curriculum, teachers should be the first one to understand the concept. Biggest challenge in the introduction of this subject which can transform curriculum and teaching is training of teachers.

In the wake of introduction of the new subject, Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT recognised the need for formal professional development of in-service teachers and development of

curriculum of media studies. At CIET curriculum was developed in consultation with the experts in media and media education. Based on the curriculum, textbook was also developed along with the manual which includes a number of activities that would help teachers and students to understand media.

Textbook is designed in such a manner that it not only introduces students to the many facets of media but also make the subject relevant to their age group. The aim is to familiarise students with a variety of important questions about media as well as introducing them to the various problems that can be solved through media intervention. Each chapter is written as self-contained unit but the textbook follows a deliberate organisational sequence. Each chapter contains case studies, class and individual exercise, boxes and further discussions of key concepts and questions for consideration.

### **Challenges Ahead**

**Training Programmes:** As mentioned the biggest challenge while introducing this subject at school level will be the lack of trained teachers in this subject at the school level. CIET, NCERT recognised the need and organised formal professional development training programmes for in-service teachers. Various teachers' training programmes are organised for teachers to teach this new subject. The teachers from various schools participated in the training programme and got motivated to take up this subject at school level. Teachers not only got a chance to learn how to analyse media

messages but they also got chance to know what happens behind the screen. Teachers explored the areas like script writing, camera handling and anchoring. The experience was wonderful and the following paragraphs summarise the kind of experience teachers had during the training programme.

“The workshop, ‘Media in school curriculum’ workshop was very enlightening for all the teachers. It has shown us a new way of looking at various aspects of media. I would surely like to take up this subject in my school.. There is so much to explore, discuss, experiment while teaching this subject.”

Ms Shweta Malik, DPS Rohini,  
Participant, Media Studies Training  
Programme, August 25-27, 2010

“The three-day training programme gave us a lot of information on various types of influence media today has on students. Teachers through this programme were given lots of information as to how they can start media clubs to create enthusiasm about this subject among students.”

Ms Sapna Verma, St. George’s  
School, Alaknanda. Participant, Media  
Studies Training Programme,  
September 7-9, 2010.

**Infrastructure Requirements:** Few schools have resources set aside for teaching media, video productions, etc. Since the subject demands the facilities like computers, editing software, video cameras, screening rooms, etc., there can be apprehension amongst schools to start this subject.

#### **Overcoming Challenges: A Roadmap**

Challenges are many but if the subject is handled properly then it can be one of

the important subjects in the coming years. The challenges and the problems will be there as in the case of any new initiatives but to minimise the hurdles continuous teacher training programmes should be organised. This new subjects should be introduced in such a manner that minimum infrastructure is required or schools should be able to run the course with the existing infrastructure at place and the most important initiatives schools can take is to establish media clubs in schools to begin with. The activities of media club will definitely lay foundation for this new subject.

Simultaneously efforts should also be made to introduce it at the lower level and the systematic and organised curriculum needs to be worked out to avoid repetitions and overlapping at different levels.

#### **Conclusion**

Media has always been the part of student’s life and it will always be. Through the mass media come plethora of information in the form of moving images, still images, sound, multimedia and online material that can be valid or invalid, positive or negative. Students’ interaction with media can affect the way they eat, study, work and relax. They are like the air we breathe, omnipresent but rarely considered. Students are so immersed in these messages that they hardly notice how they shape their perceptions, belief and actions. The course in media studies will encourage students to seriously consider the mass media and the role it plays in their lives. The mass media was there in schools too as teaching aid but as a subject it has just entered the school boundaries. The

teething problem will be there in the beginning but teachers and educators have to nurture it so that it blossoms into a successful media literacy programme.

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