Media Literacy Education has definitely come a long way. I remember mentioning Media Literacy at a Prix Jeunesse presentation in New York City in the early-mid 1990s, all the participants looked at me as a weirdo and politely ignored my comment on the necessity for TV producers to include, or at least reflect upon while writing TV programs, Media Literacy related topics. Things have changed. Today everybody talks about Media Literacy, increasingly they will be talking about Media and Information Literacy, or News Literacy, or Educommunication, etc. Whatever we call it, we all basically know what we are talking about (I’ll refrain to, once again, compose the list here). What is important is that “Media Literacy” is a globally (globally!) accepted term, a framework clear enough to have a discussion about it with representatives of many different professional areas of our communities. I think that this is the result of the thousands of educators who have been diligently educating (often with a true activism touch on it) the mediamakers, the policymakers, and the public in general (teachers, parents, social workers, medical workers, etc.) for so many years. Congratulations! But, in reality, the main step is still pending: How many public school curricula do you know that clearly includes Media Literacy in their programs? Not many, really. And when it does, it is not mandatory (like math, or even gym), or it is confused with “ict literacy” (how to use a computer, create a blog, tweet, photoshope yourself!).

Meanwhile, around the world policies are being set up: we need media literate citizens. All member states of the European Union will need to report, by December of 2011, the level of media literacy of their citizenry (2). Part of this urge, in my opinion, reflects the fact that the political powers no longer control the media sphere (3), privatization of TV, satellites, Internet and mobile telephony have radically changed the playing field. It is now clear to policymakers that in order to develop informed, rational, participant citizens, they will need to be –at some level- media literate. If we want to develop participatory democratic political systems, their citizens will need to be able to separate opinion from information, propaganda from political commentary. It is then a moment of rejoice for Media Literacy campaigners around the world, the political system is now demanding Media Literacy for their citizens. The call for Media Literacy is no longer the call from the disempowered middle school educator alone in her classroom, it is now policy. It would seem that the moment has finally arrived. There is an empathy of wills (civil society and political) towards developing Media Literacy; new initiatives are in motion, such as UNESCO’s wide-vision and well researched “Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers” (4); a new global University network, UAC-MILID, has just been created (5); there are Media Literacy initiatives in Nigeria, India, Peru, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, all over the world. Congratulations!

At the same time, again, very few of these initiatives have actually arrived to our schoolrooms, to our formal educational settings. Arts programs, humanism programs in
general, are being cut out of the curricula of public education around the globe; stressing the need for writing, reading and numeracy is actually the norm (understandable giving the failing rates in educational standards of most industrial countries). No room (time!) for another item: the kids know how to use the computer anyway, they learn fast, most people would say. In a way similar to the 1980s and 90s argument of why show TV in the classroom, when all what kids do at home is to watch TV. Missing the point that it was not about watching more TV, but about reflecting on what they were actually watching, and when lucky (access to equipment) to in fact make some TV (write a script, read the script, learn the techniques of audio-visual story telling, understand TV distribution) as part of the class curriculum.

So what we need now is the next step, to actually bring Media Literacy to all schools. Starting from Kindergarten on (6). High school might be too late already, specially when we learn that what you see on your Internet searches is mostly a reflection of yourself (7). The High School student might end up basically seeing variations of her childhood choices of cereal, cartoons and toys, nicely packed up by the TV/Internet programs she used to enjoy when she was 3.

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NOTES---
1- As per their website, the bi-annual TV festival PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL awards the world’s best children’s and youth TV programmes. See: http://www.prixjeunesse.de


3- Or if they do, it is in the form or clear censorship. Many examples, from turning off the Internet in Egypt a few months ago to... you choose.


5- UNESCO-UNITWIN-UNAOC University Network on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue. See: http://www.unaoc.org/communities/academia/uac-milid

6- 2-5 year old Americans watch 25 hours of TV weekly, 4.5 hours of DVD or video games + 90 minutes on DVR and 45 minutes with a VCR. 2010 Nielsen study: http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=118972S

7- Eli Pariser’s TED Talk: http://blog.ted.com/2011/05/04/twitter-presents-great-taglines-for-eli-parisers-talk/