

# **Responding to Hegemonic Media**

## ***Deliberations, Trends and Lessons from Asia***

**By**

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### **(I) Media Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region<sup>1</sup>**

We live in a very complex environment that is, if we care to look closely, really a complex of many environments. There are various interpenetrating experiential sites which include the cultural environment, the social environment, the economic environment, the political environment, the natural environment, the virtual environment, the national environment, the global environment, *and the media environment*. Many of these environments have complex components which very often overlap with the other environments. While each environment could be conceptually isolated for study, it is virtually impossible to separate them in reality, and they are mutually influencing.

Our concern here is really the media environment. The media environment in the Asia-Pacific region is significantly large. A cursory examination should give some idea. According to the KIDON media link site<sup>2</sup>, the combined number of media organisations in Asia<sup>3</sup> and the Pacific<sup>4</sup> amounts to about 2,000 entities covering news

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<sup>1</sup> Observations made here are based on the research report promoted by the Global Media Education project of SIGNIS World on the *Status of media education initiatives in Asia and the Pacific*. Contributions to the study conducted in 2004 come in three forms: surveys, case studies and articles (from secondary-source research). The countries that participated are Fiji, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Thailand. The reports from the various countries provide a rich source of information on media education initiatives. While there is certainly a lot of variation in the reports, they present good starting points for deliberations and understanding of *critical* media education in Asia and the Pacific. Canute Januarius, Training Coordinator, CahayaSuara Communications Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, contributed to the writing of the research report on which this paper is based. Rash Behari Bhattacharjee improved the reading of this work with his editorial contribution.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kidon.com/media-link/asia.php>. July 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Includes Middle East

<sup>4</sup> Includes Australia and New Zealand, which have a large number of media organisations compared to other Pacific Islands.

agencies, magazines, the Internet, newspapers, radio, television, teletext, and weeklies. If we exclude the Middle East in Asia, and Australia and New Zealand, we would have about 1,500 organisations. These organisations form an interconnected network which command great economic and political influence in the Asia Pacific region. But more importantly, they command immense *cultural power*.

What are the implications of this power that the modern mass media has for the ordinary people of Asia and the Pacific? What is happening to Asians and Pacific Islanders as they get bombarded in a vibrant national and global media environment? How is this power beneficial to the region and to its individual member states? Where it is not beneficial, what defence do the people of Asia and the Pacific Islands have against its negative effects?

## **(II) Issues and Problems in the Asia-Pacific Region**

### **1) General Realities**

In a workshop held in Manila in 2002, organised by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and SIGNIS Asia, the following were identified as the prevailing realities:

- Undemocratically powerful mega media corporations/conglomerates,
- Aggressive top-down, corporate globalisation,
- A unipolar world,
- US-centrism/ a bias towards Americanism,
- Commodification and homogenisation/standardisation of news,
- A shift from Fordism to Murdochism,
- Belligerent and prescriptive TV (prescribing, not describing, reality and lifestyles),
- Powerful, globally-pervasive brand cultures,
- Indiscriminate and unsustainable consumption,
- Focus on inner-city life and urban-centrism,
- Problems affecting women, tribal communities, senior citizens, children, and the disabled,
- Worsening of social injustice, inequality and poverty, and powerlessness, and
- Irreversible unsustainable growth paths.

The mass media is certainly a critical part of the problematic realities presented above. Thus, while the people have to deal with these general realities that confront Asia and the Pacific, there are specific issues that the growing and powerful national and global mass media introduces.

## 2) Media Realities

### a) Ideological bias

The mass media offers many opportunities to help the peoples of Asia and the Pacific build a sustainable society. It offers many possibilities for information dissemination, education, political mobilisation of citizens, entertainment, and character formation. However, these powers of the media are often misused. The media is controlled for a particular kind of ideological projection and lifestyle orientation (largely governed by a consumeristic value system).

### b) Legitimisation of interest groups

Mainstream mass media offers a massive power to influence the people's behaviour and to make profits. These powers place it as an immensely important site of contestation among various forces. Increasingly, it has become a major *hegemonic force* in the hands of TNCs that are media conglomerates, and over-zealous national governments. The former seeks to promote the neo-liberal economic agenda,<sup>5</sup> westernisation and Americanisation, while the latter seeks to ensure the political legitimacy of the ruling government and the ruling elites. In both cases, the ordinary citizens are victims of media impact.

### c) Unsustainability

Mainstream mass media promotes unsustainable trends that harm society, both locally and globally, today and tomorrow. The concerns cover such issues as violence, language of swearing and profanity, portrayal of sex and nudity, depiction of crime, racial/ethnic sensitivities and discrimination, religious intolerance, drug use and abuse, amorality, vulgar materialism, revenge as value, might as right, West as best, children/people as commodities, and women as 'sexual-penetration ready'.

### d) Consumeristic lifestyles

Mainstream mass media have become highly institutionalised, both locally and globally, and offer youth and children all over Asia and the Pacific a comprehensive but 'authorised parallel curriculum' (parallel to the official educational curriculum).

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<sup>5</sup> 'It is an economic philosophy, which, along with its associated policies, calls for the freedom of business to operate with minimal interference on the part of governments, international organisations, or labour unions. Basic tenets of neoliberalism include the rule of the market (allowing businesses to operate as freely as possible), economic deregulation, privatisation of government-owned industries (eg. banks, highways, schools, utilities, postal service), reducing spending on social welfare, global free trade, and replacing notions of the public good with a belief in individual responsibility. Neoliberalism is the ideology used by businesses to justify unfettered globalisation. It is termed 'neo' liberal because it calls for a return to the free-market philosophy that prevailed prior to the enhanced role of government that gained legitimacy during the Depression of the 1930s, culminating (in the United States) with the 'War on Poverty' and other 'Great Society' programmes of the 1960s.' <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/union/socs/greenaction/Lexicon/index.html>. August, 1996.

This parallel curriculum packages a fast-paced entertainment-oriented world with built-in role models, values and highly consumeristic lifestyles. Unfortunately, this parallel curriculum is supportive of, and is supported by, the present focus and direction of the mainstream educational system in Asia and the Pacific.

#### e) **Accountability**

This parallel curriculum has to date not been subjected to any collective procedures (as an official educational curriculum would) or any form of “social and cultural impact assessments”. Programme ratings which are available in a number of places in Asia and the Pacific are low key. Accountability procedures of media organisations or media producers have not been developed or addressed systematically, nationally, regionally and/or globally.

### **(III) Critical Media Education**

#### a) **Media Education Initiatives**

The government, which claims to be concerned with the negative impact of the mainstream mass media on its citizens, in particular on students and children, has not explicitly and actively introduced any social policy, education policy or curriculum that handles the social and cultural impact of the mainstream mass media. In fact, many governments seduced by the neo-liberal agenda have encouraged the indiscriminate use of content produced in alien cultures.

Initiatives to handle the problems introduced by the mass media in Asia and the Pacific are being led by both religious and secular organisations. In many places in Asia and the Pacific, the Church is certainly in the forefront of this important effort. While this is an indication of strength, the initiatives in Asia and the Pacific are largely fragmentary and there has been insufficient consolidation into dynamic networks to suggest that a critical mass has been reached.

These activities have come to be articulated as initiatives on *media education*. Used loosely, the term refers to efforts to help citizens ‘read’ the media so that they could better engage with it, use it positively, and defend themselves against its harmful influences.

#### b) **Notion of Critical Media Education**<sup>6</sup>

This study will use the term “critical media education” as against the terms “media education”, “media literacy” and “edu-communication”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to Chapter 4 for an elaborate discussion on this concept of ‘Critical Media Education’ within the Malaysian context.

<sup>7</sup> However, there will be no emphasis on this term in the individual study. The usage of the term is left to its appropriateness in a particular context.

### **i) Media Education**

“*Media education*” is too generic a term, and includes mainstream media education which is largely focused on producing media personnel for the advertising and media industry. This is focused on building a skilled workforce, though there are increasing efforts to introduce critical and cultural studies about the media and its social location. In many institutions, it also goes by the name of ‘media and communication studies’.

### **ii) Media Literacy**

“*Media literacy*” seems to suggest a literacy programme on the media, and this, by itself, is incorrect in meaning and emphasis. The media education which is being addressed here is not merely about literacy. It is literacy and much more.

### **iii) Edu-Communication**

“*Edu-communication*” is also seen as too generic and does not address a number of critical media issues frontally. Communication is really more than communication through the media. Communication is also more than just education through the media.

### **c) Critical Media Education**

“*Critical media education*”<sup>8</sup> is chosen for several reasons.<sup>9</sup>

#### **i) Empowerment**

This is about being media literate, i.e., it involves the acquisition of media production skills where necessary, and understanding how media works and how media content influences outcomes (in a technical sense). In this context, it carries the message of empowerment.

#### **ii) Critical**

The approach is *critical* because it *interrogates* mass media (especially mainstream), examines the effects of mediation and the embeddedness of media to bring to light the economic, political and cultural realities and issues behind the mass media. It educates the users and producers of media and media content on what is negative and what is positive from ‘some’ collectively accepted standpoint of values (e.g., from a

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<sup>8</sup> There has been an effort to do away with terms like ‘critical,’ which for many seems to suggest being ‘political,’ ‘aggressive’ or ‘negative,’ etc. The point is that all terms reflect a political and cultural reality, whether this is explicit or implicit.

<sup>9</sup> The Signis *Charter on Critical Media Education* covers ‘Critical Media Education’ more comprehensively.

Christian point-of-view). Being ‘authentically critical’, it also covers the potential of the media for benefitting society at large, locally and globally.

### iii) **Sustainability**

In addition, critical media education is a counter-hegemonic process (in a cultural and political sense), and presents media from a standpoint of ‘authentic communication’<sup>10</sup> and ‘sustainability of society’.

### iv) **Alternatives**

Since critical media education covers the potentiality of the mass media, it also offers an avenue for considering alternatives to the mass media, alternatives to mainstream mass media content, and the mainstreaming of the alternative media.

## **(IV) Moving Towards *Critical Media Education***

Before proceeding with the analyses of the studies and drawing lessons from them, it is perhaps worthwhile to consider three external inputs for the sake of orientation, direction, comparison, and continuity with the present study. These initiatives are quoted at length to capture the thoughts and intent inherent in them.

### **A. UNESCO Declaration on Media Education**

In 1982, representatives of 19 nations at UNESCO’s International Symposium on Media Education issued the following declaration, known as the *Grunwald Declaration on Media Education*.<sup>11</sup>

**“We live in a world where media are omnipresent:** an increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. In some countries, for example, children already spend more time watching television than they do attending school.

“Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today’s world. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen’s active participation in society. Political and educational systems need to recognize their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.

“Regrettably most informal and non-formal educational systems do little to promote media education or education for communication. Too often the gap between the educational experience they offer and the real world in which people live is disturbingly wide. But if the arguments for media education as a preparation for responsible citizenship are formidable now, in the very near future with the development of communication technology such as

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<sup>10</sup> To make sense of ‘authentic communication,’ refer to the Habermasian notion of “Ideal Speech Act.”

<sup>11</sup> Grunwald, Federal Republic of Germany, 22 January 1982. [http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/MEDIA\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/MEDIA_E.PDF). May 2006

satellite broadcasting, two-way cable systems, television data systems, video cassette and disc materials, they ought to be irresistible, given the increasing degree of choice in media consumption resulting from these developments.

“Responsible educators will not ignore these developments, but will work alongside their students in understanding them and making sense of such consequences as the rapid development of two-way communication and the ensuing individualisation and access to information.

“This is not to underestimate the impact on cultural identity of the flow of information and ideas between cultures by the mass media.

“The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Children and adults need to be literate in all three of these symbolic systems, and this will require some reassessment of educational priorities. Such a reassessment might well result in an integrated approach to the teaching of language and communication.

“Media education will be most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel and decision-makers all acknowledge they have a role to play in developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers. The greater integration of educational and communications systems would undoubtedly be an important step towards more effective education.

***“We therefore call upon the competent authorities to:***

1. initiate and support comprehensive media education programs - from pre-school to university level, and in adult education - the purpose of which is to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, of greater competence among the users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programs should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in available media channels;
2. develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries both to increase their knowledge and understanding of the media and train them in appropriate teaching methods, which would take into account the already considerable but fragmented acquaintance with media already possessed by many students;
3. stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education, from such domains as psychology, sociology, and communication science;
4. support and strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by UNESCO and which aim at encouraging international co-operation in media education.”

## **B. UNESCO Youth Media Education Survey 2001<sup>12</sup>**

This report presents the results of a global survey of media education, focusing primarily on schools. It summarises the responses made by participants from 35 countries, together with extrapolations from an extensive review of print and web-based materials relating to media education. Excerpts from the Report are reproduced below.

### **3.0 Key Issues**

#### **3.1 Aims of Media Education**

Historically, media education has tended to move away from an approach based on ‘inoculation’ towards one based on ‘empowerment’. These are admittedly loose terms, but they were recognised and used by many of our respondents. The notion that media education

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<sup>12</sup> Final Report of *Youth Media Education Survey 2001*, Prepared for UNESCO by Kate Domaille and David Buckingham, November 2001.

should aim to defend or protect young people against media influence seems to have lost ground in recent years. Even where our respondents recognised that this approach was still prevalent in their own countries (e.g. Hong Kong, USA), they tended to reject it or suggest that it needed to be superseded. The more contemporary definition of media education seems to be based on notions such as ‘critical awareness’, ‘democratic participation’ and even ‘enjoyment’ of the media. This emergent approach also affords a more prominent role for media production by students. In Spain, for example, media education is argued for in terms of students becoming ‘critical citizens’ and gaining opportunities to become part of a ‘media community’; in Denmark it is seen as necessary ‘in order to empower students as strong individuals in a democracy’; while in Sweden students engage in media education in order to help them in ‘expressing themselves, their knowledge and their feelings’.

In several countries, the term ‘media literacy’ is used more widely than ‘media education’. This reference to literacy is partly strategic, since it offers a basis for including media alongside print in the established mother-tongue language curriculum. This is where media education is most frequently to be found, even in countries where it is very well-established (e.g. Australia, Canada, England). However, this use of the term ‘literacy’ also reflects a broader argument about the changing needs of learners in a media-saturated world. Several of our respondents insisted on the need for a broader conception of ‘literacy’ if education is to address contemporary realities (e.g. Japan). It is vital to emphasise here, however, that this notion of ‘literacy’ is not a functional or instrumental one: for nearly all our respondents, media literacy was very clearly defined as a form of *critical* literacy.

Several respondents also maintained that media education necessarily entails a more ‘active’, ‘student-centred’, ‘participatory’ pedagogy. Media education was, it was argued, a matter of ‘learning by doing’; and it was an area in which teachers needed to recognise the considerable knowledge and expertise of their students. This was particularly the case in relation to the need for students to engage in practical media production, but it was frequently seen as a more general requirement. Here again, media education may be at odds with the predominantly conservative ethos of most education systems.

Of course, the history of media education is bound to be inflected by local and national contexts and concerns, and should not be completely subsumed under this ‘grand narrative’. For example, the responses and material submitted from Ireland and Russia offer particularly useful histories which point to the diverse origins and traditions of media education in those countries. Different aims and approaches often exist side-by-side, with little attempt to bring them together. Indeed, given the relative novelty of media education in many contexts, it could be seen as distinctly counter-productive to seek to impose a singular model.

Generally speaking, however, countries with a less well-established tradition of media education still seem to be informed by a perceived need to ‘protect’ young people from the media. For example, this aim is clearly apparent in the report submitted by *Unda* (International Catholic Association for Radio and Television) which was one of the few sources we were able to locate relating to Africa. Here, the aim of media education is to save young children from ‘unsuitable material’; or, in a more directly political vein, to ensure that they recognise the differences between imported culture and ‘authentic’ culture. However, these motivations are by no means confined to developing countries. The responses from the USA, for example, reflect the continuing influence there of an ‘inoculative’ approach in relation to issues such as media violence, drugs and sex.

In many countries, there exist clear policy statements from central government agencies, which require media education to be delivered as part of mother-tongue language teaching or in social studies (or related areas like political education or citizenship). However, this rhetorical certainty is often undermined by the lack of any follow-up strategy in the form of clearly assessed activities or models of student progression in skills and competencies (see below). These different locations for media education obviously have implications in terms of how its aims are defined. Media education often seems to be used as a pretext for work on language or social issues, and to be assessed in these terms; and as a result, aims specific to media education tend to be marginalised. In more decentralised education systems (e.g. India, China, USA), there are often significant discrepancies between the aims of central government and those of local educators.



### 3.2 Curriculum Frameworks

If most practitioners are clear about the broad aims of media education, the extent to which these are translated into classroom practice is highly variable. A clearly defined conceptual framework for the curriculum is obviously necessary, both in order to ensure that teachers and students are aware of the specific aims of the classroom activities they undertake, and in order to provide an agreed basis for assessment. Some of our questionnaire responses identify frameworks that are primarily defined in terms of skills or competencies, or in terms of content; while others suggest that no clear framework exists. However, many countries do now possess an explicit conceptual framework for the media education curriculum; and many respondents suggested that such a conceptual framework was necessary even if it was not already in place.

The frameworks developed by the Association for Media Literacy in Canada and the British Film Institute in England (which are closely related) have been very influential internationally, even in very different cultural contexts. Most countries that have an explicit framework use some variant of these, while others appear to have adopted one or other of them wholesale (in some cases via the translation of relevant textbooks). Broadly speaking, there are four key areas that emerge as the common conceptual concerns of media education, although they are often described or labelled in different ways. They can be grouped as follows:

- Representation: media messages and values – ‘media and society’ – stereotyping – selection and point of view
- Language: media aesthetics – media as constructions – realism – narrative – conventions and genres (these issues are often addressed through student production)
- Production: media industries/organisations/institutions – economics/professional practice
- Audience: personal response and involvement in media – consciousness of own media use – the role of media in identity

Among these, different areas tend to be prioritised in different contexts, not least as a result of the location of media education in the curriculum. Thus, while issues of ‘representation’ are fairly consistently addressed across the board, ‘language’ tends to be emphasised in the context of mother tongue language teaching, while ‘production’ often features more strongly in the context of social studies or citizenship education. With few exceptions (e.g. England, Canada, Australia), the area of ‘audience’ tends to be addressed through personal reflection on the part of individual students, rather than analysis of social differences among media audiences.

Some respondents were concerned about the dominance of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘Western’ models, and expressed the need to develop conceptual frameworks that were more appropriate to their educational and cultural contexts. In the absence of support and resources to undertake this work, however, it is likely that these conceptual models will continue to be the most influential.

### 3.3 Learning and Assessment

Predictably, only countries with the most developed media education curricula have clear specifications of the skills and competencies that are expected at different levels, and of how they are to be assessed (for examples, see the extracts from New Zealand’s new technical and vocational curriculum in media and from the Hungarian curriculum in Appendices 4 and 5). Respondents identified several overarching difficulties as regards assessment. In many instances, it seems that media education is included in curriculum documents, but is not separately assessed in its own right (or indeed assessed at all). As noted above, media work is frequently treated as a means to other ends (developing skills in written or spoken language, for example), in which case it tends to be assessed in these terms. Assessment frequently privileges written communication at the expense of other modes addressed in media education; and this seems to reflect a more general confusion about how ‘media literacy’ is to be assessed in the first place. As a result, there is very little systematic attention to the question of learning progression.

In several instances, the difficulties of assessment have resulted in considerable frustration. In Chile, for example, the curriculum documents indicate that students should develop critical

awareness and actively participate in creating media texts with a clear message; yet there are no defined criteria by which these skills are to be assessed. On the other hand, some respondents appeared to enjoy the freedom that came from a lack of such specification. In the language curriculum in New Zealand, for example, a lack of prescription is seen to allow for considerable flexibility on the part of teachers; while in Uruguay it has meant that media education can be an entirely creative venture, rather than having to be bound by specific theoretical aims.

Some of this optimism derives from an understandable wish to savour what is possible, rather than continually balking at what seems difficult to achieve. In general, however, there is no doubt that the absence of structured assessment procedures has contributed to the lack of status afforded to media education. The fact that media education has largely been subsumed within the assessment procedures of other subject areas has left it continuously struggling for recognition in its own right. One can argue that assessment exerts a much more determining influence on classroom practice than any curriculum document, and as such should be prioritised. Yet even when the criteria for assessment are explicit, the resources and training that teachers require may be lacking.

### **3.4 Theory and Practice**

In many countries (with the interesting exception of some Latin American countries), media education is primarily defined as a ‘critical’ enterprise. However, practical production by students is growing in importance – partly as a result of the dissemination of ICTs – but it remains marginal in the large majority of cases, particularly where funding is limited. Many of our respondents emphasised the need to integrate ‘theory’ and ‘practice’: while they recognised that students were highly motivated towards production activities, they also stressed the need for reflection rather than creative production for its own sake. The latter was seen to be a particular danger with the spread of ICTs, where there is a risk of encouraging a purely ‘technical’ emphasis on production, which is lacking in critical thinking or questioning.

Nevertheless, in some contexts (e.g. USA, Hong Kong, Canada), the separation between theory and practice was not always seen as negative; and several respondents were quite happy to encourage creative media production as a valid activity in its own right. Likewise, whilst the drive towards ICTs appears to prioritise technical competence with new technology, certain educators did not see this as necessarily incompatible with the kinds of practical or creative tasks that were undertaken in a media education context. As we have noted above, some argued that the ‘wiring up’ of schools could usher in far greater prospects for media education at a later date, even if it did not appear to do so immediately. They argued that students would need some kind of critical competence in using ICTs (for example, in evaluating information encountered on the Web); and that enabling them to ‘cope’ with the new technology might eventually accelerate attempts to establish a more formal media education curriculum.

In some contexts, the spread of ICTs, together with partnership projects with newspapers and TV stations, has led to a growing emphasis on the vocational (or pre-vocational) aspects of media education. This may well be a consequence of media education needing to account for itself in a new educational context characterised by a strong emphasis on technical skills and competence. In others, however, these developments have merely highlighted the division of skills in media teaching and learning. As one researcher puts it, ‘students have the technical know-how, but not the critical sense – with teachers it is exactly the opposite’. And despite gaining greater access to computers, even in industrialised countries schools are often woefully short of other kinds of equipment, such as television sets.

Ultimately, it is possible that the advent of ICTs will reconfigure the relationship between theory and practice in media education; and that it may result in a broader re-definition of the subject field. On the other hand, media education may well have a great deal to contribute to the development of critical educational thinking in relation to ICTs. There is a potential for dialogue here which seems, at least at present, to be largely unfulfilled.

### 3.5 Partnerships

In principle, respondents accepted that partnerships of various kinds were a necessity for the future development of media education. However, their past experience of such partnerships was uneven.

With a few exceptions (e.g. Japan, Canada, New Zealand), there was very little evidence of regulatory bodies being interested or involved in media education, even though some were inclined to express support in principle. Several of our respondents were uncertain about the meaning of the term ‘regulator’, however.

In terms of the involvement of media producers, there was considerable variation. In many instances, respondents reported that media companies were indifferent or even hostile towards media education; and in some cases, this was not confined to commercial companies, but extended to public service broadcasters also. On the positive side, several countries have ‘Newspapers in Education’ schemes; and elsewhere, there are projects in which children work alongside television or film producers (notably in Latin America). The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) sponsor annual awards which acknowledge a strong and growing relationship between media providers and media educators. Positive partnerships of this kind offer clear gains in terms of providing access to knowledge, institutional practices and arrangements, in terms of sharing expertise and resources and (in some instances) in terms of providing vocational advice. As most countries appear to be leaving behind the ‘protectionist’ approach to media education, the time is ripe for greater collaboration.

In poorer countries with a shorter history of media education, or with less interest from policy makers, the development of media education absolutely relies on such partnerships, for example the production-based projects in China and Hong Kong. In some instances, they are necessary simply in order to ensure the provision of basic resources (e.g. Mozambique).

However, several respondents expressed some scepticism about the value of such initiatives, and others pointed to the dangers of blurring corporate and educational objectives. These arguments clearly relate to broader concerns about the growth of commercial involvement in schooling. Some respondents argued that such partnerships should not be seen merely as a form of public relations for media companies, and that educational aims should be more strongly emphasised. By contrast, one of our Canadian respondents offered an extremely upbeat estimation of the value of such partnerships.

One issue that was raised by several respondents here was that of copyright. While laws on this matter vary significantly, in some countries the work of media educators is significantly constrained by the unwillingness of companies and governments to waive copyright restrictions on educational use.

### 3.6 Training

The lack of appropriate training for teachers of media education was an almost universal complaint amongst respondents. The lack of a centrally organised strategy meant that teachers were either training themselves or being trained in very *ad hoc* ways. At best, respondents were able to cite a few examples of university-level courses in their country, but the numbers of teachers being trained in this way were considerably short of the numbers required. It was frequently reported that centralised resources were being spent on ICT training, and that this was superseding any systematic attempt to educate teachers specifically for media teaching.

A high proportion of teachers of specialist media courses have no training beyond a few professional development days. A notable exception would be in Western Australia, where teachers must have a degree in the field and a postgraduate diploma in education and where only trained media studies teachers are appointed to teach the subject. More commonly reported was the case in South Africa, where specialist teacher training for media education is negligible. As in other contexts, teachers of media tend to possess literature degrees and extrapolate their media teaching from their experience with working with texts in literature. This is not only inadequate but often leaves teachers ill equipped to deal with the more sociological or practical dimensions of media education that most countries believe are important.

Even where media education is firmly established in the formal school sector, there is frequently a lack of specialist training for teachers. In Canada, after fifteen years of concerted lobbying, media education is now a mandated part of the curriculum. Yet the fact that there is almost no training means that it is very difficult to put the mandate into practice. In some European contexts (e.g. Denmark, England, Scotland), specialist media courses are now developing in schools. Yet this development has not been met with an increase in specialist teacher training. In England, there is only one specialist course in initial teacher training (for Media with English), with places for a few students each year. Given that more than 50,000 students follow specialist media courses between 14 and 18, the level of teacher training is very far from adequate to meet the demand for specialist teachers. There are Masters degrees and a number of distance learning diplomas available but even this is not in line with the level of expansion in schools. In Greece, a new Media Literacy course designed for Second Opportunity Schools (a continuing education initiative) demands that teachers have initial training in journalism or communication studies and be required to undergo a specialist training programme intended to prepare them in the specific aims, content and pedagogical methods of media education. Otherwise teachers of media may have little or no formal training and find it hard to gain access to in-service training or further professional development.

This lack of training is being redressed in all kinds of different ways. The world-wide growth of courses in media and communications at undergraduate level means that some teachers will now enter media teaching with a specialist background. There are a few examples of postgraduate courses (e.g. USA) or distance learning (e.g. Spain, England) being established to support the professional development of media teachers. But most often training is provided by less formal organisations and without substantial support from a centralised source. In some instances, training is provided by networks of teachers themselves: in New Zealand, Australia and Canada, for example, there are lively specialist subject associations which produce resources, run conferences and maintain dialogue with practicing teachers on the ground via newsletters or journals. The dearth of training in other contexts has been addressed through a range of publishing initiatives: in Japan, China and Hong Kong, for example, commercial publishers have begun to address the lack of resources and training teachers face. One of the most repeated concerns here was that future training should focus on ways of applying media education principles to the new technologies, in order to counter the instrumental and uncritical approach that is seen to dominate much ICT training.

### **3.7 Needs and Obstacles**

Our respondents all recognised the importance of formal recognition at government level of the importance of media education as a key area for all students. Most reported that their government pays some lip-service to the ways in which students need to be equipped to cope with life in a multi-media world. But many fewer respondents were able to cite government mandates which specify where in the curriculum and how specifically this might take place.

As we have noted, the most commonly expressed need was for specialist teacher training; and specifically for media education to be implanted in the first phase of teacher education. Continuous training is necessary to upgrade skills and practices, and to support the ongoing exchange of resources and strategies. In some poorer countries (such as India), the general infrastructure for training teachers is in need of a radical injection of cash in order to improve resources (for example, access to specialist publications and research). By contrast, in Japan it was argued that government's focus on technology had brought about a shift from a critical pedagogy to a training agenda; and in this context, a more 'low-tech' approach to media literacy work might be appropriate. In most countries, however, there is still comparatively little digital technology in schools, and this hinders the development of more practical approaches to media education.

One of the main needs expressed by many respondents is for an authoritative definition of the aims and conceptual basis of media education. While practitioners are generally very clear on these points, they have been less successful in communicating their ideas to politicians; and as a result, politicians tend to view media education suspiciously, or at least with indifference. Even in contexts where media education has quite a strong and established place in the curriculum, the lack of clarity regarding assessment often reduces it to a marginal subject that can be sprinkled across other subject areas and provided for without any specialist training for teachers. Most damning of all is that in a country like Australia, with quite a well established

media education history, qualifications in media education are not counted for university entry. The low status of the subject continues to make it difficult to argue for change, leaving educators in a position of lobbying for an area that has no formal recognition.

The absence of research was also registered as an obstacle. Most education systems that are centrally organised or at least centrally assessed are innately conservative in their provision. Rigorous, academic research about the value and effectiveness of media education is necessary if governments are to be persuaded to change policy. Acting internationally would help local providers to draw on successful examples from other contexts, adding to the weight of the lobby for media education locally. Although such research has been undertaken in some contexts, it needs to be more effectively disseminated.”

#### 4. Recommendation for UNESCO

[...]

The following are among the key areas identified as potential arenas for UNESCO, in a rough order of priority:

1. **Training.** The lack of training was identified by very many respondents as a key obstacle to future development. It was suggested that UNESCO could provide training (via distance learning) as well as offering resources and support for local training initiatives.
2. **Resources.** Here it was suggested that UNESCO should play a role in enabling educators to share resources, and in supporting those who could adapt and translate resources for different national contexts. A website was seen as a key first step towards achieving this.
3. **Lobbying.** Many respondents expressed the view that authoritative statements about media education from a body such as UNESCO would assist their attempts to argue the case for media education with national policy-makers. Past or existing statements from UNESCO could also be more widely distributed.
4. **Research.** It was argued that UNESCO should facilitate the sharing and dissemination of existing research (for example via a journal) as well as supporting new research initiatives, both local and comparative.

Several respondents pointed to UNESCO’s International Clearinghouse for Children and Violence on the Screen, and suggested that many of the above aims could be achieved by establishing a similar institution in the field of media education.

In developing the above initiatives, respondents pointed to a number of concerns that would need to be addressed:

1. **Media and ICT.** While many respondents welcomed the possibilities of digital media, most argued that media education should encompass the full range of media; and they sought to distinguish their own position from what they saw as the uncritical euphoria surrounding ICTs in education.
2. **A global perspective.** Several respondents felt that there needed to be a genuine international dialogue about the full range of approaches to media education, rather than one dominated by English-speaking countries. Any initiatives in this field would need to address the issue of translation; and, in the case of conferences or international meetings, provide funding to ensure attendance from developing countries.
3. **Copyright.** Laws on intellectual property vary a great deal internationally, but in several countries copyright poses significant restrictions on the work of media educators. This issue might be addressed via international legal authorities.
4. **Informal and formal media education.** As noted in our introduction, there is a need to pull together information about ‘informal’ media education (which would

require a different approach from that adopted in this survey), and to develop connections between this work and that being undertaken in schools.”

### C. *The Manila Initiative*<sup>13</sup>

The third initiative was organised by WACC and SIGNIS World in 2002. Twenty-nine participants from Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam met in Manila in late September 2002 for a six-day symposium. As a result of six days of deliberations, the gathering came up with six concrete, do-able initiatives. But before presenting these initiatives, they deliberated on the context to place and carry out the initiatives. The whole effort and the document that was produced has come to be called *The Manila Initiative*.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1. **Six Initiatives**

“Collectively called *The Manila Initiative*, the six initiatives are:

- (a) An Asian online newspaper,
- (b) Community radio project,
- (c) Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) at local levels,
- (d) Gender sensitivity awards,
- (e) Study of the status of media education in Asia, and
- (f) A clearinghouse and centre to collect, receive, maintain and distribute (Asian) media educational resources.

While the gathering sought to go beyond critical media education, at the conclusion of the meeting it was realised, and reaffirmed, that *the agenda of media education and reforms was very much alive and strong*. Thus, while recognising the need to actively build networking, lobbying (directly or indirectly), media monitoring and direct action to bring about reforms and democratic changes in the media environment, the role of critical media education and reforms to contribute to such changes was maintained. Media education has a long-term positive impact on society. In this, *both media education and media reforms are inter-dependent*.

In addition to the above, the ‘re-formation’ of the media was addressed not only in terms of specific reforms internal to the established mainstream media but also media educational institutions or practices. The approach to media reforms adopted was more comprehensive. The deliberations thus broadly addressed:

- a) the more fundamental issue of people-oriented and people-managed alternatives to (undemocratic) mainstream mass media;
- b) the concern for the nature of media content, i.e. democratisation of the media also meant the need to address the nature of media content in terms of its creation and ownership;
- c) the realisation to build relationships with other movements that address critical issues affecting the democratic basis and sustainability of societies in general in order to actively engage with them for political strength and for sourcing alternative media content; and

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<sup>13</sup> M. Nadarajah (ed.), *Pathways to Critical Media Education and Beyond* (Kuala Lumpur: ACN, 2005)

<sup>14</sup> The document has been edited here with permission.

- d) the need for an overall framework and methodology to guide media education and reforms.

The deliberations at the meeting which covered a large number of areas and concerns are presented below in greater detail under self-explanatory headings that reflect the questions the Manila Group asked itself throughout the six-day engagement.

## 2. **Where Are We Now?**

Media education that is carried out across Asia consists largely of local activities or initiatives. Speaking from an Asian context, they are fragmentary and isolated. Media education has so far been an internal and local activity. There is no active collaboration or engagement with other movements struggling for democracy and sustainability. There is even hardly much collaboration across the media education groups working in their national contexts. In addition, media education activities are not directly or comprehensively connected with media reforms. While there are examples of a number of methodologies to achieve critical media education (or critical media literacy), there has been an absence of thinking on comprehensive frameworks. There is an absence of a common vision of the future, which has the power to bring not only the media education groups together but also engage them with the other movements.

Speaking from a societal development context, unsustainable trends flourish. While recognising many positive trends that sustain all life, the presentations and deliberations at the meeting identified the following challenging realities:

- Undemocratically powerful mega media corporations/conglomerates,
- Aggressive corporate, top-down globalisation,
- An increasingly unipolar world,
- American-centrism/Americanism,
- Commodification and homogenisation/standardisation,
- Fordism to Murdochism,
- A belligerent and prescriptive TV (prescribing, not describing, reality/lifestyle),
- Powerful and globally pervasive brand cultures,
- McDonaldisation with the exclusion of other logics
- Indiscriminate and unsustainable consumption patterns,
- Inner-city and urban-centrism,
- Anti-women, tribal communities, minorities, senior citizens, children and the disabled,
- Worsening of social injustice, inequality, poverty, and powerlessness, and
- Irreversible unsustainable economic growth paths.

These realities also indicate a number of critical tensions – for example, globalism vs. localism, mass media vs. community media, broadcast vs. narrowcast - that need to be addressed by advocates of democratic media, media educationists and eventually taken up or resolved collectively with those working with other issues.

## 3. **Do We Have a Common Vision?**

Where should we be going as a community? The deliberations suggested a common future based on:

- justice,
- peace,
- integrity of Creation/Nature,
- freedom of information,
- freedom of communication,
- equity & equality (across gender, in intra- and inter-generational relationships and between cultures),
- spatial and temporal inter-connectedness, and
- spiritual orientation and sustainable values.

#### 4. What Are the Critical Areas of Deliberation and Involvement?

The deliberations at the meeting brought to relief many critical themes and sub-themes in relation to media education, reform and the democratisation of the media. The following areas were part of the deliberations: networking, approaches to media education pedagogy/methodology, business/finance model, alternative media, media regulatory environment, training and capacity building, new information and communication technologies for democratic communication, inter-religious dialogue, engaging with mainstream media, gender equity and equality, critically engaging with different constituencies, and examination of trends, overviews and frameworks. [...]

a) **Networking**

The discussion on networking reiterated its importance. In addition, it examined:

- (i) networking between media education groups,
- (ii) networking between media education groups and civil society (non-governmental) organisations that take up other issues like human rights, and
- (iii) networking at an Asian level and at a global level.

b) **Media Education Pedagogy/Methodology**

An interesting and important theme that emerged as part of the deliberations was the one on media education pedagogy or methodology. There were a number of approaches:

- (i) ‘deconstruction’ of media texts and the recognition of multiple readings of a single text (promoted by those who use ‘media literacy’ rather than media education ),
- (ii) conscientisation and action-learning approach based on the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire,
- (iii) the audience as an active and critical interpretative community, and
- (iv) an approach that integrates action and participatory research.

Another related concern that was covered about media education was the question of how to institutionalise it in the formal education process. As a specific course/programme along with other courses or a general one to pervade all subjects as a component part? One other way that contributes to institutionalisation is to issue certificates, a value in a highly credentialistic society.

c) **Financial Model**

Among the themes that constantly came up and demanded attention was finance: How will media education or media reform activities be funded? This was a critical concern as funds are required to carry out many of the media education/reform activities. This concern was not so much a topic covered in the papers presented but one that came up as part of the discussions on the presentations. The deliberations on a ‘business’/finance model included the following:

- (i) obtaining funds for projects from national and international funding organisations;
- (ii) social marketing of ‘products’ such as books, reports, productions or subscriptions, or social marketing of services such as political consultancy, risk analysis, membership, equipment rentals, or online platforms (technology-based services);
- (iii) forming a Trust or a special Fund supported by like-minded people; and
- (iv) strategic engagement with business houses for support, sponsorship or contracted sales understanding.



This theme seemed to have generated significant discussion. A lack of financial resources makes it difficult to undertake a sustained and professional level of media education and reform. There was a need for a '*sustainable financial model*'. A voice of caution was also raised regarding engagement with business, or becoming a business.

For once this is done, it becomes difficult to draw a line, or maintain a balance, between the need for profit (i.e. the need to be financially independent) and the goal of social development. Such a situation, it was recognised, may eventually lead to the corruption of the social agenda. It is perhaps worthwhile here to keep in mind the emergence of a debate within business and management circles - particularly those who see the importance of values in business endeavours - about the 'profit-only bottomline', with a trend, at least largely theoretical now, towards considering business practices that go beyond profit to include social and ecological bottomlines (the triple bottomline initiative, with another initiative emerging that includes spirituality).

d) ***Alternatives to Mainstream Mass Media***

Another theme that engaged the Manila Group was the alternative to the top-down, one-to-many broadcast mass media. This issue was raised and discussed in terms of two major areas:

- (i) development and dissemination of alternative content, and
- (ii) community-oriented media (in terms of management control, scope of technological deployment, and content creation).

An interesting idea that came up in this context was the discussion on the need to '*mainstream alternative media*', i.e. work at the scale of the mainstream media yet be socially and politically pro-people and pro-democratic. The Internet offers a real possibility for this as the experiments in Malaysia and South Korea show<sup>15</sup>. In this context, community radio and its immense potential captured much attention.

e) ***Regulatory Environment***

Another major theme was the regulatory environment. The regulatory environment contributes to monitoring, control, maintenance and development, all to realise greater democratisation of the media. During the deliberations, a number of sub-themes emerged:

- (i) the availability of comprehensive legislation but poor implementation and enforcement;
- (ii) the need for rules/codes of conduct, rating scales and viewing guides by national and international organisations for viewing television programmes and films, particularly meant for children and teenagers;
- (iii) systematic and periodic regional and global media monitoring on specific themes like representation of women or threatened local cultures; and
- (iv) establishment of multi-stakeholder press councils.

f) ***Human Resources Development***

Training and capacity building was addressed directly and indirectly. Building alternatives to the mass media and reforming media in the direction of greater democratisation involves building human capital and vastly improving the communication competencies of the public or specific constituencies among the public. It requires an alternative human resources development strategy. For instance, for greater gender equity and equality in media or for the community radio project to succeed requires improving competency levels and knowledge of management technologies.

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<sup>15</sup> *Malaysiakini* in Malaysia and *Ohmynews* in South Korea.

g) ***Dialogic Model of the Media***  
Inter-religious and inter-cultural encounters are inevitable in Asia, with so many religious and cultural groups living in close proximity to each other. Media has a major role to play in dealing with and shaping a dialogic relationship between the various religious groupings to achieve peaceful and sustainable co-existence. This was a specific but significant concern taken up for deliberation through two case studies. They provide insight into the processes of dialogue-building through media between various groupings in multicultural Asia. The deliberations provided a stronger emphasis for a 'dialogic model of the media', a model characterisation that is an apt description of alternative media suggested in the deliberation of the Manila Group.

h) ***Engagement with the Mainstream Mass Media***  
This interesting engagement led to two possibilities:

- (i) Should 'alternative (democratic) media' engage with 'mass media' or go separately?
- (ii) Assuming that engagement is necessary and useful, how does 'alternative media' engage with 'mass media'?

The deliberations suggested the second as more practical and politically advantageous. Thus, a particular form of engagement to influence mass media for the cause and concerns of the alternative media is to offer attractive awards for particular kinds of coverage of issues and reporting in the mass media. Another form of critical engagement is to issue regular and respected ratings on programmes produced by mass media. There is also great scope in running sensitising and training sessions for mainstream print and electronic media journalists that acquaint them with critical media issues.

i) ***Marginalised Groups and Themes***  
Gender equity and equality was a major concern with at least three significant presentations and one panel discussion covering the issue. While this is certainly a critical issue in society and the media, there were a number of questions that were raised and discussed.

One critical question was about increasing the number of women journalists in the mass media. While an increase in the presence of women in the media is necessary and not disputed, Augustine, for instance, raised a pertinent question: What do they report or write on? Or what values guide their work as journalists or reporters or important decision-makers in the hierarchy of the media organisation? The euphoria of seeing a greater presence of women in the media will be dampened if we see that all journalists – men and women alike – write on fashion or something that encourages unsustainable consumption or production. While this is something that needs to be addressed, there is also yet another lingering and unsolved problem: the participation of women in their own representation that satisfies male desire and dominance. While it is a reasonable argument that women are part of a 'script' that they did not conceive or write, it remains an issue to advocates of democratic media on how to deal with the problem of representation of women as sex objects if one group of women actually volunteer to represent themselves as such. The situation is of course different for those who are economically forced to represent themselves as sex objects.

The deliberations on these areas suggested that the issues need to be addressed and a strategy of media action developed that incorporates both genders. An associated reality that was mentioned but never really discussed was the problem of the representation of other disadvantaged and marginalised groups – ethno-cultural minorities, indigenous people, the disabled, children and senior citizens.

j) ***Trends, Overviews and Frameworks***  
A critical observation was made with reference to globalisation and its impact on media education, reforms and democratisation. There was a major concern that

commodification riding on the back of corporate globalisation would lead to global (cultural) homogenisation and standardisation. This would result in the cultural marginalisation of Asia, as evidenced by a particular aggressive and cultural form that globalisation has taken – Americanism.

The ‘American idiom’ influences not only our television programmes and their formatting but also how a news presenter reads the news, and the lifestyles of the young in Asia. A major media agenda covering education and reforms is needed to deal with this problem, even as scholars – both radicals and apologists – debate over issues of globalisation, localisation and hybridisation. One suggestion which deals with technological trends, is that not only must media activists appropriate the new information and communication technologies but also begin loading content systematically into the new virtual space to continue the cause of media education and reforms. A failure in both areas will see greater cultural marginalisation in the years ahead in this millennium, when the print media and traditional broadcast media will diminish in spread, use and importance. In the end, we need a new approach to globalisation, which is democratic and which respects difference and diversity. [...]

The engagement with trends, overviews and frameworks is to comprehensively position democratic and dialogic media advocacy in relation to education and reform, to achieve both practical and political aims. One of the most critical issues raised was that the proponents of media education and media reform do not just examine issues emerging from an undemocratic and unsustainable media. Such a focus will limit the impact of the media education or reform movement. If these activities are properly placed within the contexts and frameworks that have been suggested, it would then be possible for advocates of democratic media to

- (i) understand that unsustainability goes beyond the media,
- (ii) expand the scope of the content they will deal with and disseminate, and
- (iii) engage with members of other movements, thus building up the movement for a sustainable society collectively envisaged above.

## **5. What Should We Address and Develop Further Individually and Through Our Organisations?**

While the Manila Group was involved in networking, research and monitoring, media education, developing alternative media, and media reforms, the discussion on issues and concerns yielded many and varied themes:

- Networking between groups involved in media education,
- Systematising pedagogical methodologies for media education,
- Developing and consolidating activities for alternative media,
- Engaging strategically with mainstream media,
- Developing a sustainable financial model,
- Regulating the media environment,
- Resisting corporate globalisation and global media corporations,
- Monitoring the media,
- Fighting cultural homogenisation,
- Improving and intensifying face-to-face communication,
- Seeking gender, cultural and inter-generational equity and equality,
- Training and capacity building,
- Encouraging inter-religious and inter-community dialogue,
- Confronting the challenges of the Internet and those introduced by ICTs,
- Investing labour in appropriate media technologies,
- Targeting groups and frameworks contexts, and
- Building strategic, long-term alliances with other movements working towards spiritually vibrant, sustainable futures.

## **6. The Manila Initiative Plan of Action**

[...] *The Manila Initiative* – a response to some of the issues and concerns the Manila Group articulated – was conceived as an action strategy to be pursued in the post-symposia period by

the Group collectively in order to promote media education and reform. It covered the following areas:

- a) networking,
- b) media monitoring/watch, and
- c) media education.

a) **Networking**

*Initiative I: Asian Online Newspaper*

- (i) This would involve
  - creating a database (people, institutions, resources), and
  - developing a strategy that will involve a feasibility study.
- (ii) The feasibility study will include
  - a model for achieving financial independence,
  - social 'branding', and
  - promoting the uniqueness of the service.

*Initiative II: Community Radio Project*

- (i) This will involve an assessment of the current situation in relation to community needs, feasibility and/or acceptance.
- (ii) This would also include a study of the issues and problems such as licensing and franchising within a particular national context.
- (iii) There will be an effort to examine immediate opportunities in such areas as Timor Leste (formerly East Timor), Indonesia and the Web (i.e. a Web Radio).
- (iv) Documenting successful case studies of community radio projects as in the Philippines or those achieved through UNESCO and UNICEF.

b) **Media Monitoring/Media Watch**

*Initiative III: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) at Local Levels*

- (i) Continue the monitoring of women's issues in the media together with the local representative of WACC.
- (ii) The local study will be expanded to cover other issues relating to development. However, the part covering women will adopt the methodology of GMMP.
- (iii) This will start in the Philippines.

*Initiative IV: Gender Sensitivity Awards*

- (i) 'Gender Sensitivity Awards' for advertising in three media, i.e. TV, radio and newspapers.
- (ii) This activity will be organised Asia-wide in the coming years.

c) **Media Education**

*Initiative V: Study of the Status of Media Education in Asia*

- (i) This study will explore the strengths and weaknesses of media education in Asia.
- (ii) The topics explored will include, among others, pedagogical methodologies, financial resources management, existing and required human resources and competencies, available capacity, instructional and delivery technologies, content (issues addressed), national or local spread, whose responsibility, obstacles faced by media educationists, and definite changes/reforms achieved.

*Initiative VI: Clearinghouse/Resource Centre*

- (i) A great deal of resource materials on media education are available in Asia and other parts of the world.
- (ii) We need a combination of a 'Resource Centre and Clearinghouse' for networking, acquisition, storage, retrieval and dissemination of such

- materials across Asia for those intending to build up the cause of critical media education.
- (iii) Such a centre could also encourage exchange of human resources in addition to educational resources.
  - (iv) Since building up a resource centre/clearinghouse would involve renting physical space and managing the networking (to sustain the clearinghouse responsibility), acquisition, classification and dissemination, finance would have to be raised.

## **(V) Moving Forward**

### **1) Institutionalising Media Education**

A careful reading of the three initiatives on media education presented at length above seems to suggest that there are some core common concerns in relation to ‘media education’. Beyond all the analyses and rich details, there is that urgent need across the globe to creatively institutionalise media education in formal and informal educational settings. This is one collective wish that comes through very strongly. There are differences as to how to go about this, and it is worthwhile examining those differences even as we keep a focus on our commonalities.

### **2) Media Education in a Social Setting**

There is one important distinction that comes through if one looks at the three critical initiatives, and that is, media education in relation to media reform and other civil society initiatives. While the first two focus on media education generally, the third, which is essentially an Asian effort, seems to see media education in a qualitatively different way. While there seem to be an exclusive concern for media education in the first two initiatives, *The Manila Initiative*, while recognising the fact that the agenda for media education is not yet exhausted in Asia (and certainly not in the Pacific), locates critical media education in a larger social setting. First, media education is seen in close connection to media reform. Second, media education is seen as one among other social movements which seeks to create a more just, sustainable and spiritual world. Thus, in the process of becoming ‘self-conscious’, media education has to locate itself in critical relationship with media reform and with other civil society initiatives. Otherwise, it will become an isolated effort and face the danger of losing its orientation and its future.

### **3) Significant Concerns: Examining Orientational and Philosophical Bases**

The observations below provide for some orientational and philosophical basis for critical media education in Asia and the Pacific. They are offered as perspectives in the continuing discussions and debates on media education by concerned institutions and individuals the world over.

### a) **Media Education as Part of Values Education**

A careful examination of the studies presented here suggests that media education has to be seen as part of a bigger educational effort, i.e. values education. Through values education, we want to ‘form’ a character of desirable qualities such as respect, compassion, integrity, tolerance, diligence, responsibility, honesty, altruism and justice, among others. We want to do this through a process of values clarification to understand the implications of choices we make (in the market, for instance) and their impact on people, relationships and nature. We would like to see that our children and young adults possess values that contribute to ‘sustainability’. We want our formal schooling system to actively promote these values. Media education is seen as contributing to character formation and therefore to values education.

With this development, it is not difficult to make a connection to spirituality. Perhaps it is possible to conceive of media education as supporting a process of self-discovery and coming to terms or handling one’s spirituality (in this case, for young persons). It can also help introduce the notion that media education is social communication within the concerns of sustainability and spirituality. Forming such an opinion is supported by the studies here since they show that in Asia and the Pacific, the Church has been and is in the forefront of media education initiatives. *The route from the hard agenda of media education to the soft and deep agenda of spirituality is difficult but that possibility opens up as a pathway for the progress of media education in Asia and the Pacific.*

### b) **Media Education as Contributing to Self-Identity (Cultural Identity)**

Another issue that comes up from a careful examination of the various studies here is the issue of the identity of individuals and nations in Asia and the Pacific region and the critical role played by media education. Does media education have such a role at all? Can it contribute to addressing such a massive and difficult concern? Yes, it seems that it is one of the aims of critical media educationists in the region. This is in sharp contrast to the observation made in the UNESCO study. To reiterate:

“Historically, media education has tended to move away from an approach based on ‘inoculation’ towards one based on ‘empowerment’. These are admittedly loose terms, but they were recognised and used by many of our respondents. The notion that media education should aim to defend or protect young people against media influence seems to have lost ground in recent years. Even where our respondents recognised that this approach was still prevalent in their own countries (e.g. Hong Kong, USA), they tended to reject it or suggest that it needed to be superseded. The more contemporary definition of media education seems to be based on notions such as ‘critical awareness’, ‘democratic participation’ and even ‘enjoyment’ of the media.”

This seems like an unbuttoned and careless statement, given the experience of Asia and the Pacific in this study. The impact of global media in Asia has of course brought in a great many benefits. But, in the same cocktail of benefits, the global media sets the agenda to marginalise and/or destroy local cultures. The mass media promotes unsustainable lifestyles and value orientations that celebrate money and materialism.

The Pacific Islanders, in this context, are worried about two kinds of dangers.<sup>16</sup> The affluent lifestyle around the globe, and particularly the developed nations, is contributing to climatic change, which is raising the sea level and threatening to submerge their homes. While this real danger is lurking behind, the lifestyle that contributes to such a danger is being transplanted into these beautiful islands through the global media, threatening to submerge their cultures. This is double victimisation. How could anyone tell media educationists in these islands not to defend their young and to critically examine the values they acquire through the global media? And to suggest that such an analysis has ‘lost ground’ seems even further away from the truth.

Media educationists in Asia and the Pacific certainly see the importance of being critical but see such a critical attitude playing a major role in building a locally-informed, historically contextualised self-identity. Such a critical self-identity has implications at several levels. It has implications for national identity, what goes in and gets circulated as content, creation of that content and ownership of it.

### **c) Media Education as Epistemological Critique**

The whole field of knowing has been challenged by the mass media. While our knowing was once experiential or based on our historically contextualised cultural sources, today our knowing is chiefly through the inter-locked national and global media. While in a small and less complex society, direct experience is possible, the nature of society today, because of its largeness and its complicated systems, require the media. Knowing and arriving at the ‘truth’ is today a ‘media-ated’ event. This creates a serious problem in epistemology and has a wide range of implications.

#### **i) Media Represents Reality**

First, media does not ‘reflect’ reality; it ‘represents’ it. The representation process is governed by ‘selection’ and ‘narrativising’ conventions and strategies, which is generally motivated by politically, economically or culturally-powerful interest groups. Given this situation, what is it that we are consuming as media content? And what kind of truths are we arriving at? What kind of ‘subject’ are we being made into through the information and the explanatory narratives that are being consumed via news programmes, sitcoms, serials, soap operas, etc? This is certainly a concern of media educationists here. One of the issues coming out of this directly is the issue of self-identity (cultural identity) addressed above.

#### **ii) Vested Version of Reality**

Second, ‘stories of the world’ are presented by powerful interests, projecting a particular version of reality. We tend to see one side of the story and arrive at ‘our’ truth. People do not necessarily refer to multiple sources, and not all will be able to critically ‘read’ media messages. That is an advanced competency, and one that is part

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<sup>16</sup> M. Nadarajah’s conversation with media activists in Fiji.

of the agenda of media education. But to expect children and youth to be masters of interpretation is not realistic. So, arriving at the truth in today's context is really a much more complicated process fraught with all kinds of agenda, put out there by different interest groups, crowding our thoughts and feelings. It requires one to develop media education as a means to critique information and knowledge that are being presented to audiences nationwide or worldwide in the name of media 'professionalism' and 'objectivity'.

### iii) **Entertainment Format**

Thirdly, there is a tendency to create an 'epistemology of entertainment' by presenting the world largely through an entertainment format, whether this is pure entertainment, edutainment and/or infotainment. This 'entertainment-ising' of the world is a serious matter and affects the young very intimately while they are still in the 'play' stage of their lives. This entertainment format is a great way to deliver cultural goods that are alien and which are highly reflective of a consumeristic culture, both of which media educationists in this part of the world are fighting. The 'reality' being constructed is that the world is a place of entertainment and all other realities are fleeting ones; that which is entertaining is what is real and permanent. This is certainly a concern of media educationists here and is one of the basic problems requiring engagement. It is a problem that seems to articulate the need for media education as a critique of mass media and the worlds it creates.

## **(VI) Concluding Remarks**

Many of the conclusions that are part of the report of the UNESCO study are also the conclusions of this study, and some are elaborated below.

### a) **Conceptual Understanding and Methodologies**

The countries in the study are operating from three levels in the area of critical media education: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Conceptual understanding and methodological consideration have reached an advanced level in countries like India and the Philippines. It is at an intermediate level in countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Fiji. The Solomon Islands and Pakistan are generally at the beginner's stage. Different concepts are used – media education, media literacy or edu-communication. Though groups in the Philippines, India and Malaysia show evidence of work on conceptual clarification and methodological emphasis, this is still a low-key area. The tendency has been to adopt definitions of those in alien cultural settings. Taken positively, the situation as it exists allows for inter- and intra-regional partnerships on this matter.



## **b) Implementation Methodology**

Comparatively speaking, implementation, particularly in the formal educational setting, is high-key in India and the Philippines, and it is low-key in Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Generally, however, critical media education has not received the government's attention, and therefore has not been incorporated into the formal educational curriculum (at the primary and secondary school levels). Given this situation, the best possible approach seems to be the 'integration approach', i.e., integrating media education with other subjects, for instance, moral studies. It will certainly take a while to have it as a subject at the school level, though it means more lobbying work needs to be carried out.

Meanwhile, the responsibility of civil society groups is important to sustain the agenda of media education and work on this at a community level. In this, it is a fact that in Asia and the Pacific, the Church has been in the forefront of media education in the non-formal sector. Implementation of media education programmes has been influenced by this, for instance, it determines to whom media education reaches. In comparison, *Mediact*, a secular organisation in south India, seems to have been able to develop media education programmes comprehensively, and on a long-term project basis, reaching out to all.

## **c) Media Education Curriculum**

Here too, there are two groups: advanced level operators and beginners. India, the Philippines and Malaysia show evidence of 'curriculum thinking', while the other countries are really struggling to get at least one-time programmes organised. The importance of curriculum thinking is that it allows for more creative institutionalisation of media education concerns and topics. And this, of course, allows it a longer life span.

Comparatively speaking, the topics covered are 'orientational' topics touching on how to 'read' media in its social contexts and how to produce media products. In Malaysia, as part of a course on social communication, there is an effort to go beyond mere production of high-value communally-oriented media products to include a topic on marketing such products using the principles of social marketing.

## **d) Resources for Media Education**

This is really a serious problem across the board, and covers two critical areas – human and financial resources. Both are matters of considerable concern in the Asia-Pacific region. As far as human resources are concerned, it is rather difficult to find competent persons to carry out media education work. Asia, at least, is trying to move beyond the 'voluntary stage' of getting activists to work on media education. This means employing experienced persons and/or graduates for the job. Unfortunately, media educators who are just looking for a job do not have the commitment of those

who work on a voluntary basis. The challenge is to move from the ‘voluntary stage’ to engaging paid professionals without losing out on the commitment. That is a difficult task and it is a process in progress. The challenge is in getting the commitment of professionals.

Financial resources to carry out media education work are meagre in the region that needs to be covered, i.e., the countries of Asia and the Pacific. Innovative approaches are also not actively sought. In *The Manila Initiative* particularly, there was a major discussion on a ‘sustainable financial model’. However, the studies here indicate that no such models were even thought of and the traditional dependence on international funding organisations is still very much in place. *Mediact* has been trying a number of ways, including working closely with well-established educational institutions for research funds. This is definitely an area that needs a lot of attention. A closer examination of the possible relationship between local philanthropic efforts and critical media education would be helpful.

#### **e) Vision and Mission of Media Education**

Whether stated explicitly or implied, vision and mission notions, to a good extent, are well articulated. However, mission statements are a lot weaker than the vision statements, implying the need to focus on the mission that lives the vision. Also, there seems to be very little thinking about media education as social communications operating within the notion of sustainability and spirituality. But this is not the real problem for the whole region of Asia and the Pacific. The deeper issue is that in the ‘visioning’ and ‘missioning’ process, there is no sustained attention to building membership and leadership, nor is there a serious concern for partnership and national, regional and inter-regional networking. Media education initiatives operate almost in national isolation. So in effect, there is *no movement of media education* in Asia and the Pacific. This is a serious condition when the challenges before media educators and media education organisations are so varied and difficult. The efforts to build a movement are of course restrained, among others, by the lack of resources. But there are also many negative organisational cultures – particularly in relation to leadership, personality cults, ‘cornering of financial resources’, ‘entrepreneurial NGO-ism’, etc. – that need to be given up for the benefit of building a movement in Asia and the Pacific.

Given the realities of critical media education in Asia and the Pacific, what is supposed to be done? Many of the guidelines are already captured in the concerns of the UNESCO documents and *The Manila Initiative*. The following are some concerns generated by the studies here.

## **(VII) Some Guidelines for Counter-Hegemonic Action**

### **a) Critical Media Education Curriculum**

The need is to build a curriculum that has two components – one, a general section, and the other, a section for contextualising and localising media content. Such a curriculum can be formulated, not necessarily for consumption in the formal educational process, but for all groups that are working on critical media education on a community level. This will help to

- i) achieve some commonality among media educators in Asia and the Pacific,
- ii) institutionalise media education as an inter-regional initiative, and
- iii) initiate a process of working towards an inter-regional social movement. The curriculum must be based on the notion of critical media education as spelt out in the introduction.

### **b) Lobbying for Critical Media Education**

The governments in the Asia Pacific region have not addressed the reality of critical media education and helped in its incorporation into the formal educational process. The reality is that they have been more connected to the media corporations than to media educators and their organisations. This situation has to change significantly so that critical media education is covered at the primary and secondary levels immediately. The lobbying for critical media education must be an urgent agenda, and should be directed in a concerted manner at the inter-regional, regional, national and local levels.

### **c) Sustainable Financial Model**

One of the serious problems faced by the critical media education initiatives is obtaining finance to carry out work in the local community. The popular model is to write a project proposal and apply for funds from big funding agencies, usually in Europe. To overcome this, there must be some innovative moves by media education organisations in the region. There is, for instance, a growing awareness of building a philanthropic movement in Asia. Media education organisations could, for instance, work towards building bridges with those involved in the philanthropic initiatives in Asia. This may lead to some productive relationships. There may be other forms of financial resources available locally or regionally. A viable model needs to be built so that financial resources do not form the one major obstacle to critical media education efforts in the region.

#### **d) Networking and Partnership with Other Organisations**

Media educators and media organisations involved in critical media education must drop their ‘exclusive mentality’, and begin the process of understanding that media education is key to the success of other civil society organisations involved in building a just and sustainable society. Through the work of other organisations, media educators can access alternative sources of information and narratives and use them in their work. They can help broadcast alternative sources of information. It also helps build the collective strength of all civil society initiatives, which will benefit critical media education.

#### **e) Building a Critical Media Education Movement in Asia and the Pacific**

This is an urgent need. Many of the problems associated with media education organisations can be addressed through a well-organised regional movement with an organisational setting. Such a movement can help develop competency dictionaries and build competent human resources, build capacities of organisations and address their visioning, missioning and leadership issues, hold meetings for coordination, sharing and partnering, create and sustain intra-regional and inter-regional networks within media education organisations and between media education organisations and other groups, be a documentation centre and clearinghouse of resources produced in the region, and help build the financial viability of national organisations.

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#### **About the Author**

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