**Media Education between the Global and the Local
A Longitudinal Analysis of Curricula in Israel**

**Keywords:** media literary, media education, curricula, media studies, Israel

**Background**

As the 1980s wound down, several Israeli high schools introduced dedicated curricula for media studies. These were local initiatives, even predating the establishment of university programs of academic media studies. In the early 1990s, amid growing demand from the field, the Ministry of Education created a committee for media education and formal curriculum were written. Today, media studies programs in the Israeli education system are popular and are offered in some 400 high schools—about one in five countrywide. Twice as many expanded matriculation programs exist in media, for example, as are offered in theatre studies.

High school media studies couple academic and theoretical learning with media production that may take the form of creating video footage, engaging in still photography, or doing editorial work in newspaper, radio, or new media. Alongside the school system’s matriculation exam, students have to take an external matriculation examination of an applied nature, presenting an artefact accompanied by a production portfolio and answering the examiner’s questions. The subject matter in school combines media studies and media education.

Around the world, the media discipline oscillated during the 1990s between two opposing approaches: protectionist and empowerment-oriented. Today, owing chiefly to the advent of new media, the element of empowerment has gathered strength in media studies around the world. Empowerment in this context concerns the ability of media to create opportunities for participation in creative cultural endeavors, and to provide advantages to those who can analyse and construct media meanings for their own needs (De Abreu, 2010 ;Jenkins et al*.*, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2013). Indeed, “critical” has become a synonym for media studies, as in *critical media literacy.* The term denotes being aware of the social, political, and economic messages that emerge from texts in various kinds of popular culture, and encouraging media audiences to analyze texts actively by using analytical strategies to reveal attitudes and biases (Alvermann et al., 2014; Buckingham, 2015).

The teaching methods that typify media studies in Israel, as elsewhere, are based on a combination of active and independent learning, class discussion, and open and dialogic teaching that respects learners’ freedom of expression. They also focus on nurturing critical, reflective, and creative thinking on matters of relevance to the students’ world, cooperation among students, and creative freedom (Alt, 2013). In the past decade, digital literacy and media studies have converged in Israel, and basic skills in the accepted sense of the principles of media literacy are being imparted.

Israel’s sociopolitical reality directly impacts the contents of class discussions. The violent Israel–Palestine conflict has accompanied the country in its seventy years of existence and divides Israeli society by embroiling it in protracted political polemics. Nearly half of all Israelis (45 percent) believe that democracy in their country is at grave risk, and the media confidence index is much lower still (Hermann et al*.,* 2017). In addition to its political, religious, and socioeconomic cleavage, Israeli society is in the throes of a culture war amid polarization among groups, e.g., between native-born and immigrants, that vie to determine their boundaries and identities (Kimmerling, 2004; Peri, 2005). Paradoxically, this very struggle over the “truth” is helpful in promoting media education in Israel (Lemish & Lemish, 1997). Indeed, Israel exhibits a rare and broad consensus about the necessity of media studies (ibid.). Nationalistic and religious political parties join pro-peace and feminist organizations in favoring media literacy. All wish to equip students with skills of skepticism, verification of information, critical reading, and alertness to manipulations. Thus, while other countries invoke protectionist approaches that are geared against the adverse effects of media, the emphasis in Israel is on inuring students to potential media biases that serve the cause of political rivals.

**Research questions**

In what ways have Israel’s media curricula changed over time? To what extent have changes occurred in defining the goals, theoretical infrastructure, structure, topics of study, and pedagogical approaches of media curricula?

**Corpus**

For the purposes of this study, six curricula written and disseminated by the Media Studies Inspectorate of the Israel Ministry of Education between 1993 and 2018 (1993, 1994, 2001, 2007, 2017, 2018) were analyzed.

**Analytical tools**

The curricula were compared through the combined use of various curricular analysis tools (Tyler, 2013; Moore, 2014; Pingel, 2015), yielding five main criteria for analysis:

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| **Criterion** | **Elements examined** |
| **Curriculum structure** | Linear or modular curriculum structure? |
| **Rationale and goals** | What are the express goals?Integration between theoretical knowledge and practical media productionIdeological agenda  |
| **Theoretical basis** | What are the main media theories on which the curriculum is based?Is there a textbook and are canon texts used? |
| **Topics of study** | What are the main topics of study? |
| **Pedagogical approaches** | Are there guiding principles for teaching? |

**Findings**

**Structure**—Most of the curricula put forward a modular structure that allows teachers to choose the order in which the topics are taught. In practice, all media curricula, the newest ones in particular, come with flow charts that prescribe a linear order. Each curriculum proposes beginning with basic modeled concepts, even if it is organized around genres from which theories are extracted. This pattern suggests that the curricula are insular even if they describe themselves as open to teacher initiative and creativity.

**Rationale and goals**—In the first media curricula, critical discourse was a novelty in the education system. As critical education spread through the humanities, the critical discourse in media studies has detached itself from any clear political ideology. One example is the analysis of euphemisms from divergent points of view, with balance between Right and Left; another example is concern about the effects of media violence that focuses on changes in attitude and behavior. The analysis of television violence no longer creates an association between the cruel world perception, diffusing a sense of fear by the media and compliance with authority.

**Theoretical basis and topics of study**—The 1990s curricula balanced structural functional concepts such as uses & gratifications with neomarxist theories. In the early 2000s, postmodern approaches swept Israel, as they did the world over, made inroads in the curricula, and were joined by postcolonial and multicultural perspectives. The neo-Marxist attitudes that stood out strongly in the curricula of the 1990s and the early 2000s have lost their centrality in the more recent curricula.

Our findings show steep increases in the quantity of written text in the curriculum and in the level of detail in recent curricula relative to older ones. The new curricula are much more multifaceted in terms of themes, contents, details, and examples. This is indicative of greater professionalization and the adoption of American standards movement characteristics such as detailed basic concepts, bibliographies, and didactic suggestions.

Even though the sheer quantity of textual material has grown immensely, the number of theoretical and graphic models taught in schools has declined over time. The topic of media in a democracy is given much stronger emphasis in recent curricula, and the very latest curricula add the skill of “civic literacy” as an integral part of media studies. The new curricula omit the cultivation of cultural and aesthetic taste as an overarching goal, one that had been salient in the first curricula. In the newest curricula (2017–2018), examples from popular media are put to greater use and there is less steering of students to canon texts.

**Pedagogical approaches**—Innovative pedagogical ideas have been adopted by Israeli media studies, e.g., the “pedagogy of the repressed” among disempowered groups in society, with emphasis on Arabs and women. Pedagogical principles of open teaching predicated on pluralism of interpretations have also been adopted, as has teachers’ freedom to choose the order of topics of study. From a longitudinal perspective, however, one of the main weaknesses of the curriculum has been the detachment of the component of theory from that of production. The new curricula, however, create a tight bond between theory and practice by giving every theoretical topic a practical expression via media production studies, For example, in the segment on objectivity and subjectivity in news photography, students are asked to film a given event twice, once using a “neutral” approach and then taking a side.

**Discussion**

As the 2010s drew to a close, the Israel Ministry of Education felt it necessary to update its media curricula, mainly in response to the advent and the mutual convergence of digital media. It was clear to everyone that these circumstances brought about a perceptible change in patterns of media production and consumption, the leisure culture of children and youth, and the conduct of classroom teaching. They are also reflected in the topics and contents of the new curricula and in an attempt to organize the curriculum around new conceptualizations such as “arenas” and “environments” instead of the conventional typology of industries, messages, audiences, and effects (Martens, 2010).

Israel’s first media curricula, dating to the early 1990s, blazed the trail and were ahead of their time in two respects: critical thinking and meaningful learning that includes an active element of output, and creative endeavor. Today, these two aspects are considered central to the current educational discourse (Robinson, 2011; White & Cooper, 2015).

In Israel today, media studies are mired in a struggle over the definition of their boundaries and the singularity of their content. Technological developments have created an overlap between the contents of high school media studies and what is taught as information literacy, general education in safe use of the internet, and civic education. An additional divide that challenges the curricula is between cinema studies and media studies. The main argument one hears is that cinema belongs to, and is treated by, the humanities, whereas media is a discipline of the social sciences. It is also argued that the two disciplines have different theoretical foundations and, accordingly, cannot be set within one curriculum (First & Adoni, 2007). Therefore, the Israeli education system differentiates between media education and cinema education. Indeed, the 2017 curriculum establishes a clear dividing line between these fields of knowledge. For example, it was decided for their final project that students taking media programs should produce a short documentary film, whereas those in the cinema program would produce a short fictional film, with no genre portability allowed.

The price paid for these artificial separations includes, as an example, the absence in the new media curricula of key cinematic works that were present in the pioneering curricula. The goal of “cultivating cultural and aesthetic taste” is also missing in the latest curricula even though it stood out in the earlier ones. The reason, in our opinion, has to do with the wish to establish a clear differentiation between the disciplines.

The changes in Israel’s media curricula may be examined from the perspective of changes in the field of media literacy around the world and the challenges posed by today’s technological innovations (Baylen & D'alba, 2015; Considine, 2002; Hobbs & Jensen, 2013; McDougall & Livingstone, 2014). Israeli media curricula have, since their inception, accommodated up-to-date media approaches, theories, and pedagogical ideas that gained acceptance in media education abroad. In Israel, in tandem with global trends, there is a growing emphasis on civic education. The Israeli version of this tendency in the media curricula assigns centrality to education in democracy and freedom of expression. One may explain this in the specific Israeli context by noting the sense among curriculum developers that the existence of their state as a democracy is in jeopardy and by stressing their understanding of the specific role and responsibility of media education in maintaining the state’s democratic values and institutions.

Indeed, media education is an ideal vehicle for coping with the changes of the present era and the meaning of learning and living in a democratic society (Jolls & Johnson, 2018). What the current Israeli media curricula still lack, however, as opposed to what Jolls & Johnson define as “urgent and global,” is the ability to impart the capacity to evaluate the validity, reliability, and credibility of the media and the information that the media give over, allowing students to cope with the challenges of the “new information landscape” (ibid., p. 1381).

The new Israeli curricula overemphasize the local and underemphasize the global in terms of contents and values. Absent in the field of media, for example, is reference to the world media map. Also lacking are values of interdependency and global interconnectedness; cultural, gender, and sexual diversity; human rights; and environmental quality and sustainability. Missing too is any theme related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and peace education.

The current study finds critical discourse innovative and audacious in the curricula of the early 1990s. These pioneering curricula, however, took a pronouncedly political stance, whereas their successors have visibly adopted a softer and more neutral discourse.

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