
PHASE 04

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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'For kids growing up now there's no difference watching Avatar on an iPad or watching You Tube on a TV and watching Game of Thrones on their computer. It's all CONTENT. It's all STORY.'

— Kevin Spacey.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Quote from keynote address for the James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture the Edinburgh International Television Festival (2013), www.theguardian.com/media/interactive/2013/aug/22/kevin-spacey-mactaggart-lecture-full-text p.13

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During his keynote address for the James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture at the Edinburgh International Television Festival (2013), actor Kevin Spacey acknowledges both the manner in which young people watch today and their ease at moving between platforms in pursuit of content. This practice, driven by media literacy skills, is at the heart of our research. By first finding out how young people engaged with media, we then set about seeing if we could further their skills.

In the end, according to one participant: *'It did not really change the way I think'*. The 12-year-old who offered this feedback on the 12-13 Project, also observed in the same questionnaire that he had learned *'lots about how you should think about what you put up (online)'*. The seeming contradiction of his opinions alludes not only to his own confidence in using media, but also the relatively unstable nature of findings regarding online activity and young people today. Where once having a mobile phone was the extent of connectivity, children and young people are socialising online through an increasing array of platforms with or without competent skills. Kevin Spacey's assertion that young people can access content is unquestionable. How and why they access it is one of the challenges we must all face.

Aims and Realities

The IFI/BAI 12-13 Project set out to provide a glimpse of media usage in young people aged 12 and 13 across Ireland today. We wanted to find out what media they were using, and to see whether exploratory and creative media interventions would in fact have any impact on their habits and attitudes. We set up workshops with local media providers that would operate from the perspective of safe internet practice. We observed how these encounters motivated the participants who displayed creativity, an enthusiasm for local media and an expertise that was at once remarkable and challenging.

Yet despite this careful monitoring, mediation and validation of media literacy skills, the persistence of tragic or disturbing stories from Ireland and overseas regarding invasive social media, meant it was unsurprising that the vast majority of 12-13 Project participants listed cyberbullying and staying safe online as their primary concerns when talking about media. Across the second phase of our research, a high proportion of young people with whom we spoke had witnessed cyberbullying and had reported abusive posts to facebook administrators. This acknowledgement speaks to another glaring concern: even though 12-year-olds are below the minimum age limit required to participate in facebook's social network, many are already familiar with the service and are actively using it. This further emphasises the fact that keeping 12-year-olds out of conversations around facebook is pointless and anathema to their needs. Children are aware of the risks of networking online, and many can implement safety features; however, as we found out, a number of children cannot. While the argument can be made that there is no 'too soon' to begin training students in the safe use and navigation of online technologies, the 12-13 age range, and the move from primary to post-primary education is a crucial interstice. The students we spoke with were both genuinely excited and full of apprehension about the leap from 6th Class to 1st Year, and as their educational landscapes get wider, so too do outward influences. A media literate student is undoubtedly better equipped to face new social, learning and environmental challenges.

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Irish Kids Online

Despite the fact that the latest findings from EU Kids Online depict Ireland as 'relatively low risk' in terms of online use because of parental restrictions, Dr Brian O'Neill⁴¹ points out that 'Ireland with 45% classified as "young networkers" stands out as the highest in Europe.' What this and our findings allude to is the need for critical media literacy implementation within and beyond schools, to support curricula undoubtedly but more importantly to equip all young people to live responsibly, safely and creatively with media today and in the future.

Media Literacy and Schools

Irish schools need to be supported to make new technologies *available* to all students and to provide students, and teachers alike, with the *expertise* to use the multimedia tools in a safe and engaging manner. In the course of this research we found that the technology gap is extremely apparent in both how media is used but also its accessibility. Across the spectrum of education, both in and out of school, there needs to be acknowledgement that new media technologies can enrich children's lives, and they are here to stay. A commitment to media, literacy education needs to be embedded in all school policies, and media skills afforded regular and consistent classroom time – not just as a tool for other subjects. The problems of new curricula, resourcing, cutbacks, underfunding and lack of continued professional training face all schools. Yet the positive learning and social outcomes from media encounters offer huge opportunities for radical change in how young people learn and interact. Learning about – and doing – the stuff of media, teaches young people both hard and soft skills. They learn not only about implementing multimedia technologies, but about teamwork and sharing ideas, resources and specific talents. Young people fundamentally understand the interconnectedness of contemporary media. In the 12-13 workshops, when a finished product was put up online, the participants immediately began to share it across a host of platforms. Creating digital artefacts with local media providers empowered them with a sense of ownership and a desire to communicate with their communities.

Media Literacy at Home

In the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy, published in 2011, there was clear acknowledgement of the role to be played by parents/guardians and communities in furthering literacy among children and young people. Our small survey of parents and children at the IFI Family Festival had revealed 50.00% of attendees (up to 12 years of age) who thought that they could teach their parents something about online technology, while 44.44% of parents felt that their children could teach them. The disparity in statistics could be considered to emanate from the age of the children accompanying parents but could also link to the restrictions being imposed by many parents on their children's online activities. Despite these provisos, a clear opportunity exists on a community level for media education practices where teacher/mentor/pupil roles are fluid in an atmosphere of mutual learning.

41 www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Classification/Home.aspx

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Our Conclusion and Recommendations

From the young person who remarked that *'I am not currently on facebook and I don't plan on joining anytime soon, but I know some of my friends are on it'* to the other who observed *'it (radio broadcasting) was very complicated but I did get it at the end.'*, the IFI/BAI 12-13 Project served to remind us that young people learn and socialise in different ways and at different paces, with varying needs and abilities. But nowadays, they all need and deserve their formal and informal education to reflect the possibilities and pitfalls that technology can offer them. To this end we make the following recommendations:

- Continue to support media literacy initiatives through our education programme at IFI
- Continue to assert the place of film in media literacy definitions and debate
- Support the endeavours of the BAI in their media literacy remit
- Incorporate media literacy into our Junior Certificate Short Course in Film
- Develop a Module for Continuing Professional Development for teachers in film and media literacy to support the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
- Consolidate our links with RTÉ Young People's Programming and further our links with local media providers and filmmakers with a view to future collaborations on media initiatives
- Investigate the potential for a family-based media literacy pilot in conjunction with BAI through our IFI Family programme and other community partners
- Continue to lobby the Department of Education and Skills to broaden their definition of literacy to incorporate film and media literacies in advance of their mid-term review
- Contribute to national and international debate on media literacy through the Creative Europe agenda

Finally, from the perspectives of the mandates of both the Irish Film Institute and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the 12-13 Project confirmed that having young people learn about, implement, complete and disseminate media projects fosters in them a genuine curiosity about indigenous and other media. Knowing how it is made and the processes undertaken to bring an idea to the airwaves, television or cinema screen or to the palm of their hands galvanises such young people to participate in the Ireland of today and in the future.