

**FROM CITIZENS' EYES:  
WORKING WITH MEDIA LITERACY FOR THIRTY YEARS**

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## **1 Founding FCT**

Advocating that the contents of children's television should not solely be in the hands of the limited number of media professionals who make the programs, but should also be in the hands of various people such as mothers, fathers, those who take care of children and those who are concerned with children, the late President of the Institute of Media Literacy, Prof. Midori Suzuki, founded an organization named, 'Forum for Children's Television' together with a group of colleagues in 1977.

In order to change the children's media environment filled with television programs, she thought it necessary to grasp first, what kind of programs children were watching and what messages the television programs at that time were sending to children. In order to do this, the members of FCT felt it necessary to survey the contents of the programs targeted children, and started to gather factual data of what kinds of contents the media were offering to children, and analyze them quantitatively and qualitatively.

## **2 Research Surveys and Reports**

In 1979, the report on "The TV Programs and Commercials Children are Watching" was compiled and published as the first survey research result on television programs and commercials. Such survey was compiled each with its specific theme in series, such as 'Television and Children's Health', 'Television and Family,' 'Morning Television and Housewives in the Information Age', 'Television and Children's Rights' and so on, continued up to 8<sup>th</sup> series. FCT also analyzed the contents of TV news when the great earthquake hit the Kansai(Southwest) areas in the mainland Japan and

published the report, entitled “Television and Hanshin Earthquake” in 1995. In all these works FCT read media contents objectively, analytically and critically. Later such a method of objective, critical analysis was further utilized to analyze gender images, images of young and old people depicted in the media. Through these works lead to disclose what messages are chosen to be broadcast and what stereotyped images media produced. The outcome of such surveys were publicized in the FCT publications such as FCT Gazette, FCT Reports, and some parts of them were compiled in the book published by Midori Suzuki (For Those Studying Media Literacy, 1997).

Thus in the beginning 20 years FCT spent much time on the analyses of television programs by offering critical comments on the programs, based on the objective data of visual images and sounds, which formed the firm bases of FCT’s analytical approach to the media content. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, FCT is still continuing our efforts to report our activities on our webpage, <http://www.mlpj.org/>.

### **3 Introducing the term, ‘Media Literacy’**

Since after the foundation of FCT, the need to change the media was rather strongly felt. However, in order to change the media, it was necessary that the audience, citizens, themselves, needed to become the active readers of the media content.

At the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum, when we invited Mr. John Pungente from Canada in 1992, the term ‘media literacy’ was introduced in Japan for the first time. Thus this was also for FCT to recognize the term and since after this forum, ‘media literacy’ became the key term for all FCT activities.

As FCT used the term, 'media literacy', as a symbol of critical readings of media, it began to be gradually recognized and rooted in the public. Thus Midori Suzuki with FCT members defined "Media Literacy" in Japan as "Citizens' ability to critically analyze and evaluate media in socio-cultural context, to access media and to create communications in a variety of forms".

#### **4 Contacts with Media Literacy Outside Japan**

In our International Forum of 2000, entitled "Children, young people and Media", we invited Prof. Genevieve Jacquinot from France, in which we had significant discussions on media issues at that time. It was pointed out that in France when the dispute over the "ratings" of the programs were heated, many mothers considered the ratings by outside institutions as a penetration of media into the personal lives. In Japan the reaction to the "ratings" were similar to that of France, and FCT claimed and problematized the issue of 'who makes the ratings, on what criteria' were discussed in our forums and workshops. At that time in France there was the special program of media critique called , ' Arret sur images' and such program was considered to increase the awareness of critical viewing, while in Japan such program was never produced and this issue of 'ratings' faded away as years go by. At that time Prof. Jacquinot also gave the caution by saying, "If the media education becomes a big and significant institution, it can also become a great intervention and interference in schools." It was also pointed out that the citizens' education is very much concerned with media awareness just as in Japan.

Through such contacts with outside Japan, the FCT developed our own method of media literacy analysis, whose approach seemed to be much more useful than the program ratings. Now in FCT we find it quite important to diffuse our method of critical media literacy, in order for citizens to become really aware of, and conscious about 'who send' 'what images and sounds' by conveying 'what messages' with 'what purpose'.

## **5 FCT Method of Analysis in the Media Literacy Workshops**

In diffusing critical media literacy FCT tries to conduct our own way of media literacy analysis in our regular media workshops, summer seminars, or in various courses of the local governments' or of women's centers' workshops all over Japan. It is also worth mentioning that the Academic Association of Media Education is also beginning to recognize the importance of critical media literacy recently.

Through many experiences of the workshops we gradually developed our own media content analysis sheet, which is simply divided into the two long columns. There, we write on the left side column, the stream of media images (descriptions of characters appeared, plots, telops, etc), and on the right side, the stream of voices and sounds(including BGM). Based on this descriptive analysis sheet, we try to find out:

- 1) who can be the target audience of the text
- 2) what elements of images and sounds lead us to decide the target audience
- 3) what kind of stereotyped images can be found in the text from the aspect of gender, age and social roles.

Through such analyses we try to find out what images and values the

media are constructing, regarding who we/they are, what attribute is important for women or for men, what should be valued in life, and how we should behave and act in various occasions. Based on such analyses we try to deconstruct the media texts and re-read them objectively and critically.

## **6 Recent Development**

Entering 21<sup>st</sup> century, FCT is continuing our efforts to diffuse critical media literacy further in our FCT summer seminars and in various workshops or courses offered by the local governments or by the women's centers. It is also worth noting that the Academic Association of Media Education is also beginning to recognize the importance of the FCT's critical media literacy activities.

At present, in Kansai Area(Southwest of the Main island) FCT members are carrying out a project of three consecutive years, from 2006 to 2008, in which the efforts are made to find out how the media literacy workshops can bring change to the people's attitudes of and evaluations towards media. This research has just started and still on its first stage of conducting the preliminary survey questionnaire, but if it is completed, it will give us much information on the degree of effectiveness of our critical media literacy education.

Every year FCT offers three day session of the Media Literacy Training Summer Seminar, but this year will become rather special one, for our organization celebrates our 30 years' anniversary. We are inviting Prof. David Buckingham as a guest speaker of our anniversary forum.

Supported by the well-trained post master and doctoral students of the late Prof. Midori Suzuki, who gather at our FCT meetings on Sundays in Yokohama in spite of their busy works at their working places, FCT is continuing our regular meetings and media literacy analyses. These activities are our valuable heritage which the late Prof. Suzuki left for us.

## **7 Concluding Remarks**

In the Japanese book on Media Literacy compiled by Prof. Suzuki, Prof. Jacquinet wrote an article and posed a question in Chapter 3, “What is really ‘education about the media’?” in Media Literacy: Present & Future. This is really hard to respond to, and its reply can be different from person to person and country to country.

In case of Japan, where education is traditionally one way flow of top-down passing of various knowledge to the students without much interactions or discussions, critical thinking is not encouraged at schools or even in universities. In such an environment of the Japanese educational culture, media literacy education can play quite a unique and important role to stimulate and expand the students’ thinking ability and also strengthen their ability to discuss. From such perspective media literacy education does have a great potentiality to change the Japanese educational environment.

Lastly it is quite important to note that those who teach media literacy have to be very well aware of, and acquainted with, the issues such as ‘basic human rights’, ‘gender stereotypes, gender equality’ ‘children’s rights’, and also various charters, such as ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’, ‘Children’s Television Charter’, ‘Children’s Charter on Electronic Media’, ‘The People’s Communication Charter’ and ‘the negative, degrading images

of women in media' stated in the Beijing Declaration of section J Women and the media'. Because these statements are the bases for creating the fair and gender-free society, it should also be reflected in the media content. Without one's consciousness and awareness of such basic rights and views, the reading of the media content may just wander around superficially with easy comments and talks about how effectively or poorly the commercials or news are made, without deepening the discussion into the attached stereotypes, values and prejudices.

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