



PONDER: Critical Media Literacy

The PONDER: Critical Media Literacy Programme helps young people from Kosovo improve critical thinking skills, be conscious, aware, understand and evaluate the information they encounter from a critical perspective—empowering youth and adolescents to challenge indoctrination and anti-social messages with a critical interpretation of what they see, hear, and read, all while realizing their role as agents of social change.

The Programme

Ponder is an informal education programme aiming at the improvement of critical thinking skills especially with regard to information and messages that adolescents and youth receive. As media exposure has never been higher, critical media literacy is imperative not only for the wellbeing of individuals themselves, but also for peacebuilding, public safety and participatory democracy. Critical media literacy, in the perspective of our project, is a non-formal response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication and new technologies while deepening the potential of critical thinking to analyze relationships between media, audiences and information. The main goal of the program is to foster media literacy and critical approaches to information among adolescents and youth. This goal is achieved by multiple phases of the project:

- Establishment of relationships with duty-bearers, media and other associates;
- Presentation of the program to relevant beneficiaries;
- Training of adolescents and youth on critical media literacy;
- Short-term media internships;
- Preparation of participants who will do the internship;
- Young Critics competition for the best published article/piece;
- Young Critics network web page.

The PONDER Workshop

The Ponder workshop is one of the cornerstone activities of the UNICEF Innovations Lab Kosovo which helps young people from Kosovo to improve their critical thinking skills, approach information critically, identify and examine bias, and judge the authenticity of the information they encounter. The training is shaped using the following modules:

- Using critical thinking for media literacy: learning to ask questions, building arguments and identifying evidence.

- Diversity of media, positions and experiences: recognizing different forms of media & the changing relationships between media and audiences, and understanding the diversity and complexity of sources and positions in traditional and new media.
- Reading images: recognizing how images can be analyzed and interpreted, and comprehending how images in media can be used to express and contest social norms and values.
- Empowerment through media literacy: asking questions about the role of the audience in interpreting media messages, while focusing on topics of diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability).

Each workshop includes 30 participants, divided into five groups, who work side-by-side with a mentor over the workshop's three days, while engaging in networking and reflection activities in their down time. At the closing of the workshop all the participants brainstorm about the article/piece they will realize during the internships. This phase is key to the selection criteria for the internship.

The Internship

The internship is a real professional experience in local media that youth and adolescents have the opportunity to be enrolled in and apply and deploy the tools and techniques learned in the training. Participants are not only engaged in the normal media work by supporting the development of various media products, but they also publish critiques that raise the awareness of youth around critical media literacy, this way using media to engage other youth. The youth and adolescents are also engaged in the "Young Critics" competition, where each article/piece that is published during the internships in local media, competes for the best written article/piece prize directly.

The Young Critics Network

The Young Critics Network is a user-generated platform where youth and adolescent can post their analyses of relevant media texts, evaluate them and offer a value judgement on the authenticity, factual background and tone of text. By examining media products, the directly engaged youth and adolescents learn how to put the theoretical knowledge into practice and by producing such analysis, youth and adolescents around the country are offered by youth-for youth value judgements on media products that they are most often exposed to.

We believe that by embracing a critical media literacy approach that emphasizes production of media as much as consumption, we equip youth and adolescents with an active, civic duty mindset needed to help shape a democratic society.