

MEDIA EDUCATION AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE

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Media education has a long tradition in the English speaking world, where the study of mass media was soon seen as a logical consequence of their presence and influence in students' lives. When framed as media effects, the influence of media was considered negative. As a result, media education about mass media (press, radio and television) inherited the inoculative paradigm from film education, aimed at opposing harmful media influences.

Since the Seventies, media education was officially part of the national curriculum of British secondary schools. We cannot say the same for countries like Spain and most of Latin America. In these countries, it is very clear that a manifesto for media education is needed; a manifesto for the integration of media in the school curriculum once and for all. At this time, media education depends on individual media educators who believe in its necessity. Instead, we propose a manifestó that promotes media education in proportion to the role of media in the lives of students.

The advent of ICT and its obvious influence on the traditional mass media has brought (how could it be otherwise?) new approaches to media education. Media education and media literacy are now associated with ICT, Internet, video games, social networks, web TV, interactive digital boards, etc. Since Gilster (1997) popularized the concept of "digital literacy", there have been many others like:- "Multiliteracies" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Robison, 2010); - "Multimedia Literacy" (The New Media Consortium, 2005. P. 12); - "New Literacies" (Jenkins et al., 2006), (Dussel, 2010); - "Media and Information Literacy" UNESCO (2008: 6); - "Media Literacy Education" (Alliance of Civilizations: <http://www.aocmedialiteracy.org/>).

This new situation has revived interest in media education in Spain. It is interesting to note how even the term "media education" is affected by this new situation: whereas "media education" formerly used to be translated as "educación para los medios", now

the most frequent translation is “educación mediática”, perhaps by similarity with “alfabetización mediática” (media literacy). The term "digital competence", introduced by the European Union, as we shall see below, is to join this terminological confusion.

The European Commission for Education & Training has taken important initiatives regarding the relationship between education and media in the last decade. We will specifically refer here to the guidelines of the European Union on "digital literacy", "digital competence", "media literacy" and "media education". With the considerations presented along these lines we do not intend to establish clear distinctions between the various terms. Our main goal is to join the manifesto for media education, to propose a global media literacy and education that includes both the key aspects of media education in past decades, to the extent they are applicable to new media, and also the basic principles of digital literacy that emerged around the Internet and ICT.

We consider it necessary to adopt this integrative approach to media education because paradoxically, the wide proliferation of new media and ICTs can be damaging to the critical component that is central to media literacy education. The constant changes in digital devices may deviate more or less unconsciously, towards more technological and descriptive approaches of media education, to approaches that focus predominantly on the use and operation of that digital equipment.

Similarly, the importance and relevance that seems to have reached "digital competence" and "digital literacy" nowadays can be detrimental to the well-deserved priority for more critical and reflective media literacy and education.

The Chinese thinker Confucius said that “When the wise man points at the moon, the idiot looks at the finger.” We must not be so focused on the attractive and dazzling finger of ICT that we forget to notice where it "points," that is, the social interests that media serve and the role they play in society are the main focus for media education.

1.- Digital Literacy and Digital Competence

One of the priorities of the European Union the last decade has been the promotion of "digital literacy." Digital literacy starts with the idea of considering the ability to use ICT and the Internet as a new form of literacy. Digital literacy, according to the European Commission, is fast becoming a prerequisite for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship and without it citizens can neither participate fully in society nor acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to live in the 21st century. Digital literacy has been understood in many different ways, from the most restrictive, such as the uses of computers, e-learning and Internet, to some other definitions that situate digital literacy near to a broader training and general preparation for life (literacy) in the age digital.

Martin (2005: 135), as the project leader of *DigEuLit*, gives us the following definition: "Digital Literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process." According to this author, "Digital literacy is broader than ICT literacy and will include elements drawn from several related "literacies", such as information literacy, media literacy and visual literacy. (...) Digital literacy will involve acquiring and using knowledge, techniques, attitudes and personal qualities, and will include the ability to plan, execute and evaluate digital actions in the solution of life tasks, and the ability to reflect on one's own digital literacy development."

Media educators are so fond of talking about different literacies (informational, multimodal, multimedia, digital and media literacies, as well as verbal, mathematical, musical, emotional, etc.), that these concepts sometimes are seen as watertight compartments and even compete against each other for space in school curricula. In other words, they seek to become the container or umbrella term from the rest of literacies. We prefer to consider the various "literacies" or "multiliteracies" as different dimensions complementing each other, or as key competencies in a multiple and global

literacy.

The European Union's concern for the basic training for Information Society has also brought together experts and policymakers to consider "digital competence" as one of the eight key competences that young people should have developed by the end of initial education and training to a level that equips them for adult life. The Commission has developed a *European Reference Framework* that sets out these eight key competences that should also be further developed, maintained and updated as part of lifelong learning: communication in the mother tongue; communication in the foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence; entrepreneurship, and cultural expression. "Digital competence", according to the EU Commission, "involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet". (Commission of the European Communities (2005: 16)).

Digital competence is closely linked to information, how to search, collect, process and transmit it to communicate, and how to use the most popular computer programs: word processors, spreadsheets, databases, e-mail and the Internet. Although there are brief references to learning, research and knowledge, it seems that the priority for this competence is devoted to purely instrumental and technological contents and procedures. In the Spanish context for media education and digital literacy, however, the the focus on basic skill sets for the uses of digital devices fade into the background and priority is instead given to critical-reflexive contents.

It is clear that digital competency goes beyond the use of software and hardware, and even the use of information. In media education, basic technology skill only has value to the extent that the student is able to transform it into knowledge. To do this the student will require the basic command of specific languages (textual, iconic, visual, graphic and sound) and also of their decoding and transfer patterns. S/he also has to be able to apply

the knowledge of the different types of information in different situations and contexts. Knowledge, for its part, has educational value when it contributes to personal development and social integration of the individual, to democratic participation and to improving society.

The consideration of digital competency as one of the “key competencies” by the European Commission seems to be a clear recognition of the importance of digital literacy. However the Commission’s concepts for “digital competence” or “digital literacy” in a broader sense should be considered only a part and never a substitute for the media education and critical literacy that media educators propose as basic preparation for life in the Information Society.

We would like to highlight two risks that we would face if we did not place digital competence in the rightful place and context across the curriculum. There is a danger of making these two serious mistakes:

- To reduce digital competence to its most technological and instrumental dimension, focusing on technical knowledge, on the procedures of using hardware and software, and forgetting about the content, about how to “produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks” (with and without computers)

- To reduce media education to the development of digital competence. That is, to focus on the “Information Society Technologies” (IST) and ignore the social, economic and cultural implications of information and the media. the attitudes and values associated with the social uses of media. Here we consider "media education" as the concept with the broader meaning, which constitutes an advanced level of media literacy, and also includes digital literacy. Digital competence would be addressed from any kind of education and training for living in modern society.

There are many (perhaps too many) definitions of media education, media literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy and some other expressions in different languages. In this manifesto we wish to emphasize the need to join forces in search of a framework for

literacy and education in which their grammatical modifiers (verbal, digital, multimedia, media, visual, digital, multimodal, computer, audiovisual, emotional, informational, communication, etc.) are more determined by models of the individual and society as our goal, rather than by semantic niceties that can end up dividing interests, efforts and resources, and even set them at loggerheads.

2.- Media Literacy and Media Education

Although in European educational systems media education may have lost ground to the study of information technology and digital literacy, perhaps the convergence of media (audiovisual, computer and networks), the integrations of modes and of languages, has set the stage to regain that lost ground with a new “media literacy”, “media education”, or whatever name it's called—media / multimedia / multimodal / digital / etc. either education or literacy.

The term "literacy" is in its origins closely tied to the written verbal code, however, it can now be considered in its broadest sense as basic preparation for life, training that has existed even before the term “literacy” was coined. The generalization of the text made that at some point reading skills were included among the basic general education. Since the second half of last century, that basic education or literacy also includes the decoding of audiovisual language. At present the development of ICT has given rise to new forms of encoding information and structuring knowledge. Literacy is thus a term alive and constantly evolving. Its characteristics depend on the basic skills needed to face life with dignity in every era and for every generation. Without trying to be exclusive, we could say that literacy and education required in contemporary society must be: - multimodal and multimedia (due to the convergence of languages and media); - digital (for the predominant way of encoding information and communicate); - related to media (for the importance that media and ICT have acquired in the construction of knowledge).

In late 2008, the European Parliament “maintains that media education should be an element of formal education to which all children should have access and which should

form part and parcel of the curriculum at every stage of schooling.” In a report adopted by the plenary, members of parliament also stress the need to improve school infrastructure so that all children have access to the Internet, and they propose promoting media literacy for adults, who influence how children develop media-use habits. (European Parliament, 2008)

The report recommends the integration of media education in schools and as a component of teacher training. It calls for media literacy to be made the ninth key competence in the European reference framework for lifelong learning. “It recommends that media education should, as far as possible, be geared to practical work and linked to economic, political, literary, social, artistic, and IT-related subjects, and suggests that the way forward lies in the creation of a specific subject – ‘Media Education’ – and in an interdisciplinary approach combined with out-of-school projects. The European Parliament report recommends that compulsory media education modules be incorporated into teacher training for all school levels, too.

“Media literacy” or, rather, “literacy” (without adjectives), due to their status as “media related”, should address all aspects, objectives, content, implications, etc. related to the presence and importance of media in our society. In some ways we are only remembering the key aspects of critical approaches to the “old” traditional media education, and see to what extent they can be also applied to new media, media literacy and media education.

The five basic skills on which, according to UNESCO (2008), media and information literacy focuses, (comprehension, critical thinking, creativity, cross-cultural awareness and citizenship) may be worthy heirs of the key aspects of media education within the context of new media. If we relate these basic skills to the eight key competencies included in the European Reference Framework developed by the European Commission, we could conclude that UNESCO’s five possible core competencies of media and information literacy are more related to “interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence” than to “digital competence”. The latter is undoubtedly the most related to media literacy, but we cannot limit media education to the development of digital competence in its strictest sense.

In many countries, like Spain, with little tradition in media education, this is the real danger to be avoided: that "media education" is identified with a new subject focused primarily on the use of digital technology, something like a new "computer literacy". This contribution to the "Manifesto for Media Education" is a small step toward advocating a more substantial concept of media education.

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