ABSTRACT
Based on the results of several projects carried out with children and adolescents, we can state that knowledge of production and broadcasting aids the acquisition of critical media skills. This article combines three media education experiences in Venezuela, Colombia and Spain driven by a critical reception approach. It presents leading indicators for determining the level of critical audiovisual reading in children aged 8-12 extracted from intervention processes through workshops on media literacy. The groups had been instructed on the audiovisual universe, which allowed them to analyze, deconstruct and recreate audiovisual content. Firstly, this article refers to the evolving concept of media education. Secondly, the common experiences in the three countries are described, with special attention to the influence of indicators that gauge the level of critical reading. Finally, we reflect on the need for media education in the era of multi-literacy. It is unusual to find studies that reveal the keys to assessing the levels of critical consumption of digital media content in children, and this is essential for determining the level of children’s understanding before and after training processes in media education.

ABSTRACT (Spanish)
Diversos estudios con niños y adolescentes han demostrado que a mayor conocimiento del mundo de la producción y transmisión de mensajes audiovisuales, mayor capacidad adquieren para formarse un criterio propio ante la pantalla. En este artículo se aúnan tres experiencias de educación mediática realizadas en Venezuela, Colombia y España, desde el enfoque de la recepción crítica. Se proporcionan los indicadores que llevan a determinar los niveles de lectura crítica audiovisual en niños de entre 8 y 12 años, construidos a partir de procesos de intervención mediante talleres de alfabetización mediática. Los grupos han sido instruidos acerca del universo audiovisual, dándoles a conocer cómo se gestan los contenidos audiovisuales y el modo de analizarlos, desestructurarlos y recrearlos. Primero, se hace referencia al concepto en evolución de educación mediática. Después, se describen las experiencias comunes en los tres países para luego incidir en los indicadores que permiten medir el nivel de lectura crítica. Por último, se reflexiona sobre la necesidad de la educación mediática en la era de la multialfabetización. No es muy frecuente encontrar estudios que revelen las claves para reconocer qué grado de cronicidad tiene un niño cuando visiona los contenidos de los distintos medios digitales. Es un tema fundamental pues permite saber con qué nivel de comprensión cuenta y cuál adquiere después de un proceso de formación en educación mediática.

KEYWORDS
Childhood, critical reading, television workshops, teaching experiences, media literacy.
Niñez, lectura crítica, talleres de televisión, experiencias de enseñanza, educación mediática.

Dr. Jacqueline Sánchez-Carrero is Lecturer at the Master «Communication and Audiovisual Education» of the University of Huelva/International University of Andalusia in Huelva (Spain) (jsanchezcarrero@gmail.com).
Yamile Sandoval-Romero is Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Advertising of the Santiago de Cali University (Colombia) (yamile.sandoval@yahoo.com).
1. Media education as an evolving concept. Main study aims

Recent history shows that media education started to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century. However, there already existed educational programs that had been produced in response to the effect that TV and films were having on children. At the beginning of the 1930s, some experts in USA began to draw attention to the need to integrate press and audiovisual resources into school curricula. In the following decades, these initiatives took root especially in the USA and Canada. Mario Kaplun introduced a new method of critical reading in the 1970s in South America, with the aim of highlighting ideological content in media messages. Other similar programs were implemented at that time in Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, and the 1980s saw the emergence of educomunication in Argentina. In Mexico, Guillermo Orozco emphasized the role of the child as receptor.

In the 1990s in Spain, José Manuel Pérez Tornero proposed a method for discovering the operations and processes of critical reading in TV. The definition of critical reading and analytical reading was introduced, with the difference being that critical reading refers to the capacity to «recognise the pragmatic purpose of the program, distinguishing the different thematic and narrative levels (...) and discovering co-textual and contextual connections, including alternative proposals, and giving a new meaning to the program». Analytical reading presents a deeper dimension, and requires a «global reading of the space [or audiovisual document], breaking this up into parts, capturing the different dimensions of the program, noticing the structure and making a global interpretation of the space» (Pérez Tornero, 1994: 150-152).

From the mid-1970s, some critical reception practices took place in TV and films in Venezuela. By the end of the 20th century, in an attempt to foster critical civic action, the Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (LOPNA) was passed, in which art. 69, entitled ‘Critical education for the Media’, states that «the State must guarantee education for children and adolescents with the aim of preparing and training them to receive, search for, use and choose the most appropriate information for their development». The urgency to include media education in educational programs and compulsory school subjects is outlined below. It also states that families must receive special training to critically analyze media content. According to Martín-Barbero & Téllez (2008), new insights into old problems only properly emerged in Colombia in 1997 when children became the main focus for research activities into audience and the media (López De la Roche, 2000; Fernández, 1998; Rincón, 2002). After 2000, interest increased due to research funded by Colombia’s National TV Commission. By that time, in Spain numerous publications and projects had already appeared that highlighted the importance of critical reading, and in 2008 the European Parliament defined media education as the «ability to understand and bring critical assessment to bear on the various aspects of media, being able to separate out information from the new media’s flood of data and images».

As media education researchers, we have organized various workshops with children and adolescents in different locations. The main aim has been to develop in them an understanding of production and audiovisual narrative from a critical viewpoint. We have carried out experimental investigations in several locations: in Venezuela in 1997, through the Telekids project in 1997, with the support of the Council for Scientific, Human and Technological Development of the Universidad de los Andes, which ran until 2000. This project also operated in Spain from 2005, where it was known as Taller Telekids but it received no external funding. In Colombia, the same project started in 2006 with the support of a training program for critical reception (Mirando cómo miramos). In 2010, the third phase of this project was implemented at national level, supported by the Santiago de Cali University and the National TV Commission as part of the TV Development Plan.

2. Methodology

The sampling process in Colombia was conducted in public institutions and included 93 children and 58 adults, among them parents and teachers. In 2007, this model was expanded to 54 educational institutions in Cali, with 1,053 adults and 1,355. In 2010, the model was implemented with peer universities in six areas across the country, involving 2,400 children and 2,400 adults. In Venezuela and Spain the workshops began in 1997 with small group sessions, and the main goal of all these practices was to develop the critical awareness of children, parents and teachers in line with the aims of media education today.

The methodology applied in the three countries consisted of a pre- and post-test, so that the total sample (1,500 children aged 8-12) could be analysed before and after training. As a result, it is evident that a greater knowledge of audiovisual production enables a better development of skills to extract content structures and critically analyse them. In Venezuela and Spain, the assessment was performed according to the...
following indicators: ‘sufficiently critical’, ‘moderately critical’ and ‘uncritical’. A subject able to identify, describe and recognize characters, history, intention and the factors appearing in the first column in Table 2 would be categorized as ‘sufficiently critical’, which also includes the capacity to suggest changes in content. A subject who is not always able to identify the form or content in audiovisual documents and whose content changes are close to the original version would be considered ‘moderately critical’. ‘Uncritical’ reflects the inability to critically examine programs. In Venezuela and Spain a teaching guide was published with the support of the Department of Innovation, Science and Business of the Regional Government of Andalusia, entitled ‘Los secretos de la tele: Manual de alfabetización audiovisual para niños y maestros’ (The secrets of TV: a literacy guide for teachers and children) (Sánchez-Carrero & Martínez, 2009), including an interactive CD for children. This guide is divided in six thematic areas: production, screenplay, camera, sound and lighting, digital editing and critical reading. Along with the production workshop, there were practical critical reading sessions consisting of viewing cartoons, TV series, films and adverts for critical analysis. The three indicators and their definitions appear in Table 1.

### Table 1. Critical reading of cartoons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sufficiently critical</th>
<th>Moderately critical</th>
<th>Uncritical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies characters and their main characteristics</td>
<td>Identifies characters without detailing any characteristic</td>
<td>Inability to identify the characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story is retold in general terms told by the student omitting insignificant details</td>
<td>The story is retold including insignificant details.</td>
<td>Inability to retell the story, the student is confused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes characters’ behaviour</td>
<td>Gives vague description of characters’ behaviour</td>
<td>Inability to describe characters’ behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies solutions provided by the characters to overcome difficulties</td>
<td>Makes mistakes in the identification of solutions</td>
<td>Inability to identify solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives reasons that justify choice of favourite characters</td>
<td>Gives vague justification of choice of favourite characters</td>
<td>Gives no reasons to justify choice of favourite characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes author’s intention</td>
<td>Has a general idea of author’s intention</td>
<td>Unable to identify author’s intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggests changes in the content</td>
<td>The changes suggested are close to the original</td>
<td>No changes in content suggested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiates reality from fantasy</td>
<td>Hardly differentiates reality from fantasy</td>
<td>Unable to differentiate reality from fantasy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intervention model in Colombia is pedagogically based on UNESCO’s Four Pillars of Education for the 21st century: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Participants develop skills to approach content critically by learning-by-discovery, creating positive environments that improve their quality of life. The workshop is divided in three parts: first, a dialogue with participants, identification of their readings and relation to TV; second, the theory and practice of the concepts of audiovisual language and media production logic are presented; third, a reflection on elements and intention is proposed to draw attention to viewer

### Table 2. Critical reading of TV series.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sufficiently critical</th>
<th>Moderately critical</th>
<th>Uncritical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student retells the story in general terms, omitting insignificant details</td>
<td>The story is retold along with insignificant details.</td>
<td>Inability to retell the story, the student is confused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes the final message in an episode</td>
<td>Has a faint notion of the final message in the episode</td>
<td>Inability to identify messages in any of the episodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies some of the shots, camera movements and their uses</td>
<td>Identifies some shots but not their intention</td>
<td>No shots or camera movements identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembers the musical backdrop, sound effects and their uses</td>
<td>Remembers music or sound effects but does not indicate their intention</td>
<td>No recollection of music or sound effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes scenography and indoor or outdoor settings</td>
<td>Recognizes scenography but cannot differentiate between indoor or outdoor settings</td>
<td>Inability to recognise scenography in the episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes characters’ behaviour</td>
<td>Gives vague description of characters’ behaviour</td>
<td>Inability to describe characters’ behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes characters’ wardrobe, fashion, colours</td>
<td>Broadly describes characters’ wardrobe</td>
<td>No description of characters’ wardrobe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies titles in credits</td>
<td>Identifies some of the titles in credits</td>
<td>Inability to identify titles in credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiates reality from fantasy</td>
<td>Hardly differentiates reality from fantasy</td>
<td>Unable to differentiate reality from fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructs the story changing the end creatively</td>
<td>Reconstructs the story with lack of creativity</td>
<td>Inability to reconstruct the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants integrate these aspects and take part in the training process to become critical viewers, adopting new stances, reconsidering their perceptions and proposing reading and reception alternatives for TV content. Table 5 shows the workshop structure and its different sections as a synthesis of the critical reception model ‘Mirando como miramos’ (Sandoval Romero, 2007)⁵.

This model is closely linked to its implementation process. The in-depth dialogue with the participants regarding their knowledge of the TV environment and its influence on their lives is the most important part of Module 1. Some explanations about the origin of TV and relevant data are provided at the end of this module, prior to launching a discussion on the behavior and benefits of being a critical viewer. Information about preproduction, production and postproduction processes is provided in Module 2. Practical sessions with the camera are aimed at stimulating discussion on the meaning of viewing, being viewed by oneself and by others. The role of those who work behind the camera is analysed, along with different TV genres such as the soap opera, which is hugely popular in Colombia. A literary resource is used in Module 3 to foster critical analysis. Through Plato’s Myth of the Cave, as told in Book VII of The Republic, the participants are encouraged to analyse the text and identify the importance of light and shadows in the perception process, linking what is real (the universe of light) and reality (universe of shadows). This metaphor applied to TV content is useful for understanding the importance of the work that goes on behind the camera. Following this, the proposal presented in Venezuela analyzed the level of critical reception in participants.

The blueprint for this training model was to recognize the active role of children in the reception process.
through their reading practices and the media uses. In this case, reception is considered to be a process involving family and school, and for this reason the school was to be the meeting place for parents, caregivers, teachers and children.

3. Outcomes and debate: children begin to be critical viewers

The implementation of the aforementioned indicators in Venezuela and Spain made it possible to assess critical reading levels in children in all the workshops programmed. To this end, children's attitudes are classified as sufficiently critical, moderately critical or uncritical, according to their responses. As an example, the pre-test scores in one of the workshops held in Venezuela were 25% sufficiently critical, 41% moderately critical and 33% uncritical, according to their responses. As an example, the pre-test scores in one of the workshops held in Venezuela were 25% sufficiently critical, 41% moderately critical and 33% uncritical, according to their responses. Immediately after this experiment, a post-test yielded a score of 50% for sufficiently critical and, more importantly, a decrease in the uncritical category from 33% to 14%.

In the 55 workshops carried out in Colombia, 75% of children, 30% of parents and 26% of teachers acknowledged the educational role of TV while 90% of teachers, 70% of parents, and only 19% of children recognized TV's role as information provider. TV as a source of entertainment was acknowledged by 75% of children, 84% of teachers and 56% of parents. According to the results obtained in the pre-test, activities that indicated the lowest critical level corresponded to the identification of previous work by the directors and scriptwriters, and the recognition of audiovisual language and its intention (difficulties in identifying the significance of certain shots or the soundtrack). Other aspects that pointed to low levels of critical reception were the failure to identify intention in audiovisual documents in general (even when given a guided analysis of the story and structure) and to discriminate between fiction and reality in TV series. In the initial analysis, no more than 20% of participants referred to the audiovisual language, music and shots—with its terms—without using technical terms, whereas in the post-test, participants were able to develop the following activities without difficulty:

- Identify and give a general outline of the story.
- Describe the characters: personality traits and physical appearance.
- Identify similarities in settings, story and characters with their day-to-day lives.
- Participate in decisions that are part of the plot.
- Identify the message of the episode.
- Use audiovisual language (shots, sequences, sound effects)
- Identify fiction and intention.
- Distinguish roles in audiovisual production (director, scriptwriter)
- Distinguish fictional/non-fictional audiovisual products and classify their favorite programs.
- Analyse the story structure: beginning, middle and end.

Teaching guide. 'Mirando cómo miramos. Proyecto de formación de recepción crítica'.

• Create an audiovisual proposal regarding content and processing.

4. Conclusions

The keys to assessing critical reception levels in children can be a valuable tool for those who advocate the need to train new generations in the critical use of audiovisual media. Some organizations already use the Internet to publicize easily applicable strategies for promoting critical reading in children and adolescents, two of which include ‘Music, Film, TV and the Internet. A guide for Parents and Teachers’, edited by Childnet International (2010), and ‘Using Film in Schools, a Practical Guide’, edited by Film: 21st Century Literacy. These training publications enable young people to discriminate when viewing audiovisual content and help prepare them to become independent and critical citizens. There are also a number of useful resources to facilitate critical reception training processes, such as the model presented by Hobbs* (2001), in which teachers are shown how to adapt reading and critical analysis processes through questions that prompt further discussion (table 6).

The ideas put forward by De Abreu (2011:15) have clarified Hobbs’ contribution and have proved useful in workshops. According to De Abreu, most media literacy programs are based on these five questions developed, among others, by the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles (USA). In table 7, these questions are linked to five key concepts.

It seems that a new projection of the media education concept in relation to people is emerging in the second decade of the 21st century. Technology, human rights and democracy are increasingly linked to media education, and media education is acquiring a wider dimension and incorporating human values: the defence of individual autonomy based on critical thinking, the freedom to query and the right to information, the constructive value of openness and participative dialogue, the promotion of creativity and innovation as basic resource in troubleshooting, a communication democracy that should promote political democracy and the values of understanding and respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue (Pérez Tornero & Varis, 2010). «Teaching for communication means teaching for critical thinking and for self-discovery (...). It is positive to train citizens to be independent and capable of expressing their ideas» (García Matilla, 2009: 40).

Although the media education debate has raged for over 30 years, the role of audiovisual literacy in the curriculum is still disputed; meanwhile urgent changes are needed. We are living a multi-literacy age, defined as «the acquisition and command of skills for a personal, social and cultural use of multiple tools and languages in society. Multi-literacy does not exclusively refer to the skills needed to operate new technologies» (Area, Gros & Marzal, 2008: 74). This underlines the importance of the role to be played by teachers, parents and media experts. Media education should be promoted and implemented at school, and families should be involved in the process. We are aware that people attribute values to messages but ignore the media dynamics, audiovisual language and intention behind the content. Audiovisual literacy should be an important part of any citizen’s education and the media themselves should be the driving force behind this education.

According to Aguaded (2009: 8), «the new European framework, with the support of the European Parliament and the advance towards international assessment processes in terms of digital and audiovisual competences, are two landmark achievements».

Who is the author? What is the purpose of the message?
Which values and points of view are shown?
Which strategies are used to arouse audience interest?
How could different people interpret the same message in different ways?
What does this message omit?

The involvement of the European Parliament is a considerable boost to the implementation of media education, and many studies now evaluate skills levels before undertaking specific programs on audiovisual literacy, such as ‘Competencia Mediática. Investigación sobre el grado de competencia de la ciudadanía en España’7 (Media competence. An investigation into citizens’ media skills in Spain). This study was carried out at 17 Spanish universities and has drawn attention to deficiencies in the knowledge and skills necessary for viewers to become critical consumers of media.

Support

The ‘Mirando cómo miramos’ project has been supported by the Santiago de Cali University and the National TV Commission in Colombia. The ‘Telekids’ project was initially supported by the Council for Scientific, Human and Technological Development of the Universidad de Los Andes and the Televisora Regional del Táchira in Venezuela. In Spain, this project was supported by the Department of Innovation, Science and Business of the Regional Government of Andalusia.

Notes

1 This law was enacted in 2000 and reformed in 2007. (http://fevensor1.ve.tripod.com/lopna.htm).
3 For further information about the teaching material, see Telekids, a fun teaching strategy for audiovisual literacy. (http://www.cntv.cl/prontus_cntv/site/artic/20110420/asocfile/20110420144405/estrategia_1_disco_educativa_jacqueline_s_richiez.pdf) (28-10-11).
4 This phase is part of the work developed by the co-author of this article for her PhD thesis on Psychology in the Universidad del Norte, Colombia.
6 See the Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.org) for more information on media education issues and implementation in primary education. (28-10-11).
7 Go to www.ite.educacion.es/es/inicio/noticias-de-interes/414-competencia-mediatica for more information on the six dimensions in the analysis: language, technology, reception and interaction processes, production and dissemination, ideology, values, and aesthetics. (28-10-11).

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HOÖRS, R. & AL. (2011). Field-Based Teacher Education in Elementary Media Literacy as a Means to Promote Global Understanding. Action in Teacher Education, 33; 150.

Table 7. Five basic concepts and key questions for consumers and producers regarding construction and deconstruction of media messages6.