Teaching Media Literacy in Colleges of Education and Communication

La docencia sobre alfabetización mediática en las facultades de Educación y Comunicación

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ABSTRACT

This work is part of an R&D project involving thirteen Spanish universities in which needs and wants in the field of media education in higher education are studied in the areas of Communication (Communication Studies, Journalism and Advertising) and Education (Teaching, Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Education). The objective of this study focuses on analysing the college textbooks directly related to Media Education most used in Education and Communication,. The report has been developed based on six educational competence dimensions: language, technology, interaction processes, production and distribution processes, ideology and values and aesthetics. Using each of these parameters the scope of the analysis and the scope of the expression were taken into account, based on guidelines set by Ferrés and Piscitelli in their well-known proposal of indicators for defining new media competence and which is structured around two areas of work: the production of own messages and interaction with others. The results were obtained by applying a quantitative methodology through a content analysis of semantic fields. The main conclusions point to a greater presence of the «Ideology and Values» dimension, and almost non-existent representation of the «Aesthetics» indicator.

RESUMEN

El presente trabajo forma parte de un proyecto I+D integrado por trece universidades españolas en el que se estudian las necesidades y carencias en materia de educación mediática en el ámbito de la enseñanza superior, tanto en las áreas de Comunicación (Comunicación Audiovisual, Periodismo y Publicidad) como de Educación (Magisterio, Pedagogía, Psicopedagogía y Educación Social). Esta investigación centra su objeto de estudio en el análisis de los manuales universitarios más utilizados en Educación y Comunicación, en asignaturas directamente relacionadas con la educación mediática. Este informe se ha desarrollado en base a seis dimensiones competenciales mediáticas: lenguajes, tecnología, procesos de interacción, procesos de producción y difusión, ideología y valores y estética. De cada uno de estos parámetros se ha tenido en cuenta el ámbito del análisis y de la expresión, partiendo de las pautas señaladas por Ferrés y Piscitelli en su conocida propuesta articulada de indicadores para definir la nueva competencia mediática, que se ha estructurado en torno a dos ámbitos de trabajo: el de la producción de mensajes propios y el de la interacción con otros ajenos. Los resultados han sido obtenidos mediante la aplicación de una metodología cuantitativa, a través de un análisis de contenido por campos semánticos. Las principales conclusiones extraídas apuntan hacia una mayor presencia de la dimensión Ideología y Valores, y una casi inexistente representación de la dimensión Estética.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Media literacy, media competence, critical thinking, emotion, aesthetics, languages.
Educación mediática, competencia mediática, actitud crítica, emoción, estética, lenguajes.

1. Introduction and current position

The discussion within academia about university student training has now become persistent as a result of dramatic shifts in society over recent decades marked by the arrival of mass information through multiple channels. The need has therefore become apparent to consider as part of the university curriculum subjects covering media competence and bibliographic resources for teaching. Even though research on media competence has been produced over these years it still remains a poorly explored area (Aguaded, 2012: 8). Some research has addressed the levels of compulsory education (Santibáñez & Masanet, 2012) and the university students (Marta, Grandío & Gabelas, 2014). Since the late eighties, international researchers such as Buckingham (2007) have embraced the challenges the education system should undertake in terms of educommunication. Others such as Piscitelli (2009), Maffesoli (2009), Martinelli et al (2011), Bordignon and collaborators (2010) and Fernández-Planells and Figueras (2012) approach media literacy from the perspective of training university lecturers and good formal teaching practice in Latin America.

This research therefore responds to an unmet need within higher education teaching and is driven by the urgency of detecting what training in media literacy is being given and what improvements could be established to achieve a comprehensive empowerment of citizens when they consume the media. The purpose of this work is therefore to contribute by publicizing the dimensions of the concept of media education being studied and worked on in the classroom.

In 2011, an analysis led by Ferrés, García-Matilla and Aguaded (2011) set out the population's shortcomings in media literacy. Spanish media society did not pass the test, necessitating a look at potential solutions. Some of these solutions are addressed in this research; what role does compulsory and university education play in this regard? Are the professionals who have been commissioned with leading the educating of new generations in media literacy adequately prepared and trained? (Sandoval & Aguaded, 2012; Maffessoli, 2009). Media education should be included at all educational levels, from infants to primary to secondary. University should then progress with this education (Osuna, Marta & Aparici, 2013).

In the field of higher education, on which the results of this research are centred, there are no tools that have validated literacy processes within the university community or the motivation and training of lecturers or references to media education in the most used literature during the teaching process.

What, therefore, is media competence? First of all we will take a more in-depth look at this concept by approaching its origins and analysing how it has evolved and been introduced into other areas of expertise.

The term was coined in association with the working world but it was then integrated into academia. According to Ferrés (2007: 100) «it is a combination of expertise, capacities and thinking considered appropriate for a certain context». From the Media Studies Unit at Pompeu Fabra University under sponsorship from the Catalan Audiovisual Council a document was drawn up using contributions by 14 researchers in Spain and 50 from Latin America to define the basic skills and key competences for lifelong learning. In order to review parameters from which media education should be taught, the levels need to be governed by two criteria: the first involves the personal and the second the operational. According to the experts, for a person to be competent in audiovisual communication he/she must be able to convert emotion into reflection and reflection into emotion. He/she must also be able to perform a critical analysis of the audiovisual products being consumed as well as producing audiovisual messages that are comprehensible and communicatively effective.

In the research sector, scientific and empirical results in the academic field provide uniform data regarding the state of media proficiency of citizens. These highlight the need for intervention in educational politics in order to attain literacy. These results gathered in Spain have been corroborated internationally in other ongoing investigations, indicating failings in media education and calling into question very recent concepts such as digital natives - the products of early exposure to media and the circumstance of living in a highly technological age. There is an evident need to encourage this literacy in media competence. Likewise, to undertake research into the issue it is fundamental to measure the media level, evaluating elements that demonstrate its importance, pinpointing and detailing the concept for a better understanding of what we are measuring and assigning a clear definition about what is understood by media competence, the elements that comprise it and the linchpins that provide its foundation.

Standardizing it by highlighting its directly related aspects is the basis for undertaking a deeper analysis: it then becomes important to describe synthetically, specifically and clearly the dimensions that constitute media competence in line with (Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012) who have explored its dimensions and indicators in more depth.

A summary of the dimensions of media competence is given below:

1) Languages: knowledge of the codes, the ability to use them and to analyse written and audiovisual messages from the perspective of sense and meaning, of narrative structures and categories and genres.

2) Technology: knowledge and the capacity to employ the tools that make written and media communication possible in order to understand how messages are produced. Understanding of the role ICT plays in society.

3) Interaction processes: ability to assess, select, review and self-evaluate the media diet itself. Ability to assess critically cognitive, rational, emotional and contextual elements that are involved in its receipt.

4) Production and diffusion processes: knowledge of the functions and tasks of production agents, production and diffusion phases and regulating codes. Ability to draw up, select, share and disseminate media messages.

5) Ideology and values: capacity for a comprehensive and critical interpretation, critical analysis and selective thinking in terms of media messages and how they represent reality.

6) Aesthetics: capacity to analyse and evaluate audiovisual messages through a formal and thematic innovative perspective and education in the awareness of aesthetics.

These indicators are structured around areas of analysis and expression where the media citizen is contemplated as a literate prosumer, in as far as he/she is able to produce messages and to interact with others from outside.

We will take the dimensions described by Ferrés in his article «Competence in media studies: dimensions and indicators» published in Comunicar 29 as a starting point for analysing college textbooks for degrees such as Education and Communication and the most used or recommended monographs in their bibliographies. More recently, in 2012, the same author offered a more detailed and updated work on this subject jointly with the lecturer Piscitelli from the University of Buenos Aires and that was published in Comunicar 38. The investigative objective of this article thereby seeks to continue the work undertaken

since 2010 in academia regarding media education offered to university students.

Furthermore, we consider the educommunication training and learning proposals put forward in Spain to be paramount. According to Marta & Grandío (2013: 127), «media literacy is a permanent learning undertaking (life-long learning), which should be formalized through greater presence in the curricula of all educational levels and also non-formal educational environments for adults».

2. Material and methods

In an initial phase of the investigation, a quantitative analysis was carried out on the selection of basic

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bibliographic references in the textbooks of subjects directly related to media education offered in the Colleges of Education and Communication in Spain during the academic year 2011/12. Directly is understood as any material whose academic content included between four to six dimensions.

The results were obtained using an SPSS software database for processing statistics and by carrying out a univariant and bivariant descriptive analysis. Frequency tables were used for the univariant analysis and contingency tables for the bivariant. The most notable variables related to the bibliographic resources include the following: 353 references to books and book chapters, 54 research journals linked to the areas of communication, education, didactics, pedagogy, educational technology, etc. and 34 specialized websites.

In a second phase of the research, and after selecting the ten most consistent bibliographic references, an analysis was made of their content by semantic fields applied to the contents pages of the works referenced. Here, the total appearances of words or sets

of words linked to some of the six dimensions that make up the concept of media competence were quantified, with the addition of a seventh generic indicator that groups together the magnitudes that mention media competence generally and that is difficult to incorporate in any of the six previously mentioned.

Lastly, in order to give the investigation a qualitative capacity, the technique of in-depth interview was employed on 30 Spanish teachers who teach subjects directly related to media literacy in the Colleges of Education (20 selected in total) and Communication (10 interviewed in total), in order to analyse planning and learning expectations regarding the training they offer to students in ME. For this article some of the responses related to the dimensions proposed by Ferrés and Piscitelli have been extracted.

3. Analysis and results

Despite the fact that the database for this research contained a large number of variables, the results obtained from the statistical analysis places ten monographs into the ranking of most used bibliographic resources, as detailed in table 1.

Eight of the ten bibliographic contributions are monographs published in the last thirteen years. More specifically, the most recent works are those by Ferrés (2008) and De-Pablos (2009), inferring an updating of the material comprising textbooks in subjects directly related to ME, bearing in mind that data collection was carried out during the academic year 2011/12.

Meanwhile, the less recently edited works that figure in this ranking belong to works by Ferrés (1998) and Aguaded (1999). Nevertheless, despite the fact that they were edited in the 90s, these two manuals are undoubtedly the first reference works that demonstrate the need for a deeper social investigation into the importance of communicating this audiovisual communication medium, its impact and its audiences, particularly on children and teenagers. As textbooks, both works offer keys to educating about television, training the viewer and putting forward didactic pro-

posals for use of the medium in schools.

A notable aspect in this ranking is the appearance of three monographs by the lecturer Ferrés: «Televisión y Educación» (1998), «Educar en una cultura del espectáculo» (2000) and «La educación como industria del deseo» (2008). His work on show culture is in fact one of the most highly referenced in textbooks along with that by Cabero, «Tecnología Educativa: utilización didáctica del medio vídeo» (2007).

According to the authorship variable, eight of the ten works in the bibliographic collection are written by highly renowned Spanish researchers in the academic field of educommunication, while the others are by the lecturer in Education at the University of Loughborough (England), Buckingham, of equally high repute and with extensive experience in the area we are studying.

The subject blocks that the content of these monographs cumulate are, broadly speaking, linked to the study, description and analysis of media education associated with audiovisuals, to the use of technology

Table 1. Ranking of the 10 most used bibliographic resources in subjects related to media education in university studies of Education and Communication in Spain
«Educar en una cultura del espectáculo» (Ferrés, 2000).
«Una televisión para la educación» (García-Matilla, 2003).
«Crecer en la era de los medios electrónicos» (Buckingham, 2002).
«Educación en medios» (Buckingham, 2005).
«Tecnología educativa: la formación del profesorado en la era de Internet» (De-Pablos, 2009).
«Tecnología educativa: utilización didáctica del medio vídeo» (Cabero, 2007).
«Televisión y Educación» (Ferrés, 1998).
«Convivir con la televisión» (Aguaded, 1999).
«La educación como industria del deseo» (Ferrés, 2008).
«Tecnologías de la Información y comunicación para la formación de docentes» (Cebrián-de-la-Serna, 2005).

as an educational complement, to the training of teachers and education in electronic media. This research goes into further detail measuring the presence of the six dimensions that make up the concept of media competence in each of the manuals.

The semantic study carried out on the aforementioned monographs focused on an analysis of the contents. An assessment was made of which terminology used was likely to be classified in the dimensions chart constituting Media Education. In total, the corpus analysed a total of 346 chapter contents. Table 2 shows the total entries obtained in each of the indicators:

An initial assessment indicates that all the dimensions are present in the ten bibliographic resources

Table 2. Classification of the semantic references applied to the 6 dimensions on media education							
Dimensions	Languages	Technology	Interaction processes	Production and diffusion processes	Ideology and values	Aesthetics	Generic
Entries	84	303	182	97	291	31	26

analysed. According to the total calculation, two sections from the 346 chapters that make up the corpus analysed are repeated the most: the first, comprehension of the social function of technologies (Technology Indicator) and the second, the ability to detect ideology and values, whether explicit or latent, even in unnoticed communication and the adopting of a critical interpretation (Ideology and Values Indicator).

These results show that most bibliographic resources are concurrent in attributing significant importance to the social function that communication and information technologies exert when teaching students. Likewise, content that addresses the capacity to detect stereotypes and messages that go against human values and the environment are also awarded significance. According to the chart of magnitudes applicable to media education, these sections correspond to the Technology and Ideology and Values dimensions. It must therefore be deduced that greater weight is given to analysis than to expression, although this does not mean they are not included in the textbooks as students are encouraged to develop the capacity to handle multimedia and multimodal tools. Of the works analysed, those by De-Pablos (2009), Cabero (2007) and Ferrés (1998) discuss these sections in most detail. The rest refer to them but to a lesser degree.

A second block resulting from the database assigns a notable position to the Interaction Processes dimension, particularly sections related to the capacity to comprehend and manage own emotions in terms of preferences and for cognitive purposes and the capacity to interact with people and groups in increasingly more varied identity and intercultural environments. This content is more present in the works by Ferrés (2000), Buckingham (2002; 2005), De-Pablos (2009) and Cabero (2007).

A third block assigns an average presence in

the manuals to the following dimensions: capacity to evaluate sources and capacity to manage own emotions in screen interaction (Ideology and Values and Interaction Processes), knowledge of production systems and ability to share and disseminate information (Production and Diffusion Processes) and lastly active interpretation when interacting with screens to build a richer society (Interaction Processes). In this last section the works by Aguaded (1999) and Ferrés (1998; 2000) are the most notable.

Data from the Languages dimension scored lower in the works analysed. Manuals by Ferrés (2000) and Buckingham (2002) attribute the greatest importance to the training of students in analysing and assessing narrative structures and gender and format conventions, to education in the establishment of intertext relationships -intertextuality-, codes and media and to interpreting and assessing the representative symbols and their expressive function.

It is interesting to reflect on the Languages dimension at this point. Despite the fact that the quantitative analysis showed it has limited presence in Media Education texts, some of the in-depth interviews held with lecturers and managers who participate in curricula planning in Communication and Education colleges demonstrated that this dimension should be considered intrinsic and a priority as it provides the foundation for deeper examination in the rest of the indicators.

Lastly, results of a more marginal presence in the

Table 3. List of the 5 dimensions most referred to in the monographs on media education			
ME Dimension	Area (Analysis/ expression)	Indicator description	Entries referenced in the contents pages
Technology	Analysis	Comprehension of the social function of technologies.	195
Ideology and Values	Analysis	Ability to detect ideology and values, whether explicit or latent, even in unnoticed communication and adopting a critical interpretation of them.	105
Ideology and Values	Analysis	Capacity to detect stereotypes and messages that go against human values and the environment.	88
Technology	Expression	Capacity to employ multimedia and multimodal tools.	73
Interaction processes	Analysis	Capacity for comprehension and management of own emotions in terms of preferences and for cognitive purposes.	62

quantitative analysis correspond mainly to the Aesthetics dimension. Of special interest in this analytical block are sections that, despite being extremely important for Media Education, are barely present in the ten bibliographic resources. We refer here to student capacity for responsible reflection on their own online/offline identity and that of others, ethics when downloading products from the web or the ability to manage the concept of authorship to use resources such as «creative commons».

Of the ten bibliographic resources analysed, the works that offer greater uniform coverage of all the dimensions are those by Buckingham, «Education in media» (2005), and Ferrés, «Televisión y educación» (1998).

By way of classification, the following information is important for each of the magnitudes:

• The Languages dimension is most present in the bibliography by Ferrés (2000).

• The Technology dimension, in Ferrés (1998), Cabero (2007) and De-Pablos (2009).

• The Interaction Processes dimension, in Ferrés (2000).

• The Production and Diffusion Processes dimension, in Buckingham (2002).

• The Ideology and Values dimension, in Cabero (2007) and Ferrés (1998).

• And lastly, the Aesthetics dimension, albeit tentatively, is most prominent in work by Buckingham (2005).

4. Discussion and conclusions

From the results gathered in this research certain inferences can be made that call into question the quality of media literacy offered in university classrooms.

Although it is apparent from studying the textbooks that all the dimensions comprising the concept of media education are present, greater attention is paid to the Technology and Ideology and Values indicators while detracting from others such as Aesthetics. This dimension is somewhat cast aside, barely considered and even appears unfamiliar when being implanted in teaching guides.

This discussion section emphasizes the importance of some of the responses provided by teachers of subjects directly related to media education, in particular, their opinion about what two dimensions are given the most weight in their respective teaching activities in the classroom:

1) «The Ideology and Values dimension is, I think, fundamental. Technology is a basic competence, which is needed more and more» (Interviewee 2).

2) «I think Ideology and Values is crucial, especially for critical thinking. Once we have critically interpreted, we have learnt to read the media in a varyingly discerning manner. The second is languages» (Interviewee 3).

3) «I consider Technology extremely important as we need to stay very up-to-date with the new media emerging every day. The production process also concerns me quite a lot as nowadays it is hard to find products customized for teachers in the market» (Interviewee 4).

4) «Personally what most interests me in the classroom are the first and the last: Languages and Ideology and Values. That is, understanding the language and how we can encourage the competences of active, participative critical interpretation of messages» (Interviewee 6).

5) «I would highlight Technology, for example, and Languages» (Interviewee 8).

6) «Without a doubt Ideology and Values and then I would put Diffusion Processes on the same level» (Interviewee 10).

7) «I try to work on The two dimensions I have selected, receipt and production, through dialogue. All the dimensions are important, but those concerned with creating and direct production , as well as technology, always end up as pending issues and that will hopefully be worked on in other subjects in the future» (Interviewee 19).

8) «I work on processes of receipt and interaction and ideology and values by analysing the media from a psychological perspective (the child as spectator, the values the media convey…)» (Interviewee 22).

9) «I think production is important as they need to be helped in doing, and the other one, ideology, because they have to be trained and not everything is acceptable» (Interviewee 30).

There is widespread agreement concerning the idea that the Ideology and Values dimension is one of the most important when teaching media education. Even though most of the teachers interviewed found it difficult to extract two dimensions from the six proposed many gave priority to the need to prosecute messages, detect ideologies and values, expose stereotypes and perform an active and participative interpretation.

On the other hand, there is no common denominator in terms of the indicator to which they devote the least time in their teaching. For either technology, languages, aesthetics, interaction processes and even diffusion processes, responses were marked randomly in the interviews analysed.

One common trait many cite, however, when

considering that not all the dimensions are dealt with in their respective subjects is lack of time.

The testimony from Interviewee 8 is interesting with regards to the aesthetics dimension: «what draws my attention is the aesthetics dimension, as I wasn't aware of it, and I think this could be introduced or inserted as a set or a sub-dimension in design areas or production» (Interviewee 8).

Associated with this indicator, there is significant and varied research in recent years that examines in-depth neuroscience. In media education curriculum this branch focuses on the interaction between rationality and emotiveness, in other words, between thoughts and feelings, on the need to bring out the unconscious as the most significant part of emotional activity (Ferrés & al., 2013).

The aim is to empower the citizen so that he/she becomes aware of his/her emotions deriving from images and be able to construct personal critical reflection, converting this capacity for analysis, this pleasure in aesthetics into a new source of satisfaction.

One of the main reasons why there is an apparent lack of teaching in the aesthetics competence is due to prioritizing reason over emotions, relegating the latter to a less academic and more personal aspect. Thus, according to the study by Ferrés, Masanet and Marta (2013) there is a mere 20% of scientific articles on communication that include a reference to the emotive semantic field while these terms are also employed with little depth and with minimum references.

«There is a tendency to complain about the supposed exorbitant fascination young people feel for screens and the apparent disproportionate influence they exert over them and, in return, the lack of interest they demonstrate in learning. Yet nobody alerts them to the fact that by excluding emotions from their teaching approaches as an object of study, they are hindering young people's understanding of the mental mechanisms that are activated in interaction experiences with screens, and that, by sidelining emotions in their teaching praxis as a motivational stimulus, they are in fact contributing to reinforcing the impotence of reason» (Ferrés, Masanet & Marta, 141-142). In this regard, there are examples that further examine this interesting issue through the in-depth interviews carried out in the study: «Do you consider the subject of emotions and the unconscious in media experiences? If so, which perspective do you work on?»:

Without seeking to offer representative or transferrable data, some of the responses were affirmative:

1) «The cultivating of emotional intelligence, emotional thinking, the relationship of students with the world through knowing how to understand others' emotions and their own, is held in increasingly higher regard, increasingly more prestige and in greater consideration when educating our students» (Interviewee 6).

2) «Also, emotions are very present, for example when we analyse cinematographic genres, horror or comedy strategies… from discussion of cases and also through re-montages, such as a Mary Poppins horror

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film, how discourse is reconstructed with original material…» (Interviewee 8).

3) «I think the study of receipt includes, by definition, aspects related to pleasure and emotions, an aspect that is the very essence of the relationship young people have with cultural resources» (Interviewee 19).

Others are more negative:

4) «Not consciously, no, but when discussing in each of the working processes there is a direct relationship with this area, I think» (Interviewee 20).

5) «Actually no. What you are suggesting is interesting but it is not something that's in the programme. It's not considered. Also there isn't time for everything but it is interesting» (Interviewee 27).

Emotions are aspects the interviewees took very much into account in the receipt of media messages: the ability to be sensitive to messages in order to be able to receive them better.

Incorporating other dimensions of media education and their link to competences acquired by the Spanish citizen (Ferrés, Aguaded & García-Matilla, 2011; Masanet, Contreras & Ferrés, 2013) it is interesting to note that the fifth dimension Ideology and

Values is one of the most highly referenced in the semantic study. A concordance is therefore inferred between the academic guidelines, the teacher's interest and the subject matter of the most used textbooks in ME.

There is a general conviction among experts that one of the fundamental components of media literacy is the critical sense (Pérez-Tornero & Sanagustín, 2011; Buckingham, 2007). Again, according to Ferrés, Masanet and Marta, «in 93.51% of the articles in Comunicar and in 85.05% of conference papers there are terms linked to the semantic field of critique» (2013: 139). There is no doubt that teacher training should be considered one of the challenges to be undertaken to ensure that citizens, and in particular children, adolescents and young people who are still in the teaching-learning process, receive correct literacy training in media from schools.

Proposals to improve this shortcoming must mandatorily include state institutions, which should first be given a picture of what is taught in classrooms nowadays as well as a real vision of media literacy recorded by citizens in recent works and as highlighted in this article.

Through an awareness of the failings and risks brought about by media illiteracy it falls to the teaching community to demand teacher training proposals and the inclusion of teaching material that they work on in the classroom in ME, rather than relegating them to transversality, which is what has been occurring in recent years in primary and secondary schooling.

Lastly, although this publication's perception focuses on the area of teaching, it is important to recognize that this immense responsibility should be extended to other social agents or institutions (Pérez-Tornero, 2009). The overriding debate about media literacy establishes that the family, the communication media themselves, schools and governments are competent in the task of empowering citizens. In short, children in the digital age must remain informed and trained in how to use it and teachers and the family should remain alert to this sensitive population. Thus, as they grow up they acquire the need to be competent and responsible and at university level this acquisition can be seen to come from below, from primary and secondary education backed consistently by families and the home environment.

Support

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