

Competence in Audiovisual Communication: Proposal Organised Around Dimensions and Indicators

Joan Ferrés Prats

The concept of competence came about associated with the world of employment, in the business sphere. Then it gradually became integrated into the academic world, becoming the conceptual axis for educational reforms in most countries in the European Union, including Spain.

Competence is usually understood as a combination of knowledge, capacity and attitude believed necessary for a specific context. The neglect in which education in audiovisual communication (EAC) finds itself is therefore made clear in the fact that, in spite of our cultural context being markedly audiovisual, EAC is hardly present in the educational curricula.

It must be acknowledged that there are highly valuable experiences in education in audiovisual communication in our country. But looking at the whole of society, these experiences are one-off, anecdotal and not very representative. Furthermore, from the point of view of competences, very few attempts have been made, explicit or implicit, to define what a person competent in audiovisual communication would be like.

As a member of the UNICA group (Audiovisual Communication Research Unit) of the Pompeu Fabra University, in 2005 Joan Ferrés, in collaboration with Mercè Oliva and sponsored by the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC), carried out an initiative aimed at defining and coming to some agreement as to this concept. An initial document was drawn up based on the research team's experience and on an analysis of the most successful experiences carried out in the most outstanding countries in the subject.

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The document was sent to 54 experts in the Iberian-American area renowned for their contributions to this academic field. A second document was prepared with the observations and suggestions from the 46 experts who answered this request, which was sent to 14 experts in Spain for analysis and evaluation. Finally, these experts debated the proposals and observations in a seminar held in Barcelona and they came to an agreement on the final document¹.

The main value of the document **Competences in Audiovisual Communication** therefore lies in the fact that it has been agreed by the most renowned experts in Spain.

Of course, it is a document that must always be provisional, a document that must be revised continuously, as experiences in education in audiovisual communication continue to grow. But it is a document that can serve as a basis both for the criteria on which this education should be based as well as the dimensions that must be taken into account.

Competences in Audiovisual Communication

Introduction

Justification of the proposal

The situation of neglect in which education in audiovisual communication finds itself is made evident, among other things, by the lack of a precise and agreed definition of what it means to be competent in this area and, consequently, by the absence of evaluations of people's level of competence.

To a large extent, the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes depends on the effectiveness of the assessment

¹ An appendix at the end of the article contains the names of the experts who took part in the two phases of the initiative.

systems used. On the other hand, there cannot be effective assessment systems without a precise definition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that must be achieved in order to be considered competent in an academic area.

The document was prepared within the context of the working programme of the European Union entitled "Education and Training 2010", within the working group on "Key competences for lifelong learning. A European reference framework". In March 2000, the European Council in Lisbon set a new strategic objective for the European Union: education and training systems must be adapted to the demands of the knowledge society; for this reason, member states must establish a European framework that defines the new basic skills that Europeans must master within the framework of lifelong learning. This framework must include information and communication technologies, technological culture, foreign languages, entrepreneurial spirit and social skills. With this aim, working groups were created for key competences.

Two years later, in February 2002, at the Barcelona Council, a need for action was emphasised in order to improve the mastery of basic skills. In particular, special attention was requested for digital literacy and foreign languages. The aim was to define the necessary competences for everyone in the knowledge society. Working group B, called "Key competences for lifelong learning" defined a framework made up of eight key competence domains for everyone in the knowledge society, among which is *digital competence*, ranking fourth.

So, deriving from this mandate, educational systems must define and promote the key competences that must be acquired by pupils during schooling, within the framework of their competences.

Key competence can be defined as a multi-functional and transferable number of skills, attitudes and knowledge that all people need to acquire in the process of compulsory education for their personal realisation and development, inclusion in society and access to employment. They must be transferable and therefore applicable in certain contexts and situations.

In the aforementioned working document on key competences, it is established that digital competence, which covers both information and communication technologies, "involves the confident and critical use of

Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication". These competences are related to logical and critical thought, with the skills for handling information at a high level and with the efficient development of communicative skills.

Efficient development of these communicative skills supposes in the individual vital *competence in audiovisual communication*, which we understand as an individual's capacity to interpret and analyse, based on critical reflection, audiovisual images and messages and to express oneself with minimum correction in the communicative sphere. This competence is related to knowledge of the media and to the basic use of multimedia technologies necessary to produce it.

When we talk of audiovisual communication we are referring to all those productions that are expressed by means of image and/or sound in any kind of medium and means, from traditional (photography, cinema, radio, television, video) and the most recent (video-games, multimedia, internet, etc.).

The Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC) has made a pioneering contribution, as it has helped provide mechanisms both for consultation and for interaction between experts in order to define, with disciplinary thoroughness, the referential frameworks that delimit the concept of a *person competent in audiovisual communication* (AC).

Design of the proposal

With this aim in mind, two activities have been carried out in order to achieve an agreed definition of the aforementioned concept:

1. Production of a base document defining the concept of a *person competent in audiovisual communication* (AC). Based on the experience of the document's authors, compared with an analysis of documents produced in countries in which education in audiovisual communication (EAC) is being worked on, a base document was produced defining the dimensions that go to make up the notion of *non-professional competence* in the area of AC and the indicators were presented that were considered adequate in order to assess this. This document was evaluated, via email, by the key specialists in the subject in the Iberian-American area. They were invited to make all kinds of amendments, suggestions and criticisms in

writing that they felt would contribute to drawing up the final document.

2. Day of discussion. In the second phase, on the 11th of November a seminar was held attended by the key experts in the country to debate the document with the contributions in order to reach an agreement on a definition of what is understood by a person competent in audiovisual communication and to delineate the indicators that must be taken into account to enable assessment.

The proposal involves three kinds of implications:

- To reach this document it was necessary to take into account what people believe should be known, which involves a **normative** dimension.
- This document, in order to be effective, had to be able to serve as an instrument for measurement, i.e. be useful in a **descriptive** dimension.
- The final descriptive product had to serve, subsequently, to help draw up the objectives, processes and content in audiovisual communication that had to be developed and acquired by pupils in general at the end of compulsory secondary education and to serve as a basis for subsequent lifelong learning in this field; as well as the content of the university curriculum for the training of future teachers and future professionals of communication and information in general.

Areas of influence

Below is a description of two criteria which should govern the levels of competence described later. The first affects the personal aspect and the second the operative.

The personal aspect: interaction between emotiveness and rationality

The idea is that people should be capable of becoming aware of the emotions that lie at the base of the fascination exercised by images, and of turning them into a trigger for critical reflection. They should be capable of going from the simple pleasure of watching the image and interacting with it to thinking about it and, from here, to think by creating

images, converting the capacity of analysis, critical sense, aesthetic fruition and creative expression into new sources of satisfaction.

In other words, in order for a person to be considered competent in audiovisual communication, he or she should not be asked, as a spectator, to replace emotion with reflection, but rather they must be capable of converting emotion into reflection and reflection into emotion.

The operative aspect: interaction between critical interpretation and creative expression

A person who is competent in audiovisual communication must be capable both of interpreting audiovisual messages appropriately and at the same time expressing themselves with minimum correction in this communicative sphere.

In other words, they must be capable of carrying out a critical analysis of the audiovisual products they consume and, at the same time, of producing simple audiovisual messages that are understandable and communicatively effective.

Dimensions

Competence in audiovisual communication involves the mastering of concepts, procedures and attitudes related to what could be considered the six fundamental dimensions of audiovisual communication²:

1. Language

- Knowledge of the codes that make audiovisual language possible and the capacity to use them in order to communicate simply but effectively.
- Capacity to analyse audiovisual messages from the perspective of sense and meaning, of narrative structures and of categories and genres.

2. Technology

- Theoretical knowledge of how the tools work that make audiovisual communication possible, to be able to understand how messages are produced.
- Capacity to use the simplest tools to communicate effectively in the audiovisual area.

- 2 These dimensions cannot be conceived as sealed compartments at all. Each can only be understood in relation to the others.

3. The processes of production and programming

- Knowledge of the functions and tasks assigned to the main agents of products and the phases into which the processes of production and programming are broken down for the different kinds of audiovisual products.
- Capacity to produce audiovisual messages and knowledge of their importance and implications in the new communication environments.

4. Ideology and values

- Capacity for comprehensive critical interpretation of audiovisual messages in terms of how they represent reality and, consequently, as bearers of ideology and values.
- Capacity for the critical analysis of audiovisual messages, understood both as the expression of and support for the interests, contradictions and values of society.

5. Reception and audience

- Capacity to recognise oneself as an active audience, particularly based on the use of digital technologies that allow participation and interactivity.
- Capacity to critically value the emotional, rational and contextual elements that are involved in receiving and evaluating audiovisual messages.

6. The aesthetic dimension

- Capacity to analyse and value audiovisual messages from the point of view of formal and thematic innovation and education in the aesthetic sense.
- Capacity to relate audiovisual messages with other forms of media and artistic expression.

Indicators

1. Audiovisual language

1.1. Scope of the analysis

1.1.1. Codes

- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the use of image-related formal resources from an expressive and aesthetic point of view.

- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the use of casting (physical presence and acting by actors and presenters), scenery, make-up and costume.
- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the kinds of lighting used and the expressive and/or aesthetic functions involved.
- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the use of sound and the expressive and aesthetic function involved, in interaction with other expressive elements.
- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the use of editing as a resource to add sense, rhythm and meaning to images and sounds depending on how they interact.
- Basic knowledge of the evolution of audiovisual language throughout history and of the changes and innovations introduced in the different media.

1.1.2. Media, types and genres

- Capacity to identify the specific expressive characteristics of each medium.
- Capacity to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction, and to evaluate an audiovisual message according to the category and genre it belongs to.
- Capacity to identify the characteristics of narrative, news, advertising, game shows and magazines, reality shows, talk shows and debates.

1.1.2.1. Audiovisual narrative

- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the narrative structure of an audiovisual story and the mechanisms of narration.
- Capacity to analyse and value the characters in an audiovisual story and the narrative roles assumed.
- Capacity to analyse and value a story according to the target audience it is aimed at.
- Capacity to identify and evaluate what interactivity adds to the story.

1.1.2.2. News

- Capacity to evaluate audiovisual information as an exercise in selecting and rejecting, in which different criteria are involved, the most important of which is image.
- Capacity to evaluate information according to the order in which news items appear, the time dedicated to them, the narrative of what is explicitly said and the absence of what is omitted.

- Capacity to understand the underlying business of the media and to evaluate the consequences this may have in how news is treated.
- Capacity to understand that the exercise of giving news involves taking decisions with regard to content and presentation and that there is not such thing as an objective rule for this enterprise.
- Capacity to understand that this exercise of interpretation allows plurality and freedom of expression, that it can give rise to the accurate treatment or deceptive manipulation of news.
- Capacity to detect and evaluate the differences in treating the presentation of the same news item offered by the different media and to understand that different views of the world affect the social view of reality.

1.1.2.3. Advertising³

All the indicators listed in the section on audiovisual narrative apply also to advertising, especially with regard to stereotypes and values.

- Capacity to critically analyse advertisements from the point of view of the addressee's needs and desires: does it satisfy needs or create desires?
- Capacity to analyse and evaluate advertisements according to the product benefit presented, a functional advantage or added value, of a psychological or sociological nature.
- In an advertising message, capacity to discern whether rational mechanisms are used, related to argumentation, or primarily emotive mechanisms are used, related to seduction.
- Capacity to critically understand and evaluate forms of indirect advertising, such as product placement.

1.1.2.4. Game shows

- Capacity to analyse the aims of game shows.
- Capacity to analyse the strategies used by the contestants.

- Capacity to know the relation between explicit and implicit advertising in this kind of programme.
- Capacity to analyse the explicit and implicit values.

1.1.2.5. Magazines, reality shows, talk shows and debates

- Capacity to identify the aim how talk is managed.
- Capacity to analyse the kind of relationship built up with the audience.
- Capacity to identify the values and models constructed through the celebrities, the presenters and the narrative.

1.2. Scope of expression

- Capacity to produce static and moving images with a correct use of image-related formal resources.
- Capacity to relate images creatively, giving them a new sense based on how they interact.
- Capacity to associate images to verbal texts in an original way to achieve expressive syntheses with new communicative values.
- Capacity to integrate images and sound creatively to form new audiovisual products.

2. Technology

2.1. Scope of analysis

- Knowledge of the main physiological and physical principles that enable perception in audiovisual communication.
- Knowledge of the most important technological innovations that have been developed throughout the history of audiovisual communication.
- Capacity to detect how the most elementary effects have been produced.

2.2. Scope of expression

- Capacity to handle visual recording equipment (photographic and video cameras) and sound equipment (microphones and recorders) with the minimum level of

3 All the indicators listed in the section on audiovisual narrative apply also to advertising, especially with regard to stereotypes and values.

technical correction required.

- Elementary handling of electronic and digital editing systems for image and sound.
- Elementary handling of digital recording and modification systems for images.

3. Processes agents of production and programming

3.1. Scope of analysis

- Basic knowledge of the factors that turn audiovisual messages into products subject to the socio-economic conditioning factors of the whole industry.
- Knowledge of the differences between publicly and privately owned media.
- Knowledge of the fundamental differences between live and recorded broadcasting on different media.
- Basic knowledge of the phases that go to make up the production and distribution process of an audiovisual product and the professionals involved.
- Capacity to critically evaluate the opportunity that is sometimes offered by the media to invert the broadcaster-receiver roles.

3.2 Scope of expression

- Capacity to detect the different areas, themes and situations that are not covered, hardly covered or not covered enough by the media and others that are more highlighted.

4. Reception and audiences

4.1. Scope of analysis

- Capacity to explain why some images are liked or why they are successful: which needs and desires (cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, sensory, etc.) they satisfy.
- Capacity to discern and assimilate the disassociations sometimes produced in the spectator between emotiveness and rationality, between the more or less prime interest generated by images and the rational evaluations made of them.
- Capacity to detect the mechanisms to identify, project and immerse that are activated by means of characters, actions and situations in a narrative, videogame, internet, etc.

- Capacity to evaluate the cognitive effects of emotions: ideas and values related to characters, actions and situations that provoke positive or negative emotions.
- Knowledge of the importance of the personal and social context in receiving and evaluating images.
- Capacity to reflect on one's own media consumption habits.
- Capacity to select the messages consumed in accordance with conscious and reasonable criteria.
- Acquisition of habits for information search concerning the products available on the media.
- Basic knowledge of audience surveys: why they are used and their limitations.
- Basic knowledge of the technical principles of programming.
- Knowledge of the different groups and associations of viewers and users of audiovisual media.
- Knowledge of the legal framework that applies to and protects consumers when receiving audiovisual products.
- Capacity to produce learning, awareness of what is learned in front of a screen, capacity to transfer what has been learned to other life scenarios, etc.

4.1 Scope of expression

- Knowledge of the power involved in being informed by channels and the legal possibilities for complaint in the case of any breach of the applicable rules in the area of audiovisuals.

5. Values and ideology

5.1. Scope of analysis

- Capacity to detect and take sides in the case of ideology and values resulting from how characters, actions and situations are treated.
- Capacity to analyse and evaluate audiovisual messages as reinforcing the dominant values of society or as vehicles for alternative values.
- Capacity to detect the most generalised stereotypes, especially with regard to gender, race, social or sexual minorities, disabled, etc. and to analyse the causes and consequences of this.
- Capacity to distinguish between reality and its representation offered by the media.

- Capacity to recognise that one cannot be informed about reality if one only resorts to a single medium.
- Capacity to critically analyse the culturally standardising effect sometimes exercised by the media.

5.2 Scope of expression

- Capacity to produce simple messages to transmit values or to criticise those presenting some media products.

6. Aesthetics

6.1. Scope of analysis

- Capacity to get pleasure from formal aspects, i.e. not only what is said but also how it is said.
- Capacity to relate audiovisual products with other manifestations of the media or art (mutual influences, etc.).
- Capacity to recognise an audiovisual product that does not come up to the minimum standard with regard to artistic quality.
- Capacity to identify basic aesthetic categories, such as formal and thematic innovation, originality, style, schools or trends.

6.2. Scope of expression

- Capacity to produce elementary audiovisual messages that are understandable and that provide a certain amount of creativity, originality and sensitivity.

Appendix

Below is a list of the names of the experts who took part in both phases of the initiative.

Iberian-American experts consulted⁴

- Aguaded, Ignacio.** Huelva University, Spain
Amador, Rocío. UNAM, Mexico
Aparici, Roberto. National Open University (UNED), Spain
Aranguren, Fernando. Francisco José de Caldas District University, Colombia
Arévalo, Javier. Public Education Secretary, Mexico
Ávila, Patricia. Latin American Institute of Educational Communication (ILCE), Mexico
Bartolomé, Antonio. University of Barcelona, Spain
Bernal, Héctor. Latin American Institute of Educational Communication (ILCE), Mexico
Blois, Marlene. CREAD, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Bustamante, Borys. Francisco José de Caldas District University, Colombia
Cabero, Julio. University of Seville, Spain
Candioti, Carmen. Ministry of Education, Spain
Crovi, Delia M. UNAM, Mexico
Del Río, Pablo. University of Salamanca, Spain
Dorrego, Elena. Central University of Venezuela
Esperón Porto, Tania. University of Pelotas, Brazil
Fabbro, Gabriela. National University of La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Fainholc, Beatriz. CEDIPROE, Argentina
Fontcuberta, Mar de. Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.
Fuenzalida, Valerio. Catholic University of Chile
Funes, Virginia. UMSA, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
Gabelas, José Antonio. Spectus Group, Zaragoza, Spain
García Fernández, Nicanor. Government of the Principality of Asturias, Spain
García Matilla, Agustín. Carlos III University, Madrid, Spain
Gutiérrez Martín, Alfonso. E. U. of Teachers Segovia, Univ. Valladolid, Spain
Hermosilla, Elena. CONACE, Chile
Hernández, Gustavo. University of Caracas, Venezuela
Kaplún, Gabriel. University of the Republic of Montevideo, Uruguay
López, Emma. Latin American Institute of Educational Communication (ILCE), Mexico
Maquinay, Aurora. Department of Education, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain
Merlo Flores, Tatiana. Catholic University, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Miralles, Rafael. University of Valencia, Spain
Morduchowicz, Roxana. Ministry of Education, Argentina
Obach, Xavier. Televisión Española, Spain
Ojeda, Gerardo. Iberian-American Association of Educational Television (ATEI), Spain
Orozco, Guillermo. University of Guadalajara, Mexico
Ottobre, Salvador. Southern University, Argentina
Pereira, Sara. University of Minho, Portugal
Pinto, Armanda. University of Coimbra, Portugal
Pujadas, Eva. Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain
Reia-Baptista, Vito. University of Algarve, Portugal
Quintão, Vânia. University of Brasília, Brazil
Quiroz, Teresa. University of Lima, Peru
Rincón, Omar. Javeriana University, Colombia
San Martín, Patricia. CONICET, Argentina
Vázquez, Miguel. Eduardo Pondal Institute, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

⁴ This list only contains the Iberian-American experts consulted who made contributions to the base document (46 out of a total of 54).

Experts at a state level⁵

Aguaded, Ignacio. University of Huelva.

Aparici, Roberto. National Open University (UNED).

Candioti, Carmen. Ministry of Education, Madrid.

Del Río, Pablo. University of Salamanca.

Ferrés Prats, Joan. Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona.

Gabelas, José Antonio. Spectus Group, Zaragoza, Spain.

García Fernández, Nicanor. Department of Education of the Principality of Asturias.

García Matilla, Agustín. Carlos III University, Madrid.

Gutiérrez Martín, Alfonso. E. U. of Teachers Segovia, University of Valladolid

Maquinay, Aurora. Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Obach, Xavier. Televisión Española, Madrid.

Ojeda, Gerardo. Iberian-American Association of Educational Television (ATEI).

Pujadas, Eva. Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona.

Vázquez, Miguel. Eduardo Pondal Institute, Santiago de Compostela.

⁵ This list contains the experts at a state level who were present at the seminar held on the 11th of November 2005, in which the document Competences in Audiovisual Communication was approved by consensus (14 out of 18).