

Education in Audiovisual Communication in the Digital Era

Joan Ferrés Prats

- *The fact that audiovisual literacy does not form part of school curricula is a demonstration of the gulf separating the academic world from the everyday life of citizens.*

Paradoxically, the appearance of digital technologies and multimedia has widened this gulf even further, creating new conceptual and operational confusion. The opposite of what one normally supposes, digital or multimedia competence does not entail audiovisual competence. In fact, it often serves to hide its incompetence.

Keywords

Education, audiovisual communication, competence, multimedia, digital, school curriculum.

Groundbreaking initiatives

During the 2005-2006 school year, and within the framework of the Educational Innovation Projects, the Generalitat de Catalunya directed an initiative entitled Programme of Education in Audiovisual Communication (PECA in Catalan). It was a groundbreaking proposal in Spain, along the lines that had been promoted by the Ministry for Education and Science of the government of the Principality of Asturias, now six years ago, on introducing an optional subject in all schools in the autonomous community entitled *audiovisual communication and multimedia*.

However, it seems paradoxical that, in academia, we should consider initiatives as groundbreaking and innovative that consist of introducing a kind of communication into curricula, namely audiovisual, that has been in existence for over one hundred years and that, throughout this century, has impregnated and continues to impregnate the collective imaginary of many generations of children, young people and adults.

This is yet more proof of the traditional disassociation between the educational world and popular culture or, in other words, of the distance between the classroom and the everyday life of children and young people.

The paradox is that these initiatives are truly groundbreaking and innovative because they are exceptional. They are the only initiatives to introduce education in audiovisual communication into the curricula of formal education. And, curiously, with a well differentiated approach. In the Principality of Asturias they have resorted to an optional subject. This formula allows the content to be dealt with on a broad basis, but only reaches a circle of pupils who choose the subject. Catalonia has opted for a "transversal" or across-the-board approach, spreading the content throughout different subjects. This formula means that all

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pupils can be reached, fundamentally through the areas of society, language and plastic arts, but limits the amount of content covered.

In any case, the exceptional nature of these initiatives is worrying, as it demonstrates the extent of disassociation between school and society. In the social area, throughout the 20th century, audiovisual communication gradually gained ground not only with regard to leisure pursuits but also as a vehicle of culture, above strictly verbal, oral or written communication, becoming the framework of the information society in the form of hegemonic communication. On the other hand, in the academic world, audiovisual communication was first neglected and then forgotten in favour of the dominant verbal culture and, finally, with the advent of new technologies, the concept of audiovisual communication was diluted (and consequently also marginalised and forgotten) within the generic and confusing concept of *information and communication technologies* (TIC).

Audiovisuals in the digital era

The appearance of digital and multimedia technologies does not seem to have helped to put things in their place. On the contrary, it seems to have increased confusion and misunderstanding.

In fact, from comments made by some experts, we may deduce that audiovisual literacy has been replaced by digital literacy. These comments suggest a lack of knowledge of what this important technological advance entails.

The possibility to digitalise a whole range of texts has led to an extraordinary strengthening of their communicative capacities, increasing the possibilities not only to produce, store and handle information but also to ensure that the receiver interacts with it creatively.

But this happens both in audiovisual and in verbal language, which means that, both in one area and in the other, digital literacy does not preclude literacy in the respective codes of expression. Currently, a person cannot be considered literate, not verbally nor in audiovisual terms, without a certain digital literacy. But digital literacy alone does not confer any kind of competence in verbal or audiovisual communication.

Similar comments may be made with regard to the concept of *multimedia literacy*. Technological advances, such as the appearance of multimedia, substantially modify communication and strengthen its persuasive and seductive effects. In multimedia communication, as it increases the quantity of mechanisms and codes available, the transmitter can take advantage of the specific potential of each one of these mechanisms and codes.

But this does not mean that, if the receiver tries to confront these effects, he or she does not need to know their peculiarities, conventions and expressive mechanisms of each and every code and vehicle. In other words, competence in multimedia does not replace audiovisual competence, as it does not replace verbal competence. Quite the contrary; it actually requires them.

It is because of all this confusion, contradiction, divergence and discrepancy that we feel the need to promote initiatives aimed at introducing or strengthening education in audiovisual communication, not only in the school sector but in all educational areas, including universities and adult education.

The aim of publishing this special edition of *Quaderns del CAC* is to help to ensure that education in audiovisual communication is recognised as necessary and relevant curricular content within current social and cultural environments. In other words, we must ensure that competence in audiovisual communication is recognised as a deficiency that must be resolved in school and university study plans and in adult education.

The organisation of the volume

This single themed edition of *Quaderns del CAC*, dedicated to education in audiovisual communication, is fundamentally made up of a series of studies carried out over the last few years concerning initiatives related directly or indirectly to the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC in Catalan). Some articles have been added to complete the volume, providing a more global view of the issue:

Competence in audiovisual communication: proposal based on dimensions and indicators

The concept of *competence* is one of the axes on which the

most recent educational reforms have been based in all countries of the European Union and is the central axis of the educational reform being promoted in Spain.

One of the most evident proofs that education in audiovisual communication has been neglected by the academic world is the fact that, in Spain and among educational professionals concerned about this area, there has been no initiative aimed at defining and agreeing on the concept of *competence in audiovisual communication*.

The article on this issue offered here is the result of research carried out with the collaboration of a large number of experts in audiovisual communication, sponsored by the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC) and promoted by the UNICA group from the Pompeu Fabra University.

A preliminary document was drawn up at this university on the concept of *audiovisual communication*, based on the professional experience of the members of the team behind the initiative and based on an analysis of similar studies carried out around the world.

This initial document was analysed and evaluated by around fifty renowned experts in audiovisual communication in the Iberian-American area. The contributions of these experts were incorporated into the initial document. This second document was analysed and debated by around fifteen experts from Spain, meeting in a seminar. The aim was to come to an agreement on a document that would explain the criteria and characteristics that would define competence in audiovisual communication. The article presented is the result of this collaborative work.

Education in audiovisual communication: perspectives and proposals for action in Catalonia

This document systematically analyses in detail the different aspects from which education in audiovisual communication should be tackled: based on a justification of its need and an outline of its history, a definition should be reached of the content that should be covered or a presentation of the most urgent steps that should be taken in the different areas, from school education to university and adult training, without forgetting the role of the mass media in this field.

One of the elements that makes this document so valuable is probably the fact that it has been drawn up and approved, within the framework of the Catalonia Broadcasting Council

(CAC), by the Forum of Entities of Audiovisual Users, which means it has been approved and agreed on by representatives from more than forty entities in Catalan civil society, interested in some way in the social consequences of audiovisual communication.

The CAC has sent this document to the academic authorities, both at a state level and for Catalonia, so that they may know the concerns, desires and demands of those Catalan institutions that are most worried about education in audiovisual communication.

Approach to education in audiovisual communication in the world

This article aims to place the problems of integrating audiovisual literacy in school curricula in a world context, from an academic and conceptual perspective.

The article, written by Mercè Oliva from the UNICA group of the Pompeu Fabra University, reviews the most significant experiences in education in audiovisual communication that have been carried out in the world, underlining the differences in approach, both in terms of theoretical concepts and also in how these are structured and located within the different curricular frameworks.

Fundamentally, those experiences are mentioned, carried out in countries that have stood out or still stand out for having given these problems preferential attention: from Canada and the United Kingdom to Australia and the countries in the north of Europe. At the end of the article, before the conclusions, a detailed analysis is carried out of the situation in education in audiovisual communication in Catalonia.

Manifesto for education in audiovisual communication

This *Manifesto for audiovisual and multimedia education* was drawn up by a group of experts in audiovisual communication meeting in Galicia in December 2005, at a seminar held within the framework of the International Meeting on Audiovisual Education.

The Manifesto was addressed to the academic, Spanish and local authorities at a historic time, because the educational reform was being drawn up. This was therefore considered to be an ideal opportunity to introduce content related to audiovisual communication into the new school curricula.

Conclusions of the White Paper: education in the audiovisual environment

In 2002, the Catalonia Broadcasting Council (CAC) publicised its *White Paper: education in the audiovisual environment*, with the aim of promoting one of the most important tasks among those assigned to the Council, namely that of attending to and protecting children and teenagers.

This single-themed edition reproduces the third block of the paper, dedicated to the conclusions and proposals structured around five broad lines: that of knowledge and research; that of information, training and education; that of production and dissemination; that of involvement and that of regulation and self-regulation.

The aim of reproducing these conclusions and proposals from the *White Paper* is to offer a local and pragmatic framework for the problems of education in audiovisual communication.