Overview of Education in Audiovisual Communication

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■ *Although for decades the need has been realised to introduce education in audiovisual communication (EAC) in formal education, there is no agreement as to the model to be followed. This article reviews the main debates being held on EAC: how it is defined and what name it should be given; on which approaches it should be constructed; what content it should include; and how to incorporate it into curricula. The text also examines how these debates take shape in the educational systems of different countries, paying particular attention to Catalonia, in order to highlight the limitations and opportunities of current proposals.*

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1. Introduction

Most articles, studies, declarations, etc. about media education usually start by citing a whole series of statistical data aimed at demonstrating the significant presence (and influence) of the media in the life of young people and children and on society in general, as well as the central role they play in many social processes. The defence of education in audiovisual communication is based on this idea, i.e. teaching how to understand and use the media.

Unesco's founding declaration of Grunwald in 1982 already pointed out that "political and educational systems need to recognise their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication", given the scarce presence of media education in educational systems (a great distance being established between education and the real world). But although the importance of this area has been pointed out insistently for decades, the presence of audiovisual education in educational institutions around the world is irregular and, in many cases, little and relatively recent.

The aim of this article is to review how media education is currently understood, focusing on its presence in formal education, particularly secondary. Evidently, media education cannot be limited to this area but must also include many other contexts, such as continued education, non-formal and adult education. But it is in formal primary and secondary education where the greatest effort must be made in this area, given that it plays the largest part in constructing and developing new generations.

In this article we will review some of the debates concerning media education around the world and we will study different approaches, content and options to introduce media education into formal education curricula. Finally, we will see what form these debates take in

Catalonia in order to point out a few of the limitations and opportunities of the present model.

2. Education in audiovisual communication (EAC): terms and definitions

When we talk about media education we can find many similar concepts that refer more or less to the same idea: teaching how to understand, analyse and use the media. It is therefore not a question of educating through the media ("education *with* media"), using them as support material (e.g. seeing October, by Sergei Eisenstein, to illustrate a lesson on the Russian revolution), but rather of transforming audiovisual communication into an object of study per se.

As we have mentioned, various terms are used to refer to this field: media education, media literacy, education in audiovisual communication, audiovisual education, etc. One or other of these terms are preferred in different contexts. So, for example, "media literacy" is the concept normally used in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, while "educación para los medios" or "education for the media" is used in Latin America, and "education in audiovisual communication" (educació audiovisual) in Catalonia.

Obviously each term has nuances that differentiate it from the others. However, the exact definition of each term varies significantly depending on the author or institution consulted. In fact, it is significant that, in numerous studies and articles on this area, the first chapter often concerns different expert opinions on their definition of different terms related to this area.[1]

In this article, given the space limitations, we will leave these debates to one side and use the concepts of *media education* (ME) and *education in audiovisual communication* (EAC) without differentiating between the two.

And similar to the lack of agreement as to the most suitable term to refer to education in the media, neither is there agreement as to what it is and what content it should have. Below we will review some of these debates.

3. From protectionism to empowerment

Historically, EAC dates back to a *defensive* focus: the aim was to protect children from the perils supposedly represented by the media, particularly television. These "perils" could be cultural, political or moral (Buckingham; Domaille: 2001a). In the first case, the media are seen as a kind of "low culture", sub-products without quality, the watching of which undermines children's sensitivity and interest in literature, art, etc. (in other words, in authentic culture, a source of personal enrichment). According to this point of view, the aim of EAC should be for children to learn how to appreciate high culture, rejecting the products of the media. In other words, they should read more and watch less television. This posture is also implicit in many approaches that are concerned about the shift from written culture towards an audiovisual culture, reminding us gloomily of the virtues of the former, which is gradually being lost (and only seeing the negative side of the latter).

In the second case, the media are seen as dangerous because they promote a series of negative beliefs and political ideologies, normally related to capitalism, the consumer society and cultural domination. So EAC would aim to expose these false values conveyed by the media so that young people reject them. This posture can be found particularly in countries in Latin America, with the aim of counteracting the strong presence of North American products.

Lastly, the moral dangers of the media would be related to inappropriate or dangerous values and behaviour concerning sex, violence and drugs. The aim of EAC in this case would be for children to adopt moral and healthy forms of behaviour, rejecting those conveyed via media messages. Examples of this posture can be found, as we will see, in some states of the United States.

Two issues attract our attention in these postures. Firstly, how the media are described (particularly television) as something essentially negative (sometimes even harmful) that stupefy, manipulate and dirty the minds of those who watch them. The potential benefits and pleasures that might

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[1]   See, for example, Fedorov (2003) or Ofcom (2004).

be provided by media messages are denied in favour of an exaggerated emphasis on the harm they can cause.

Secondly, it is also interesting to point out how people believe EAC should be carried out and what the ultimate objective should be. So, from this perspective, there is only "one" correct way to watch television, in the same way that there are only certain valid beliefs and values, and the job of educators is to teach this to their pupils. So there is no room for critical reflection or debate. EAC is seen as a kind of *inoculation*, a preventative measure against the media's supposed contamination or even a way of keeping children away. A paradigmatic example is the slogan "*kill your television*", which guides some of these approaches.

An example: the USA

The USA is one of the countries where media education is still related to a protectionist posture, related to morals. So all the initiatives by the federal government since the nineties (a time when people once again became interested in this issue, after the back-to-basics educational policy of the eighties)[2] have been along these lines, with the aim of "inoculate adolescents against unhealthy media messages about sexuality, violence, nutrition, body image and alcohol, tobacco and drug use"[3].

This can also be seen in the secondary education of each state. Even though each state has a different situation[4], in many cases we find the content of media education within subjects related to health (Health, nutrition and consumerism). Here the aim is to protect young people from the bad influence of the media in the same terms as we referred to earlier. An example of this posture is the document Media Literacy: an exciting tool to promote public health and safety for Washington's communities and schools, published by the Washington State Department of Health, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services and the Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction, which states that the media are a risk for young people that must be neutralised through education.

It is interesting to see how, from this point of view, media education is claimed as an alternative to censorship. We can find an example of this in the document Media Literacy: An alternative to censorship (Heins; Cho, 2003), from The Free Expression Policy Project, which states that "Popular culture can glamorize violence, irresponsible sex, junk food, drugs, and alcohol; it can reinforce stereotypes about race, gender, sexual orientation, and class; it can prescribe the lifestyle to which one should aspire, and the products one must buy to attain it". All this leads to "calls to censor the mass media in the interest of protecting youth", in other words, its content must be controlled.

Given that this kind of measure is seen as an attack on the part of administration against free speech, the self-protection of children and young people is presented as an alternative, i.e. they themselves can reject the content that harms them. How can this be achieved? Through media education, which must work on the viewers' analytical skills and critical thought. We see here, therefore, how critical thought and the liberal demands for minimum state intervention in media content are combined.

Compared to this defensive focus, we find other proposals more closely linked to the idea of *empowerment* (Buckingham; Domaille: 2001a), in which EAC is not seen as a form of protection but of *preparation*. So the aim is not for children to watch television in a certain way (or not watch it at all) but rather to make them able to take considered

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2   For more information on the history of media education in the USA, see Heins; Cho (2003: 7-32).

3   For example, in 2000 the Department of Education subsidised 10 educational projects on media education, five focusing on violence in the media and the remaining five on other "dangers" (drugs, sex, etc.). Another example we find in the report published in 2002 by the United States government that supported media education from the perspective of educating young people about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. (Heins; Cho: 2003).

4   Nonetheless, there are cases in which EAC is incorporated within subjects such as language or social science and in which the approach is closer to critical thought and to attitudes we find in Canada or the United Kingdom.

decisions regarding the media. This approach could already be found in Unesco's initial proposals in this area[5], as well as in most of the countries in the west (United Kingdom, Canada, European countries, Australia, etc.).

The aim is to develop skills of comprehension and analysis to encourage active and critical involvement on the part of students instead of submitting them to a specific posture. There is no single way to watch television but rather each person must have the capacity to watch it in his or her own way, producing meanings that are both personal and socially relevant.

So the need for EAC arises more from the central position held by the media in social, political and cultural life today rather than due to the risks involved, although this does not mean that this approach forgets the influence they may have on children and young people, as well as other "negative" aspects.

This central role of the media in current political and social processes would explain the fact that this definition of EAC from the empowerment approach is related to concepts such as critical thought, democratic involvement and citizenship, seeing EAC as a right that enables pupils to act as fully fledged citizens, capable of forming part of the public arena of social communication. For this reason, the capacity to access the media, the selection and use made of them are highly important elements in the issues of EAC[6].

At the same time, attention is not only placed on television (the omnipresence of which, due to the protectionist approaches, concentrates all mistrust, fear and rejection) and all the media are included in EAC: press, radio, television, cinema, internet, multimedia, comics, photography, etc.

It is also interesting to note how, in this perspective, the idea of *enjoyment* appears, a concept completely excluded from the previous approach. That is, television, cinema, etc. are seen as sources of pleasure, a pleasure that must be worked and reflected on but never minimised. So many of the EAC initiatives attempt to make pupils reflect on why they like certain kinds of programmes in order to convert this into conscious enjoyment. However, this last aspect is usually relegated to second place because, as Lewis and Jhally (1998) have commented, EAC usually focuses more on "helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers".

An example: the United Kingdom

In order to illustrate this view of EAC and the relation established with the concept of citizenship, we will take a brief look at a statement from the government of the United Kingdom regarding this area. Consequently we do not intend to review EAC globally in the United Kingdom, a complex goal and outside the scope of this article, both due to this country's long tradition in media education and also due to the large number of institutions dedicated to this.

In 2001, the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) published Media literacy Statement 2001: a general Statement of Policy by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on Media Literacy and Critical Viewing Skills, a statement of what the DCMS understands as media literacy and a point of reference for future media literacy policy[7].

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5 Both in the founding declaration of Grunwald in 1982 (which we have referred to at the start of this article), as well as in subsequent documents on this area, such as the conferences that took place in 1990 in Toulouse ("New Directions in Media Education"), in 1999 in Vienna ("Educating for the media and the digital age") and in 2002 in Seville ("Youth Media Education") and the report Media Education: a global strategy for development drawn up in 2001 by D. Buckingham.

6 Although these proposals are not limited to these aspects but usually propose an extensive study of the media, in all their aspects: from audiovisual language to reception, including the processes and forms of production. We will return to these aspects later.

7 This statement arises from a seminar to examine the media education initiatives being carried out in the United Kingdom and organised by this same department in 1999. A seminar that, in turn, arose as a response to the recommendation that the government should lead the coordination of a national strategy for media education, contained in the report Violence and the Viewer, published by the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission in 1998.

The document starts with a justification of why media education is necessary[8]: "the moving image, particularly but not exclusively television, is now as central to young people's cultural and intellectual development as traditional print (books and magazines)". Given that young people live in an environment full of media (media that are sometimes to be found in their bedroom: "media rich bedroom"), "to take their place in the twenty first century, children must be screen-wise as well as book-wise".

As we have already seen, what justifies EAC is not so much the supposed perils of the media for children and young people but rather the need to prepare them so they can develop in a context dominated by the media. At the same time, neither is it a question of limiting EAC to the study of television but rather extending this to all media.

For this reason, "children will need to appraise critically, and assess the relative value of information from different sources, and gain competencies in understanding the construction, forms, strengths and limitations of screen-based content". Even more so when technological convergence leads to "an expansion in non-linear access to material where the user decides his or her own schedule", something that increases the need for self-regulation on the part of viewers, who must know how to be critical in order to be able to choose between all the options available (increasingly more numerous).

We can therefore see that media literacy is defined in terms of critical interpretation[9], focused on the aim of pupils establishing their own point of view regarding the media. However, this critical interpretation (understood as the skill of thinking critically about what is being watched) will include a whole range of specific skills, such as being able to distinguish fact from fiction; identifying and appreciating the different levels of realism; understanding the mechanisms of production and distribution; knowing how to judge quality; defending oneself from manipulation and propaganda; distinguishing between information and opinion; differen-

tiating between different levels of non-fiction; identifying commercial messages within programmes (product placement); approaching advertising critically; being aware of the economic reasons behind any television programme; and, finally, consciously justifying one's own preferences.

So those aspects are prioritised that are related to the active and critical use of the media, which must allow us to enjoy it and, at the same time, counteract the negative aspects (therefore in no way are the media seen as neutral or completely positive). At the same time, we can see how this stance disregards other aspects such as audiovisual language, aesthetics, etc.

Finally, all this would justify including EAC within the subject of citizenship, a subject included within secondary curricula as from 2002 with the aim of helping students to develop complete comprehension of their role and responsibility as citizens in today's democracy. And, given the central role of the media in the public arena, the fact that young people can critically select, synthesise and evaluate the information reaching them through the media will be key to understanding how democratic society works and thereby to taking a more active part in it.

4. Content

EAC can include a lot of different kinds of content, given the complexity and breadth of its object of study. In this respect, D. Buckingham and K. Domaille (2001a), based on a study of EAC in different countries around the world, distinguish four broad areas of content:

a) *Language*: where aspects would be included related to media aesthetics, narrative, genres and their conventions, the staging of each medium per se.

b) *Representation*: where media messages and values would be studied, stereotyping, point of view, the aspect of realism, how media don't reflect reality "as it is" but rather construct a specific representation.

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8   We have already seen that, in different contexts, various terms are used to refer to EAC. In the United Kingdom, as in the rest of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the term media literacy is used instead of media education.

9   Perspective that is already made clear in the sub-heading of the statement.

c) *Production*: which would include both the study of the production context (industries, organisations, institutions, etc.), as well as the economic aspects, professional practices, the concept of *authorship*, etc.

d) *Audience*: considering personal response and involvement in media, studying the role of media in constructing identity, different kinds of audience's response to media, how the audience is constructed or the media's influence on social life and the political system.

However, in very few cases do we find all these content categories within in a country's education programmes, as some are normally given priority above others. As we will see below, what is ultimately taught to the pupils will depend on how EAC is incorporated into the curriculum: if it is treated as an independent subject or its content is distributed throughout various subjects (as well as what these subjects are, which include this content).

On the other hand, here we also find the debate as to whether EAC should include the creation of audiovisual texts on the part of pupils. This posture arouses a lot of mistrust, as it involves the risk of transforming EAC into a "workshop" aimed at professional practices, or of emphasising only the technical aspect, leaving to one side its potential as a tool to reflect and question the media (which is precisely what is happening at present with the teaching of ICT). However, this hesitation is being overcome and the need to unite theory and practice is becoming increasingly evident, as shown by the educational curricula of Anglo-Saxon countries or the statements made by Unesco on media education over the last twenty years[10].

5. A subject in itself or distributed throughout different subjects?

Although there is currently quite an agreement among western countries as to the general objectives to be pursued by EAC[11], when these need to be specified in educational curricula we find notable differences and some unresolved debates.

So there is some uncertainty as to whether media education should be an independent subject or whether it should be integrated within other subjects. The first option would allow the media to be dealt with from different angles, giving certain weight to EAC within the course of study, providing it was compulsory and had the same importance as the rest of the "traditional" subjects. However, the problem is that it is often optional instead of compulsory, understood more as a complement than as a subject with its own weight (there are practically no countries where audiovisual content are exclusively within one subject).

The second option is the most habitual and consists of an "across-the-board approach" whose aim is for EAC to have a constant presence in the school. In many cases, however, this content is not properly planned so that we find it "everyone and nowhere". At the same time, in general the skills and competences are not specified that students need to achieve in this subject. In most cases, in assessment, "traditional" content takes priority and media education content has a symbolic presence that goes no further than good intentions. Only in those countries where EAC is more developed, such as England and Canada, are the goals specified that need to be achieved, as well as what must be assessed. The absence of defined assessment criteria obviously contributes to media education's lack of status and to the fact that it ends up depending on the private initiative of the teaching staff.

All this is affected by another problem: the lack of teacher training. The fact that the content of media education usually cuts across different subjects and is included in all the other subjects means that several teachers, who are not experts in the field, need to have the necessary knowledge about the media's characteristics. The constant demands for teacher training in almost all documents analysing the status of EAC in different countries indicate that there is still a long way to go in this area.

When EAC is dispersed throughout the curriculum,

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10 See note 6.

11 Following the perspective of empowerment, mentioned at the beginning of this article.

depending on the subjects where it is included, certain types of content take priority over others. We will carry out a brief review of the different subjects where we can find EAC content around the world and some of the implications.

In most countries, such as England, Canada and Scandinavian countries, we find this content in language subjects, in line with the use of the term media literacy. This option is a result of the broader conceptualisation of literacy that does not focus only on the written word, arising from the change undergone by society with the arrival of the media.

At the same time, an attempt is being made to legitimise EAC by making audiovisual communication as important as written language, conveying seriousness to content that, in many cases, runs the risk of being seen as "secondary", accessory, a "bit of fun" for the students.

We can find an example of this in the language curricula of the *Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training* (CAMET) in Canada[12], where it is said that "the vast spread of technology and media has broadened our concept of lite-racy. To participate fully in today's society and function com-petently in the workplace, students need to read and use a range of texts". So the term "text" is used to refer to any oral, written or visual message (including films, television pro-grammes, comics, advertisements, posters, etc.). In the curriculum, "viewing" and "representing" have the same weight as "reading", "listening", "writing" and "speaking".

With regard to the specific content taught to students, when audiovisual communication is introduced into the subject attention is usually placed on audiovisual language. At the same time, given that, when we talk about literacy, it is understood we are talking about learning how to *read* and *write*, in many cases the subject includes the production of audiovisual texts by the students (from a perspective more focused on creative expression and the suitable use of audiovisual language than on mastering the technology), thereby helping to legitimise this dual nature of EAC.

However, in practice, including all kinds of texts in this subject means that the volume of content is usually excessive, so that the audiovisual content ends up being subordinated to written language[13] and is diluted within the subject. The degree of subordination depends to a large extent on the will (and capacity) of the teacher, as well as the time and resources available.

In addition to language, we can also find EAC content in subjects such as:

- Social science, where content is dealt with related to representation (stereotyping, realism, etc.) and audience (the media's influence on different social processes);
- Plastic arts, focusing more on students creating audiovisual productions;
- Citizenship, where aspects of the media are dealt with related to critical interpretation, the values and ideology transmitted, the use made of them by the media (particularly news programmes), etc.
- Technology, focusing on how the equipment works;
- Music, studying the use of music in different audiovisual productions;
- Art history, focusing on aesthetic aspects, studying the different cinematographic movements, the relation between the media and other artistic disciplines.

All this is complemented with specific EAC subjects, which, as we have seen, are usually optional. These specific subjects can have different approaches, ranging from professionally oriented workshops (where students are introduced to the technical skills related to the media: direction, production, scripting, etc.) to more general theoretical subjects that attempt to cover different areas and provide a general and complete view of audiovisual communication: audiovisual language, audience response, critical thought, creative production, etc.

In short, what is finally taught to students depends on

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12 Where the states of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are included. For more information on media education in Canada, see the Media Awareness Network (http://www.media-awareness.ca).

13 For example, in General Outcome no. 2 of the curriculum for English and Language Arts (ELA) of CAMET, it is explicitly stated that "the study of literature is the main component of the ELA curriculum", a statement that makes it clear that the study of the media is still secondary and subsidiary content to that of written language.

where the content is placed and how the subjects are combined. For example, in Norway this content is distributed among the subjects of language, plastic arts, music and social science, in addition to a specialised but optional course. In England, in addition to the previously mentioned subjects, this content is also found in the curricula of citizenship and technology[14].

From all we have seen so far, we can detect, in general, a certain lack of interest in giving EAC a central position within educational curricula[15]. In contrast with the difficulties to introduce media education, we find the rapid spread of the teaching of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education around the world, due, to a certain extent, to the optimism we are experiencing concerning their possibilities[16]. In some cases they are even confused with media education and the former ends up replacing the latter, something which means leaving to one side everything that EAC can provide in terms of reflecting on the media, given that the teaching of ICT is always more focused on technical knowledge (knowing how to use the equipment) than on a critical and creative perspective.

6. EAC in Catalonia

To finish, we will take a brief look at how these debates apply to the Catalan situation. The education framework in Catalonia is currently going through a period of change. In May 2006 the LOE or public general Education Act was passed and the Catalan Education Act will soon be drawn up. So, although Catalonia has a long tradition, dating back to the seventies, of initiatives focusing on the development of teaching in audiovisual communication, here we will focus on this new framework in order to see the challenges and problems EAC will have to face over the next few years.

To start, we should note that audiovisual communication does not appear in the LOE as a specific subject in any school year, not in compulsory primary or secondary education or in the baccalaureate or "batxillerat" in Catalan. This act specifies that this content will be "transversal" or across the board, i.e. it will have to be worked on throughout the different areas (following what is being done around Europe)[17]. This will obviously determine how EAC will be incorporated into Catalan formal education.

Recently (April 2006) in Catalonia, the definitive text was published for the curriculum debate initiated in January 2005 in order to achieve a National Agreement for Education, a prior stage to drawing up the Catalan Education Act[18]. This document is proposed as "a more global reflection of the approaches that must frame curriculum design, the purposes the educational system must guarantee for students throughout their time at school

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14 The standards of the educational curricula in the United Kingdom can be consulted at: http://www.standards.dfee.gov.uk [Consulted: 7 July 2005].

15 Some of the reasons given for this lack of interest in media education are the conservatism of the educational system, which makes it difficult for non-conventional content to break in; the resistance to considering popular culture as a subject worthy of study; and the potential danger of the "critical thought" that accompanies media education.

16 Optimism related to the concept of the information society.

17 Specifically the following is said: "Notwithstanding its specific treatment in some of the subjects of this year, reading comprehension, oral and written expression, audiovisual comprehension, information and communication technologies and education in values will be worked on in all areas". This paragraph (which appears both in primary education and in compulsory secondary education and the "batxillerat") is the only time EAC is mentioned.

18 This document has been drawn up based on the proposal by five committees of teachers from different educational stages (each committee dedicated to a specific area: language and communication, social and cultural area, science, art and personal development) with contributions from education professionals during the period of open debate.

and the aspects that must be prioritised at a general level and at each educational stage" (2006: 7). In other words, it sets out the framework that must be followed by the new curricula for Catalan education.

The introduction to this document emphasises the need for education to adapt to the new society based on information and communication, leaving behind models based on an industrial society. However, this emphasis, which could seem to increase the importance of EAC in teaching, is not directly translated into the texts of the different areas, in which EAC is present but always as secondary content.

In this same introduction, and as specified by the LOE, audiovisual communication is presented as "transversal" content, which must be dealt with throughout the different areas of knowledge. In principle, it might seem that this constant presence on the part of EAC provides it with a central role in teaching. However, the fact that it is compared with other content such as raising the awareness of sustainability, the peaceful resolution of conflict and the development of healthy behaviour[19] suggests that audiovisual communication does not have the same weight as the "traditional" subjects. EAC is closer to the general values that must be transmitted to pupils rather than to tangible content (i.e. legitimised as an area of study).

If we analyse the texts for each area, references appear to audiovisual communication in four out of the five: the area of language and communication, the social and cultural area, the artistic area and the area of personal development and citizenship. Only in the scientific area is there no mention of EAC.

However, unlike what is happening in other countries, the fact that EAC is located in different areas does not mean that it is dealt with from different perspectives. In fact, it is curious how, in all four cases, emphasis is placed almost exclusively on critical interpretation, leaving other aspects to one side. The fundamental aim of studying audiovisual communication will be to train critical viewers: pupils must learn how to access, select, organise and particularly interpret critically the information they receive from the media. Once again EAC is positioned closer to general values than specific content.

This approach refers us directly to the concept of *empowerment*, linking EAC to the concept of *citizenship*[20]. So the media are not seen as essentially dangerous but rather as central institutions in society that we must be familiar with and know how to use in order to fully form a part of it. So they must be incorporated into teaching not to defend children and young people from their dangers but to transform them into fully-fledged citizens. From this perspective, the media are more an opportunity than a danger.

But, as we have mentioned before, problems arise when critical interpretation eclipses any other perspective of study of audiovisual communication, a problem that we can detect in this document. In fact, there are practically no references to any other aspect of EAC: only in the areas of language and creativity is there a brief reference to learning audiovisual language. This second area also refers to the practical aspect, i.e. the creation of audiovisual messages by pupils, who must master both the technical and the language aspects.

However, we do not wish to be excessively pessimistic in our analysis. Although the approach taken by this document leads us to expect some problems (especially with EAC ending up "everywhere and nowhere"), we will have to wait until it takes definitive shape in a curriculum in order to see how it will be put into practice. Obviously an attempt should be made to ensure that the inclusion of EAC in the classes does not depend solely on the goodwill of the teachers, and that is why it is very important to establish specific competences which the pupils must achieve throughout their education. This document at least shows the

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19 Specifically the following is said: "However, raising awareness of sustainability, the peaceful resolution of conflict, responsible use of the media, development of healthy behaviour, equal opportunities, prevention of sexist conduct, the formation of democratic and citizenship values must be present throughout the curriculum and in educational actions" (pg. 6).

20 However, curiously, where the media appear least is in the area of personal development and citizenship, where they are only highlighted as a source of models for young people

determination of almost all areas to include audiovisual communication and the media in formal education.

Within the need to specify the competences students must achieve in order to legitimise the abstract concept of EAC and provide it with content, we can find other initiatives that have been carried out to date by the Department of Education that show some interest in the area and should be taken into account with a view to future curriculum design. An interesting example is the proposal drawn up by Aurora Maquinay and Xavier Ripoll, *Basic competence in audiovisual education*[21]. Here competence in audiovisual communication is positioned as a part of a basic competence in information and communication technologies (ICT).

This is an attempt to move the content related to ICT, which has been incorporated so easily into educational centres, towards a less technical and more critical focus, a more global view that also includes audiovisual communication. "We believe a new definition of *audiovisual education* is required, adding to it all the elements that new technologies provide us and taking very much into account the fact that mastering multimedia language also involves, and particularly so, a knowledge of the codes of audiovisual language".

We should also point out the need to teach reading and writing, linking EAC with literacy and underlining the importance of knowing how to decipher audiovisual messages and create new ones. This emphasis on the idea of audiovisual literacy is very interesting, as it legitimises EAC as an object of study and places it beyond simple "values". Already in the guidelines for the deployment of the curriculum for primary education, drawn up by A. Maquinay in 1994 and preceding this document, it was noted that "learning how to read and write today cannot be limited to verbal language but we must learn how to read and write images and sounds". Unfortunately, this concept does not appear in the National Agreement for Education.

At the same time, it is also useful to attempt to deal with audiovisual communication in all its complexity. So these competences are divided into historical and social impact, audiovisual communication (including agents of product and the production process, categories of the different media, literacy in media language and media representation) and technological literacy. The aim is for pupils to know, in general and in depth, all the aspects that go to make up audiovisual communication. At the same time, the proposal also sequences content by age and school year, understanding that a serious approach to EAC can only be achieved after specifying the content and competences that must be achieved through study.

7. Conclusions

After briefly examining some of the debates around the introduction of media education in formal teaching, reviewing different approaches, content and options for incorporating it within curricula, and seeing how these debates take shape specifically in Catalonia, we will end this article by pointing out some aspects we feel are worthy of consideration (particularly now, when we are developing a new education act).

Firstly, we may say that, in Catalonia, firm interest has been detected in incorporating EAC into formal teaching from almost all areas. It therefore seems that there is agreement insofar as the central role of the media in cultural, political and social life must be translated into its presence in school.

However, specifically, this incorporation has various problems, without doubt because of the difficulty of the educational system in introducing new content as a fully-fledged subject. So it seems that Catalan (and Spanish) formal education resists considering audiovisual communication as yet another area of study, comparable to

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21 This proposal has its precedents in the documents also drawn up by Aurora Maquinay in the nineties (in 1994 the guidelines were published for the deployment of the audiovisual education curriculum in infant and primary education and, in 1996, that corresponding to secondary education) within the framework of educational reform in 1990 (the LOGSE or Act for the General Organisation of the Education), a reform with which audiovisual education received a definitive boost and found its place in formal education. Here, audiovisual education already appears as "transversal" and necessarily treated from an interdisciplinary perspective across all the areas that go to make up the school curriculum.

social science or language, and always positions it within the "ethereal" area of values (in the sense that it appears both everywhere and nowhere).

This leads us to ask whether EAC is really "across the board". So, although the aim of incorporating EAC throughout the curriculum is to make audiovisual communication present in the educational system, we believe that it is not given, at any time, the legitimacy it deserves as an object of study per se. To this we should add a second problem, which we have already mentioned: namely the teaching staff. The fact that EAC is present throughout the curriculum means that the responsibility for training pupils lies with the teachers, who are not experts in the subject. For these reasons, we believe that serious thought must be given to whether distributing EAC throughout the curriculum is the most suitable option when incorporating it into schools and institutes. The best option might be to turn it into a specific (and compulsory) subject.

Finally, in order to legitimise education in audiovisual communication, we must also insist on the need to provide specific content without being restricted to the area of values (which, as we have mentioned, are more intangible). Critical interpretation can be positioned as the main objective of EAC but it can only be constructed on a solid base of content that covers all the subject's complexity. At the same time, it is also important to specify the competences pupils must achieve at each level and ensure that the introduction of EAC in the different subjects does not depend exclusively on the goodwill of the teachers.

Therefore, after so many years of debate, there is still a long way to go before EAC finds the place it deserves within the educational system.

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