

CITIZENSHIP AND MEDIA EDUCATION: TWO STRONGLY RELATED CONCEPTS IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA AGE

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Abstract

The omnipresent media messages have positive and negative effects on the perceptions citizens have on the world and on the social integration of others. That is why it is necessary to educate to the media consumption, so that citizens can benefit from the positive effects avoiding the negative ones. Being literate implies to be trained to be a critical consumer and a reflexive producer of media messages. Citizens that do not develop those competencies are at risk of becoming info-excluded and progressively socio-excluded. Media Education is therefore essential to Citizenship Education. This paper presents a research conducted with pupils, aged from 11 to 16, that aimed to contribute to the development of competencies at reception and production level of media messages for school newspapers.

It also presents the project of Media Literacy/Citizenship Education to be developed in Castelo Branco region, Portugal, from 2007 till 2010.

Key words: Citizenship Education, Media Literacy, Media Education, Multimedia CD-Rom.

1. The need for a new education

The 21st Century is a "media-saturated society" (Hobbs, 2007, Richardson, 2007), where citizens cannot avoid the contact with the media and the media messages. This contact consists in an interaction between the individual and the message because the first decodes the second according to his/her own values, beliefs, and the political, cultural, economical and social contexts. In this way he/she completes the meaning of the message (Pinto, 2003).

Media messages are not a window to reality (Buckingham, 2003), but a code of reality according to more or less clear contexts and objectives. It is important therefore, according to Thoman e Jolls (2005) that individuals are aware of five aspects related to the means of communication: *i*) all media messages are constructed; *ii*) media use symbol systems with codes and conventions to deform the messages; *iii*) media messages have values and points of view; *iv*) different people interpret the same message differently; *v*) the majority of media messages are constructed to get gains and/or power.

There is a consensus that the constant interaction with the media has an effect on individuals, either in the way of regarding the world or in behaviours and values (Morduchowicz, 2003). Media can have positive effects and negative ones. Therefore the best position is to benefit from the positive effects, avoiding being affected by the negative effects (Potter, 2005).

Because media have a central place in society it is important that each individual becomes an attentive consumer of media messages but also a producer in order to intervene in social discussions with his/her opinions and thoughts, intervening socially. This is doubtless a way to participate, to have a democratic citizenship in a digital world where the way of communication is not from one to many, but from one to one, from many to many (Richardson, 2007).

In order to develop skills at this level, each individual needs to develop specific skills, to accede training to an education for democratic citizenship. This education must take place in an informal environment, in society, but also in a formal environment, in schools. The school could not resign from such an important task (Candeias, 2003). The school can not achieve the task so far in countries from the south of Europe, as in Portugal, as the present research shows

2. Citizenship Education: theory vs practice

In Southern European Countries there is nowadays a gap between what educational laws advocate and the practices developed in schools as far as Citizenship Education. This conclusion belongs to a study made in 45 European countries which refers that the most positive aspects of the law is the autonomy granted to schools to develop curricula in this area and to reinforce relationships with the different community actors (Bîrzéa *et al*, 2005).

At this level, Portugal has good legislation. Autonomy is granted by Decreto-Lei 115/98. Citizenship Education is foreseen in documents such as Law 46/86 (Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo), a Lei-Quadro 5/97 (Educação Pré-escolar), Decreto-Lei 6/2001 (Currículo Nacional do Ensino Básico) and Decreto-Lei 74/2004 (Organização e Gestão do Currículo no Ensino Secundário). These documents refer that the school must have an important role in the training of active, responsible and participative citizens. They call attention to the need of children and young people acquiring: *i*) critical and reflexive mind; *ii*) moral, cultural and aesthetic values; *iii*) individual and collective participative habits in school and society; *iv*) research and problem solving skills; *v*) scientific and technical knowledge that help their insertion in the world of work; *vi*) respect from diversity of opinions. In Portugal, Citizenship Education is foreseen by Law, but it is important to understand if it really works in practice.

The study coordinated by Bîrzéa *et al* (*idem*) does not specify the situation in each country but underlines three challenges to be achieved by Southern Europe: *i*) effective participation of students, parents and local authorities in school management; *ii*) assessment of the school projects at citizenship level in order to understand the proposals and the outcomes of the work developed; *iii*) initial or in service teacher training.

The concretisation of these challenges is fundamental so that Citizenship Education becomes effective. Literature review shows that Portugal is not prepared to match the three challenges effectively.

In relation to the first one (participation of educational actors) Ruivo states that lately we are watching to an misunderstanding desinvestment in Education, with a clear drawback in many domains among them in the Basic and Secondary schools autonomy (2006, pp. 96-97).

In relation to the second challenge (assessment of school projects and analysis of outcomes) Afonso considers it is too soon to move forwards, because there is no representative study that allows analysing results, success and difficulties that students and teachers face. He considers there is a positive perception of what is going on that lays on debates and seminars but also in the knowledge of concrete experiences (2004, p. 459).

In relation to the third challenge, Salema, Martins, Costa, and Tuna conclude that teachers reveal competencies to develop activities related to Citizenship Education, but that they should not give up continuous training in the area: "To educate for democratic citizenship in contexts of ongoing change requires the trainer to become aware of the need for continuous training in this area" (2003, p. 9). The same research refers that within the school, Citizenship activities can be developed outside traditional classes, but also in specific spaces.

In Portugal, in Basic Education there are three non disciplinary curricular areas: Tutoring, Civic Training and Project Area. The last two are clearly vocated to work with transversal topics and so approach Citizenship Education (Afonso, idem, p. 449). This door is not closed as and Domaille e Buckingham (2001) refer in a study conducted in 35 countries, Portugal included. In the conclusions they underline these two areas as important spaces to approach Media Education. Tavares (2000) states that Project area seems an adequate space to deal with media (2001, p. 50).

3. The broadening of the concept Literacy

According to Lundgren (2004), Buckingham (2003), Gonnet (2001), and entities like Euro Media Literacy (2006) and Media-educ (2004), Media Education develops skills that allow citizens to become critical receivers and reflexive producers of media messages. Hobbs (1998) adds: *i*) the understanding that there is a political, economical, social and cultural background that influences Media; *ii*) the use of Media to act and provoke social challenge.

The European Union, in its official site, recognises that Media are a powerful economical and social force, besides being an accessible means that strengths socialization and participation in the democratic life. It is needed however to clarify that media messages are constructions, not portraits of reality, not yet decoded: "The media do not offer a transparent window of the world" (Buckingham, idem, p. 4). Potter sees a frontier between reality and the media messages. Media Education allows us to know that frontier: "Becoming more media literate gives you a much clearer perspective to see the border between your real world and the world manufactured by the media" (2005, p. 13).

Media Education is needed so that each citizen can be an active participant in society: "It is one of the key pre-requisites for active and full citizenship" (European Union, on-line).

A study developed in nine European countries, Portugal included, refers the need to include Media Education in school curricula, in teacher training inclusive, because of the lack of teachers' skills in the use of new Media (Mediappro, 2006). Ayres states that that gap can have negative effects in Media Education: "If teachers lack confidence or knowledge in dealing with the complexity of the world of media professionals this can be detrimental to media education" (2004, p. 1).

A new literacy will be needed. Technological, economical and social progress as well as globalization itself led that more than reading, writing and counting is needed, as it was in the 80's of the 20th Century (Unesco, 2003). Kress states that we live in an era where the image overlies the text and the screen, the book. These facts have effects at several levels such as in learning, communication and social interaction. This is why the same author speaks about "a revolution of a social and not just a technological kind" (2003, p. 17).

4. Media Education and Citizenship Education

We think there is a close relation between Citizenship Education and Media Education. Carvalho, Sousa e Pintassilgo (2005) refer that Citizenship Education was associated to social integration and to normalization during "Estado Novo" (1926-1974). Only after the April Revolution (1974) it was seen as important to educate reflexive and participative citizens socially.

Media Education has developed since the 60's with UNESCO. In the last 25 years documents arrived to Ministries of Education of several countries, Portugal included (Gonnet, 1999).

The two areas are included explicitly or implicitly in the Reform of Education of 1989 (Decreto-Lei nº 286/89). We refer to Annex I of Desp. 142/ME/90, that proposes the realization of interdisciplinary activities, linked to the environment as well as practical use of acquired knowledge and the development of activities that promote the increase of initiative, organization, autonomy and solidarity (Ministério da Educação, 1990).

However, results are not the expected ones. Portuguese students did not develop the skills attained by students from other countries. A global transversability was not attained because not all teachers were involved (Roque, Carvalho, Afonso e Fonseca, 2005). The need to attain these skills is there, especially at Citizenship Education (Carvalho, Sousa e Pintassilgo, idem) and Media Education level (Remy, 2003).

The European Union decided to make a contribution for the development of these two areas. It issued two documents that attribute a key role to Citizenship Education having in mind that it is a main objective of educational reforms (Bîrzéa, idem). In 2007 it will publish a document where the Member States are asked to introduce Media Education in the curricula (European Union, 2007).

To Hobbs (1998), activities related to Media Education contribute to Citizenship because they: *i*) develop the capacity of analysis and communication, explaining how the world of social communication work and the importance of diversity of opinions; *ii*) develop in spaces where students develop skills of leadership and problem solving; *iii*) motivate young people to accede several sources and means of information

5. The CD-Rom "Vamos fazer jornais escolares"

We tried to contribute to the effective integration of Media Education and Citizenship Education in the curricula of Basic Schooling. The National Curriculum of Basic Schooling (2001, on-line) defines competences that teachers should help students to develop. One of them consists in establishing a close relation between school, media and ICT.

We decided to produce the CD-Rom "Vamos produzir jornais escolares", a multimedia application that helps students from 11 to 16 years old (from the 5th to the 9th Grades), and teachers to produce school newspapers either printed or on-line.

We decided to make a CD-Rom because it is a digital technology that can include traditional and digital media. It leads users to Internet sites, search engines and handbooks on-line.

We chose school newspapers because there are a lot in Portugal. Público (2005), for example, has a National Contest for school newspapers and there are more than 200 competitors yearly. The school newspaper is an easy accessible and cheap media, "an important resource to develop critical thought reflexive styles and habits, creativity, respect for diversity of opinions and interest for update topics" (Pinto, 1991, p. 7). It can be used in the classroom as a useful pedagogical and didactical tool that can help

several areas (idem). It allows overcoming the gap between schooling and social space that is an obstacle to Citizenship (Remy, 2003). It may develop research skills through confrontation of different ideas. According to Abrantes "Citizenship Education was and is connected with freedom of press, and goes through the link to school newspapers" (1992, p. 66).

The CD-Rom explains how a newspaper is produced and the different journalistic styles; it leads to information search and the analysis of the work developed; it purposes activities for the production of newspapers related to the school environment. Pedagogically it is inserted in the constructivist approach defended by several authors as Pinto (2002) and Luke (2003). It defends group work, problem solving. Lima e Capitão (2003) refer that constructivism should not abdicate from other approaches as cognitivism for example. We have, therefore, an open and flexible curriculum that purposes activities and explicit knowledge about several topics.

6. The CD-Rom in the school

During 2005/06, 104 students from four classes (two from the 6th grade, one from the 7th grade and another from the 8th grade) worked with the CD-Rom in classes of Portuguese, Civic Education and Project Area that took place in the ICT Room. The teachers organized groups and purposed them activities for the newspaper production. All these classes where video and audio recorded. Direct observation was also made, field notes taken and interviews made. Data collected are being processed and analysed at the moment.

After these first steps it is possible to refer that the work developed with the CD-Rom contributed to the development of Media and Citizenship Education. It is a stimulus the use of ICT by students and teachers.

We are going to present, as an example, the work done by a group of students from the 7th grade.

During the second term we recorded four sessions. The teacher prepared all the work beforehand during several classes of Portuguese. Topics were proposed by the students. This group (five students) chose the topic "The school bar", whose opening and closing hours had been altered and several items of food taken away, as chocolate and chips. The group wrote three questionnaires: one to the students, other to the clerks and the third one to the parents' representative in the Pedagogical Board.

In the first session students wrote the questionnaire aimed to the students and the teacher had suggested: "Look at the CD and find out as the inquiry technique is. We have open questions they are difficult when analysing the data. We can not conclude anything from open questions. We have to have two or three questions to facilitate data analysis" (February, 16th 2006).

T - Let's see this one: "What do you think of the service? Very good, bad, average and what is this?"

S - It is very bad.

T - Bad is enough. The service in the bar is not very bad, God help me.

S - It is not good.

T - Ok, but is not very bad. Put very good, good, average and bad

(...)

T - What time would you like the bar opened? Eight o'clock, right? Eight, eight thirty and as it is now: what time does it open?

S - 9h10 or 9h15.

T - It should be another question here. "Do you agree with the bar timetable?". One leads to the other. "What were the reasons why some food items were taken from the

bar in the beginning of the school year?" Ah, Ok. You put multiple choice answers as well. Health Matters, quality matters, other. What? Very good. "Why do they close around 15h30 and start taken... Do they take the bar away?"

S- The food.

In the next two sessions they reformulated the questionnaires. In the third session (March 14th) they had already photocopied the questionnaires and started data collecting as we can understand from the following dialogue:

S - Oh J., the 9^o[X] only can speak with us in the afternoon. As we do not know what time we have to stay long.

S1- Talk with the teacher.

(...)

S - Teacher, the 9^o[Y] did not have class.

T - Better then. Go to the replacement class.

S - They hadn't either.

T - Do those later.

In the third session (March 14th) they started the data analysis of the data collected so far, and with the teacher advice they interviewed five students of each class of each schooling grade. Data analysis was discussed:

- "Do you think it was al right to take away the chocolates and the chips from the bar?". Six said "Yes" and 19 said "No". Let's see the reasons".

- "No, it is lack of education". This is not very complete.

- Right.

- This says "Yes" because it was bad for health. Write. "No, because chocolate gives energy". There's another very similar: "No, because they are an energy source". Delete that one and put this and two with the same justification.

In the last session the teacher helped the students making contacts, in work organization and task division. It is also possible to infer that they did homework:

T - Students from the bar. Today there is a Pedagogical Board meeting and we have to interview the parents' representative.

S - How can we do that?

T - You have the students' questionnaire. A group is going to analyse the data.

S -But we already have the students' questionnaire.

T - Then two of you are going to analyse the data and one goes to the computer.

S - We already started that at home [they show Excel graphs].

T - At home. Very good. That's it. Then you have to make the conclusions M.and T. [from another group] can do that very well and are going to help you..

The teacher tries to motivate group interaction and create research habits:

T - This sentence is weard: "Do you think they did well taking out chocolates and chips from the bar?".

S - "No. Because.

T - Exactly: "No, because, otherwise hypoglycaemic are going to the Hospital.

S - hypoglycaemic, what?

T - Try to find out what a hypoglycaemic is. We can not go on without knowing a word meaning. A. (student from another group) is in the Library and can bring a dictionary.

Go downstairs and ask Mrs. X to phone to the Library and ask A. to bring a Portuguese dictionary

The text was written afterwards, so we did not assist its production. But it was published in the newspaper. In relation to that we think that students approach the question that interested them and that can be included in a broader problem: youth obesity. Something that the teacher had anticipated and encouraged. "The school newspaper does not interest them a lot because the topics are not interesting to them. It would be important that some could write about games, preferred musical bands. That is what I'm going to ask them" (December 7th 2005).

They collected different opinions about the subject and published the text what means to intervene through media. They practiced written expression and used, in this new situation, knowledge acquired in the Portuguese class. They used the CD-Rom and the Word processor but also the Spreadsheet because they analysed data with Excel (bar graphs). Something interesting that the teacher that was inexperienced in the field referred: "In ICT I do not feel at ease. This work is being very interesting to me and as the students know more than I do in many aspects, I end asking them to help one another because sometimes I can't" (December 14th 2005).

7. A research project to go on

In October 2007, a scientific research project started. It was funded by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia and European Social Fund. The CD-Rom "Vamos fazer jornais escolares" is the research starting point. Researchers from several Portuguese and foreign universities, a newspaper agency and a software enterprise joined the project.

It was called Media Education in Castelo Branco region and aims to: *i*) allow students and teachers a better knowledge in relation to the several steps in the production of a printed or online newspaper; *ii*) improve newspaper reading; *iii*) contribute to students become critical decoders and reflexive producers of media messages; *iv*) increase the use of digital media (CD-Rom, Internet, ...); *v*) improve contents and graphics of existing school newspapers in the region of Castelo Branco; *vi*) approach schools to the educational community.

The designed activities included field work with 27 groups of schools, in order to produce school newspapers in the schools that still do not have it as well the improvement of existing newspapers.

Teachers and students involved in the production of the school newspapers will have the CD-Rom available. They will also have a handbook with pedagogical activities related with the use of the CD-Rom in the production of contents (text and image) for the school newspaper. It will also develop an Internet site to be available for the project.

The local newspaper Reconquista, partner in the project, will print each school newspaper (three editions a year) and will publish a supplement with the best news of those school newspapers. This supplement will be published three times a year. Schools will have the opportunity to publish an on-line newspaper in the Ministry of Education site.

The team of the project will support teachers and students going regularly to the schools and helping with the activities. This will finish in September 2010 with a final assessment made by international experts in the field.

Conclusion

Citizenship and Media Education can be understood as two sides of the same coin: the one that helps preparing citizens for the 21st Century. The CD-Rom "Vamos fazer jornais escolares" aims to contribute for these two transversal areas that may be a reality in the schools and in the curricula through the production of media messages for school newspapers. The first results are interesting and the CD-Rom is going to be improved, delivered in an Internet site and made available for the 29 groups of schools in the region of Castelo Branco, Portugal.

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