"WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA OR DEVELOP IT WITH STUDENTS": DISCOURSES AND FEARS FROM THE TEACHERS

Maria José Brites
Universidade Lusófona do Porto/CICANT (PORTUGAL)

Abstract

Media literacy is a complex and fundamental area nowadays and it is required, worldwide, an investment in teachers training. In this chapter, we will consider the Portuguese reality, based on two different training courses, in the context of two media literacy research projects. The consultation of involved teachers revealed that there are four important dimensions to take into consideration in this type of training. These areas contemplate: 1) issues around digital media, 2) the insurance of a better knowledge of the journalistic cultures, 3) the support to the sharing of knowledge among teachers and 4) a need for a more self-confident feeling on teachers’ skills to understand and implement media literacy at schools.

Keywords: Teacher Training, Education for Media and news, Communication technology.

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues for the need to invest in the training, both pre-service and continuing, of teachers in the field of media education [1-6] this is a strong pillar of articulation with citizenship and democracy [7, 8]. Media education is a key element in developing citizenship and a critical attitude and constitutes a right [9-12]. Living in a deeply mediatized society [13], it is essential that formal educational structures accompany these significant societal changes. Considering the Portuguese context, more than 20 years after the creation of the school library network and after the publication of the media education referential [14] and the school library referentials [15, 16], the work left to do is still extensive.

What do we mean when we talk about media education? This concept has undergone through an evolution over the years and has become increasingly dynamic. There are general definitions of media education that focus on accessing, using, analysing and communicating in various ways. In specific settings, media education can involve many other things. It considers reflection and the ability to critically doubt, participatory capacities and an intrinsic connection to citizenship and digital media, among other aspects.

This progress on what is considered to be media education is evolutionary, corresponding to the challenges that are posed to the practices, the projects, the new tools, the contexts and the challenges that audiences place on it. This specificity is very important, because it creates understanding and corresponds to the challenges that arise in practice. "Both the acquisition and mediation of media literacy are themselves social processes, during which young users perceive social norms about media usage, risks, and opportunities and put these norms into practice." [17]

In fact, it is essential that media education can be expressed with other fundamental dimensions, and that they become vital to thinking of media education in a contextual way. The media, and consequently, media education, are constituted of the elements of our lives, and it is essential that they be articulated with these various components. Otherwise, they are in isolation [17]. Future research should:

"Reinforce life skills in the definition of media literacy: Given that media change certainly continue, there is still a need for a broad conceptualization of media literacy that is not media specific. [...] we would like to propose defining skills primarily by their necessity for social development (e.g., critical thinking, social, or moral skills) and then adapting these skills to specific media developments." [17]

The last decade has been fruitful in the production of research, books and supporting documents for the dissemination of media education. One of these, of marked relevance, is the UNESCO curriculum for teachers that emphasizes the importance of considering capacities, knowledge, activity and
practices/production in the area, without forgetting the assessment and the need for a critical consciousness [18].

Teachers are often overwhelmed with diverse activities in schools, so they don't always have time for new tasks. The UNESCO curriculum [19] offers some suggestions for trainers to consider when they think of activities in schools: they should know the contents and approaches that are already part of the curricular disciplines; they may seek to adapt existing plans or activities; they should encourage students to read and discuss information in different media formats; and finally, they need to know and take into account the themes, areas and priority contexts in the school so that they can adapt educational activities to the media and to the needs of the school.

Teacher training projects in this area are especially challenging, because they enclose a dual need of teachers. On the one hand, the projects must reinforce and even create structures for teachers to become more capable in this area, taking into account that there are limitations in the ability to implement technologies in the school's classroom. "Teacher training in the application of ICTs in education has a long way to go, and requires identification of the factors that can help improve the competencies that current and future teachers must acquire in order to implement digital literacy in our schools" [6]. In addition, on the other hand, the projects must help teachers to have a more positive image of their capacities, as they often see themselves as less capable in the face of much younger pupils [2]. In reality, it is difficult to ignore the differences and generational gaps, which actually may not be so large but are perceived as such by the teachers' negative self-representations. Teachers are aware of these differences [6].

“The presence of technological resources in schools and the high performance of so-called ‘Technology Generation’ or ‘Generation Z’ students are not enough to develop students’ digital competence. The primary key is determined by the technological and pedagogical skills of teachers. [...] Teachers’ digital skills are very important in the development of learning processes to introduce technologies as tools in the service of education.” [6]

A fundamental aspect that relates to generational differences and knowledge, and also with questions of alteration of educational paradigms, is the fact that the educational strategies of teachers sometimes need a more complex exchange of knowledge and collaboration between students and teachers [6], and even among teachers with peers.

This discussion is not of lesser importance, since media education has become a basic competence for enabling participation in society and for understanding the mediatic environment that surrounds us in everyday life. One of the most complex aspects is the evident possibility that students have to create content, and also eventually challenge the hierarchies of those who have this power to create and who does not. Creativity is identified with control and also with reinforcement and the need for competence [17].

In this context, it is considered that the role of researchers working in the area of media [19] and media education, as well as professionals in the area, including journalists [20], are of great support and support for teachers, not only in the realization of projects, but also in the transfer of knowledge that can be useful in working with young people, especially in schools.

“educators are, for reasons of disciplinary and professional constraint, unable to fully engage and learn from the new possibilities offered therein (uneven as they may be), researchers of youth and media have a particular opportunity with respect to informing educational thought and policy in this regard. Put differently, researchers of youth and media are today especially well positioned to make a vital contribution to the lagging perceptions and vocabularies that educators often draw upon in seeking to understand their students, and to energize a debate that has thus far mostly taken place on the peripheries of educational practice. In what follows, I consider the preceding through four lines of reasoning: that young people’s mediated practices are, in newly material ways, redrawing definitions of youth and adolescence long since theorized; that researchers of youth and media are in a unique position to inform educators about these processes of redrawing; that informing educators along these lines can, for researchers of youth and media, contribute to the crucial project of expanding educator’s understandings of young people; and, that in spite of these opportunities, challenges lurk for educators seeking to destabilize staid notions of youth and adolescence”[21].

Media education does not relate to the act of doubting everything, but rather of critically questioning [22, 23].
“Key Questions are significant to inquiry-based practice because critical thinking isn’t just about asking questions – it is about asking important questions. So, for example, NAMLE’s Key Questions avoid shallow book report prompts such as “What was your favorite part?” (which in today’s culture often contributes to an overly self-absorbed world view, as if the only thing important about a book would be what you liked). Instead it provides questions that help students examine why an author, illustrator, or publisher made particular choices, what the book’s impact might be, or why its messages might be important and to whom. Such questions are so important to media literacy education that nearly every major media literacy organization across the globe has developed or adopted their own question set. NAMLE has borrowed from many of those, but tweaked them in ways that make them particularly useful for teachers.” [23]

2 METHODOLOGY

We developed articulated research over time and associated with two research projects, ANLite (2014-2017, post-doctoral research funded by Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology - FCT) and Media in Action (MIA) (2018, project with European funding from DG Connect).

Both projects involved in-depth work on media and news education and also digital storytelling with teachers (up to the 12th grade). In the first case, semi-structured interviews and semi-open surveys were conducted before and after a certified training intervention. In the second case, certified and coordinated training at the European level was created for teachers and they had the option to complete semi-open surveys before and after the training. The countries participating in MIA were the same ones coordinating in the study. In this chapter, we concentrate in presenting the results of the two final surveys in relation to the Portuguese results. We also note that three professors who had performed the ANLite training were simultaneously involved in the training of the MIA project.

Looking at the results about age and working time at school, we see that we are facing a set of teachers that are in the oldest classifications, in age groups of over 40 years and with times of service of over 21 years. This puts them in age groups that are most distant from digital media experiences.

In this chapter, we will address the following research questions: How do teachers perceive the importance of media education and news in school? What constraints do you find in the day-to-day work?

3 RESULTS

The analysis of the results of the two projects shows four major areas of reflection that need more careful attention in the future. These areas are: 1) learning issues regarding digital media, 2) journalistic cultures, 3) the sharing of knowledge between peers and 4) a need for a more self-confident look on the teacher’ skills. The training of teachers in the area of media education still has a long path ahead, and it will be necessary not to neglect these issues as we move ahead.

3.1 New tools (digital)

New tools were one of the fundamental aspects for each of the groups, who had specific opportunities to think and apply tools for the use of media in the school. These tools were mainly related to digital contexts. Although both groups were more focused on future technologies, an ecological, contextual approach was used, considering both traditional and no traditional media. Emphasized the importance of the media in general and was appropriate to each school’s context and the teachers involved in the training. Some of the trainees shared experiences from the training context using digital media and some from before the training with complementary means. However, the proposals for digital work were more desirable, because they constituted a novelty in some cases.

"I will use several tools made available on the Internet on sites I have known during the training. I will use the news more often in preparing my classes and will encourage students to investigate and report more rigorously, based on journalistic ethics. " (QF, R7, ANLite)

"I made contact with digital tools that I did not know and could discuss with colleagues the topics addressed." (QF, R5, ANLite)
3.2 Journalistic culture

In relation to journalistic media, although some of the professors were already accustomed to using news in school contexts for news analysis, to think about how a journalistic text is created or to associate news with specific contexts of a discipline program (for example, "Broaden our knowledge for the use of media in school and in the teaching activity." (QF, R9, ANLite)), the sessions devoted to thinking in journalistic cultures were more ground-breaking.

In the current context of the discussion on misinformation and false news, these sessions (particularly in ANLite) have had an important impact. The participants knew very little about these journalistic cultures, about what is considered to be the news-making complex processes. They came to realize that the tools used by journalists can have an important educational potential [24]. This specific context of training eventually revealed potential for the future [24, 23].

"Learn how to develop varied skills in students using news and leading students to implement a methodology similar to those used in journalism." (QF, R6, ANLite)

"A greater knowledge of how to make news and how it can be useful to work with students." (QF, R13, ANLite)

"I wish I could learn more journalistic techniques that might be useful in teaching the discipline I teach." (QF, R11, ANLite)

To this most vocated component of journalism, the logic of relationship with the dynamics linked to citizenship was also associated:

"Continuing to develop inclusive creative projects, contributing to the training responsible citizens." (QF, R6, ANLite)

3.3 Sharing with peers

In addition to the learning specifically addressed in the content, both groups stood out with evidence about the importance of sharing related experiences, either during the content training sessions or during the final presentation sessions of the work that the trainees performed or intended to accomplish in their school contexts. This was actually considered a great asset, as indicated in the final reflection reports. Almost all of the trainees were unaware of how many media projects and media literacy activities already existed in schools. The panoply and diversity of ideas and implementations resulted, for example, from the contexts of the trainees. Moreover, it is also noted that both groups sought to create activities that did not require a dramatic increase of overtime for teachers [19]; the training lead them to think about the contexts in which they operated.

In fact, subsequent contacts to the groups with some of the trainees revealed synergies that were being established among them, in order to continue to perpetuate the contexts of the groups. In some of the statements that follow the participants reveal their appreciation for the possibility of sharing in both groups:

"On the one hand, [the biggest highlight of training was] the sharing of very diversified experiences, on the other the clear notion that the use of media in a school context can be further explored than it already is." (QF, R8, ANLite)

"The way in which each trainee appropriated the knowledge transmitted throughout the training sessions, resulted in a diversity, richness and quality of the final works presented." (QF, R8, ANLite)

"[What was most distinguished was] the new knowledge transmitted, the clear communication provided by the trainer in the approach of different themes, collaborative work, reflection and sharing between trainees and trainer and the great climate of Learning in the various sessions." (QF, R21, MIA)

"The sharing of experiences and the contents covered allowed us to increase the confidence to integrate in the activities that I develop content on the media." (QF, R2, MIA)

"In several ways, [this is] suitable for different audiences and contexts. In collaborative work with other teachers." (QF, R34, MIA)

"[What I most highlight is the] presentation and exploration of didactic material (digital tools) and the collaborative Work Environment." (QF, R16, MIA)
3.4 Autonomy and confidence

The facilitation of autonomy and confidence to work with media education in the school context is one of the most relevant principles when doing this type of training. It is also one of the hardest to be able to instil in the trainees. In the sense that in the continuity of work in the school, they will be in a daily confrontation with the fact that they work with younger generations, who are more accustomed to working with the technological media [6].

Although in this chapter we do not concentrate on the initial surveys, looking at them and the field notes of the sessions with the teachers, this emphasis on a markedly negative self-perception about the teachers’ capabilities in working with digital media and with education projects for the media, were very evident [6].

Not having an overly positive view of the results of these two groups, we consider that small gains have been seen, which translates into an increase in autonomy and self-confidence throughout the training, especially when trainees are placed in confrontation with the need to think and execute projects in schools, articulated with training. Some of the comments that were made in the final surveys point to this gain.

"I feel more confident and autonomous." (QF, R8, MIA)

“Yes. At this moment I have more tools/knowledge to work this theme." (QF, R15, MIA)

“Yes. I feel more comfortable using different digital applications in my classes. Besides, I got to know new tools." (QF, R17, MIA)

Although these achievements are considered, we do not have an overly positive view of the gains in training over time, if there are no structures, individual possibilities and contexts for facilitating these approaches in schools.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary results point to an ambivalence between considering that these knowledges are fundamental to live in society, to succeed and work, as well as to show the willingness to use this knowledge in the classes and, finally, the self-assessment (excessively) negative of their capacities to guide students and themselves in these innovative learning processes (in the school context).

We note that despite having shown gains from the teachers with whom we worked over several weeks, we are aware that they are not sufficient in the personal/professional context of these professionals in the scope of media education in schools, and much less within the broader school context. Although these professionals were chosen randomly, it is noted that some participated in the two groups and that some others also have interest in these areas. So, the work here was mostly done with professionals who were already interested in media education. If they were disinterested, the results presented would be even more negative.

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