

## Promoting the use of ICT and the development of media literacy and citizenship education: the multimedia CD-Rom "Let's produce school newspapers"

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational tendencies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century still exist: reading, writing and counting were priorities. However, in the knowledge society, citizens must develop other skills to interact in a world pointed out by the ubiquity of media. To be considered a literate citizen today, it implies to be a critical receiver and a reflexive producer of media messages. Nowadays, media literacy and citizenship education are an urgent matter in education, as the use of ICT in schools. In order to bridge the gap between the use of ICT in schools and in society, and in order to develop critical and reflexive skills in young people, a CD-Rom was developed and tested in two Portuguese schools. The CD-Rom "Let's produce school newspapers" motivates pupils to produce newspapers, to read and write critically and to become better citizens. It was developed under the philosophy of criticizing media through media. This paper provides the theoretical background of media literacy and its importance in the development of citizenship education.

**Keywords** Multimedia CD-Rom; media education; media literacy; citizenship education.

### 1. Media Education and the new Citizenship Education

The educational systems in Europe face a crisis because they were not able to meet the actual needs at the educational level. According to Candeias (2003) this crisis is related to five crucial factors: *i*) the systems are based in a social, economical, cultural and political integration logics; *ii*) its economical importance is frequently questioned; *iii*) they addressed to an audience that changed; *iv*) live a legitimating crisis, that make schooling routine very hard; *v*) children and young people are nowadays confronted with new living models through media, different from the ones defended by the school [1].

The gap between the values taught in school and those learnt through media demands a new way of understanding citizenship education in many countries. In the European Union this is even more urgent, because European countries opened frontiers and the way to a supranational society that presupposes important changes in mentalities, behaviours and values. An education towards citizenship is needed as Ferry and De Proost (2003) refer : "l'éducation à la citoyenneté doit alors pouvoir se profiler aussi comme une éducation postnationale" [2].

These authors defend the role of media in citizenship education: "Les grands médias de diffusion jouent a cet égard un rôle de premier plan" [2]. Gonnet (2001) defends that the school can not ignore that the text book is no longer the source of knowledge. It is through media that students learn about the world. "Ces bouleversements ne sont pas sans conséquence pour les acteurs de l'école" [3]. He thinks that school must look at the media as an opportunity. He reinforces the proposal made by Unesco in the 60's in order to develop a media education: "une éducation critique à la lecture des médias, quel que soit le support (écrit, radio, télévisé) [4].

This education aims to train people to approach media messages critically. As Buckingham (2003) says "media do not offer a transparent window of the world" [5]. Gonnet on the other hand explains that

media “ne reflètent pas la réalité. Ils la codifient. Les messages médiatiques ne sont para neutres” [3]. Media education will allow to overcome the negative effects of media messages, an objective that dates from the 30’s [6].

Nowadays the aim of media education is no longer to defend people from the effects caused by media but to make people to decide in a more informed way. “Media education is seen here not as a form of protection, but as a form of preparation” [5]. Domaille and Buckingham (2001) refer that change and detect “the emergence of a more contemporary definition of media education, based on notions of ‘critical awareness’ and ‘democratic participation’” [7].

For Media-educ (2004) Media education takes on a critical and practical nature, giving main priority to cognitive development and understanding. Its aim, therefore, is to “develop knowledge and understanding of one or more media forms, and it is likely to include both critical and practical activity” [8]. Media Education, according to Buckingham, “is the process of learning and teaching about media; media literacy is the outcome – the knowledge and skills learner acquire” [5]. Lundgren (2004) refers that “Media literacy is an essential life skill for the 21st century. It is the process of applying literacy skills to media and technology messages, learning to skilfully interpret, analyse, and create messages” [9].

De Proost refers that the new education towards citizenship must not dispense the social power of Media, independently of achieving an effective and legitime regulation of Media. And he concludes that must be a complementary and division of roles between Media and school: “C’est au système médiatique, les contenus ou l’information, et à l’école, les compétences ou la formation, que doit s’appuyer une éducation à la citoyenneté renouvelée” [10].

## 2. Increasingly Media literacy in Europe and in Portugal

In September 2006, eight institutions from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom presented in Brussels the European Charter for Media Literacy. The main aim of this document, signed, thereafter, by dozens of people and institutions, is “to support the establishment of media literacy across Europe”. The charter refers to the need to alert the media, policy-makers and citizens of the importance of media literacy which will allow the citizen to *i*) become better acquainted with media technologies and different types of contents; *ii*) make better informed choices since it stimulates a critical approach to the analysis and appreciation of the media; *iii*) to develop creativity and use the media as a form of expression and participation in public debates [11].

A study by Mediappro presented in Brussels in June 2006 concludes that there is a lot to be done in Media literacy area. “There is consensus among all nine countries [Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom] that media literacy, especially with focus on the new media, is needed in schools”. The study recommends that politicians from the different countries support “the integration of media education and media literacy contents and subjects into the curriculum of both teachers and students” [12].

In Portugal, media education keeps pace with the referred studies. Mediappro recommendations in relation to our country consists in “developing media literacy in the Portuguese context”. As far as specific recommendations we point out the organization of practical activities for pupils and teachers. To the politicians it is recommended the integration of contents to develop media education and media literacy “on the teacher’s curricula and on the student’s curricula” [12].

Domaille and Buckingham refer to the Portuguese situation saying that media education does not exist as a subject. They also refer that the recent alterations “in the Basic School Curriculum (from grades 1 to 9) have created three new non-disciplinary curriculum areas that can all address Media Education issues”. The report thinks that new areas allow media production, media languages and socio-economical structures analysis.

In Portugal a “National School Newspaper Competition”, promoted by the “Público” newspaper and the Ministry of Education has existed since 1991. Every year around 400 competitors participate between the printed and online versions. The aim of the competition is to a) bring together school and current life,

with particular emphasis on important issues; b) help youngsters to decode media language; c) develop a critical approach d) encourage the school population to read newspapers; e) guarantee a more active learning of the Portuguese language [13].

For Pinto (1991), the school newspaper is a cheap and easily accessible media, “an important resource for developing a critical approach, style and habits regarding reflection and creativity, respect for the diversity of opinions and interest in current affairs.” He also says that the newspaper may be used in the classroom as “a precious educational tool available for a wide range of subjects” [14]. The production of the school newspaper can bring about a taste for research and the confrontation of ideas. Opening the school gates to the outside world facilitates even more the discussion of similar problems. In this way it allows “supprimer la coupure entre sphère scolaire et espace social extérieur, que fait obstacle à l’apprentissage de la citoyenneté” [6].

### 3. The multimedia CD-Rom Let’s produce school newspapers

In Portugal, one of the main principles behind Decree-Law 6/2001 defends the “appreciation of a diversity of teaching methodologies and strategies with the support of information and communication technologies” [15]. The National Curriculum of Elementary Education indicates actions for each teacher to follow so as to help pupils develop certain competences. Among these actions is the one which foresees the need to establish a close connection between the school, the mass media and ICT [16].

For Buckingham (2003), the media are all the modern means of communication, from television, to cinema, radio, photography, publicity, newspapers and magazines, recorded music, computer games and the Internet. We have focused on newspapers and more specifically on school newspapers. Pupils need to acquire competences in this area right from the beginning and, as Ayres (2004) mentions, so do teachers: “If teachers lack confidence or knowledge in dealing with the complexity of the world of media professionals this can be detrimental to media education” [17]. Abrantes (1998) goes on to say that “only a small number of teachers will feel sufficiently qualified and secure to embark upon a production” [18]. This is what led us to produce the CD-Rom “Let’s produce school newspapers”, aimed at pupils aged between 11 and 16 (in Elementary Education), but also at teachers. The CD-Rom has two main objectives. On one hand it wants to contribute towards media literacy, helping pupils and teachers in the improvement of school newspapers. It also aims to contribute so that schools, which do not publish a newspaper, may go on to do so with regularity. On a more specific level, the aim of the CD-Rom is to contribute towards: *i*) the training and motivation of teachers and pupils for the pedagogical use of newspapers in the classroom; *ii*) the development of competences in pupils which will encourage them to be critical and reflecting producers of media messages.

On the other hand, the CD-Rom aims to contribute that children and young people should be listened by Mass Media. News on children increased at a high rate in the last decade [19], but rarely children are listened to. In a research conducted in 13 Irish newspapers in 2004, McNamara concludes that newspapers are controlled and in their majority written by adults. “Young people are regularly seen but rarely heard in these publications”. However he advocated that newspapers should reach young people in order to keep pace with audiences. And the task is feasible: “Improving the representation of young people in the media will require action from politicians, publishers, journalists and educators at every level – primary, secondary, third and mid-career” [20].

In Portugal we accompanying the project Children and Youth in the News, that analyses all news that deal with children published during one year in four daily Portuguese newspapers. It analyses 90 TV news journals recorded during 6 months. The project ends in October 2007, but from the first results it is possible to refer that authorities, support associations to children and their families are the most involved. Children’s opinions do not take part in the news. The reasons for this must be underlined in the final report of the project, as Ponte refers, the absences must be one of the most interesting common facts in a discourse [19].

The authors of the study in Portugal are willing to inform enterprises and media professionals about the results what may contribute to change their behavior in relation to children and young people. It is what

all over the world is being tried according to the World Young Readers Network, that belongs to World Association of Newspapers [21]. In this network are registered projects developed in 68 countries that aim to get news agencies, schools and students from different grades closer. Europe contributes with 27 projects, however none is from Portugal.

### 3.1 Pedagogical aspects and contents of the CD-Rom



**Fig. 1** CD-Rom Main screen

The CD-Rom explains the functioning of the newspaper, from the preparation of publication to its dispatch, for which it is dependent on written text, audio, photographs and video films. It shows how each journalistic genre is produced: news, report, chronicle, editorial, opinion article, among others. It dedicates a whole unit to the creation process of a school newspaper, another to the analysis of newspapers and a third to the online newspaper production. Another section, entitled Resources, refers to free image banks, internet sites which explain how school newspapers are produced, to blogs, search engines and dictionaries as well as recommending bibliography. In structural terms, the CD-Rom also includes a unit of FAQ, a Navigation Map and Help. In addition, there is another section “About the CD-Rom”, in which the Contents, Aims and Activity Types are specified. It also has a glossary.

Several authors such as Pinto [22] and Lima and Capitão [23] defend that the constructivist pedagogical philosophy is the most adapted to the current educational model. Luke (2003) goes even further: “Together, collaborative, constructivist, and problem-based learning are a powerful conceptual antidote to pedagogy as transmission and knowledge as parcelled facts and objects, accessed monologically through designated official media” [24]. In spite of this, Lima and Capitão draw attention to the fact that in terms of multimedia applications “in practice it is only possible to implant cognitivist learning (presentation of explicit knowledge) complemented by some constructivist aspects (group work, articulation of ideas and a critical approach to problem-solving)” [23].

In the organization of the CD-Rom, although we have relied mainly on the constructivist paradigm, we have also used a set of orientations which are based on cognitivism. We have opted for an open and flexible curriculum, geared towards the development of activities and the sharing of experiences in intelligent learning environments. We have also indicated the use of several fields of knowledge so as to stimulate the construction of knowledge and the development of greater interactivity with the surrounding social environment. However, we have not omitted the presentation of explicit knowledge.

## 4. Conclusion

Five experts, three in the area of multimedia and two in journalism have evaluated the pre-prototype of the CD-Rom. After an analysis of the data resulting from the evaluation, a set of technical and content corrections was defined. Then, we made the final corrections. This prototype has been used by pupils and

teachers, in two Portuguese schools, to produce newspapers. The sessions in which the CD-Rom is used have been observed and recorded on audio and video. We will analyze the results from now on. We expect to release the first results of this empirical project during the year of 2007.

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