

Introduction

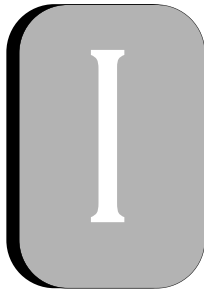
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Teacher Training in Media Education: Curriculum and International Experiences

Dr. José Manuel Pérez-Tornero

Full Professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

Dr. Samy Tayie

Full Professor at the University of Cairo (Egypt)

In April 2008, Pérez-Tornero received an urgent commission from UNESCO to draft a text-base to develop a curriculum for teacher training in media and information literacy. There were already some precedents in the shape of previous work carried out by Pérez-Tornero for UNESCO. In 2002, in a joint UNESCO and European Commission project, MENTOR, Pérez-Tornero and Tayie led a group of international experts who prepared a media education curriculum for teachers in the Mediterranean area. In 2004, Pérez-Tornero conducted another study for the European Commission, promoting Digital Literacy, in which he stated the need to foster a change in media culture and communication skills for which the training of teachers was crucial. This issue had arisen in another study conducted by the same author, also for the European Commission («Study on Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe») in which teacher training and the development of a curriculum on media information literacy was deemed essential.

But there were other more significant precedents. In fact, since UNESCO began to deal with media education on an international level (the Grünwald Declaration in 1982 followed in 1990 by Toulouse; Vienna, 1999; Seville, 2002 and Paris, 2007), the need for a media education curriculum and teacher training has gained in urgency, supported by proposals from pioneering studies on the subject by Masterman, Pugente, Duncan, Balzaguette, Gonnet and others.

Why precisely in 2008 did UNESCO launch the idea of developing a global curriculum with regard to the training of teachers? Certainly, the reasons are many but some are truly striking: A) In 2008, the Summit of the Information Society of the United Nations (Geneva, 2002 and Tunis, 2005) had already been overtaken by the need to constitute societies of knowledge in which media and information literacy was to be decisive; B) At that time almost all education systems worldwide were undertaking curricular reforms that placed the development of student skills at the center of the system, among the most important being the digital skills related to new media; C) It was also unquestionably the time to integrate the Internet and ICTs in the classroom. For that reason, the renewal of skills and the training of teachers became a must; D) Furthermore, the development of Web 2.0 (whose concept emerged in 2004) was rendering obsolete the out-dated distinction between education's usage of the media, and education and its position with respect to the media, because for the first time media could be used in a general and creative way in terms of educational systems that was not just responsive. Teachers and students could now become producers, creators and communicators; E) At that time, the globalization of the media had taken such a giant step forward that upgrading universal education strategies

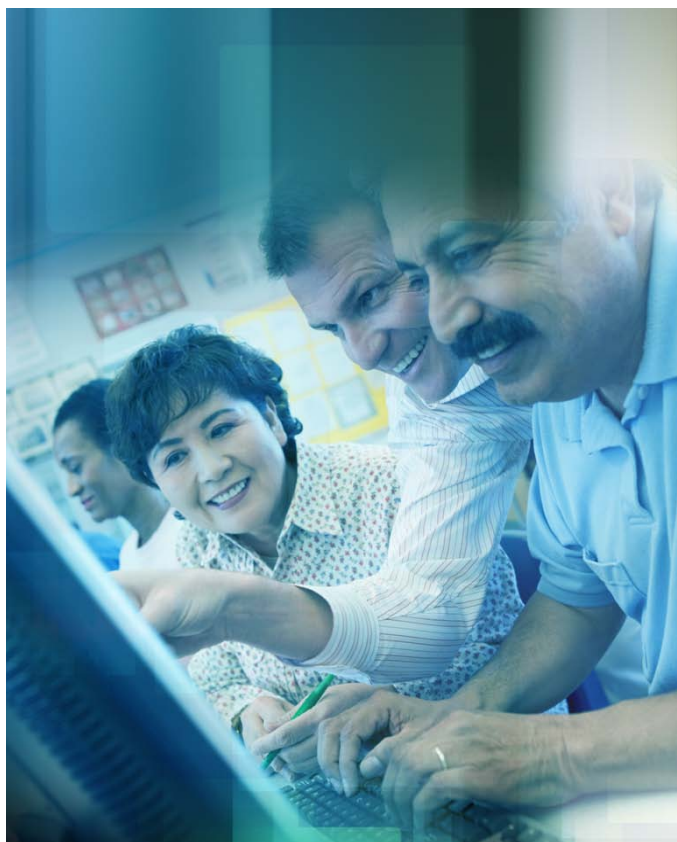
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could no longer remain unthinkable. Rather, it was deemed a necessity; F) In any case, and whatever the reasons, in 2008 the development, dissemination and testing of what is called «The Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers», was put into effect for the first time globally. And after three years of hard work, the full text of this curriculum, involving many international experts, was presented on July 1, 2011 in Fez (Morocco). Since then, more than a dozen countries have been developing their own adaptations of the curriculum and have been actively experimenting with their various proposals and recommendations.

This same forum in which the curriculum was presented also saw the launch of what would become the platform for developing academic research and development: the «UNITWIN Cooperation Program on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue», which is the result of an agreement between UNESCO and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and eight committed universities from around the world (those of Sao Paulo, in Latin America, Temple, representing North America, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Europe, Cairo, in Africa, the University of the West Indies in the Caribbean, the Tsinghua University in Asia, the Queensland University of Technology in Oceania, and the Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in the Maghreb). This platform combines the mission to foster the development of this Curriculum with UNESCO to promote media and information literacy and to improve intercultural dialogue, thereby underlining that teacher training in media and information literacy will be a major challenge for the global education system at least for the next decade.

This current issue of «Comunicar» seeks to reflect on this universal challenge: the curriculum and teacher training in media and information literacy focus, although not exclusively, on the UNESCO Curriculum and on diverse experiences within the field of media and information literacy and teacher training development. This edition of the journal includes several texts on various strategies and teaching practices in media education.

The journal editors¹ have sought the assistance of experts and researchers from different latitudes and disciplinary approaches with a special invitation extended to members of the «UNITWIN: Cooperation Program on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue» as well as to experts involved in curriculum development for UNESCO and other prominent researchers actively working towards its development.



All these authors address issues and areas covered by the UNESCO Curriculum either directly or indirectly, and offer a broad overview of the key issues affecting teaching practices in media and information literacy. But before reading these texts, let us briefly present the structure of the UNESCO Curriculum in order to help the reader understand the articles presented in this edition.

The «UNESCO MIL Curriculum and Competency Framework» combines two distinct areas: media literacy and information literacy. The term used for this «umbrella» is: A) «Media and Information Literacy» (MIL). It aims to integrate the tradition of information literacy, engaged in issues such as information needs, access, location, evaluation, organization and the ethical use of information and information technology. Important sources to keep in mind are: The National Forum on Information Literacy (www.infolit.org), The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (www.ala.org/acd/nili/nilih.html), The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) (www.ala.org/AASL/ip_nine.html); B) Media literacy. For a review of the current use of the definition of Media Literacy, Potter takes the European context to highlight the contribution of Zchetti and Vardakas, traditionally focused on issues such as understanding the roles of the media, the critical interpretation of media content, individual expression as a form of democratic participation and the technological skills of media users to produce media content.

The integration of these different traditions is not only a new terminological convention but involves a qualitative leap forward in what has so far been the evolution of the relationship between communication and education. To stimulate this leap forward, the UNESCO Curriculum presents three positions:

The first of these, which the Curriculum calls «ecological vision», means the acceptance and recognition of the various media and informational environments related to media literacy. The second, which we could call «functional», means configuring the Curriculum's objectives and purpose. The third, we describe as «operational», is concerned with establishing an appropriate framework to guide and promote the work of students and teachers.

From the «ecological» standpoint the UNESCO Curriculum provides a list of areas and resources related to media and information literacy: film, television, Internet, books, freedom of expression, among others. While this list is imperfectly structured, as it is primarily descriptive and refers to various categories, it is valuable for orientating media literacy towards a very broad communication and media horizon by means of a holistic approach which is unrestricted in terms of covering all media types and formats as well as content and contexts.

It should be noted here that it has not always been evident whether media and information literacy relates to some or all media. Therefore, it is significant that UNESCO recognizes that media and information literacy can only be useful today if it accepts multimedia and cultural convergence with its emphasis on its multicultural dimension. It matches the position adopted by the European Commission Expert Group which assumes that media literacy relates to all media.

From our point of view, the advantages of this convergent and holistic approach would be enhanced if the UNESCO Curriculum recognized the distinct nature of the elements considered within the term «ecology». For this to occur, it would be sufficient to include in the Curriculum's proposals (and, therefore, in media and information literacy) the following conceptual categorization: 1) The media and support: film, television, Internet, books, computers and media in general; 2) Institutions: libraries; 3) Types of content: news, advertising, games; 4) Codes and technologies: digital and analogue; 5) Rights relating to the individual and public sphere, freedom of speech and information.

In fact, the justification for these categories is that media (defined as technologies and support) transmit and produce content of various types and formats and, at the same time, relate to formalized social contexts or institutions such as libraries, schools or political entities which, consequently, leads to the development of activities that are protected by laws or rights. It is this global focus on media that endows media literacy with a holistic approach.

In any case, with or without an organized structure, the Curriculum is a considerable leap forward in terms of approaches which, until very recently, had been jealously guarded as separate autonomies.

With respect to the operational framework, the UNESCO Curriculum's various components combine three themes: 1) Knowledge and understanding of media and information as key to the develop-

ment of democratic discourse and social participation; 2) the evaluation of media texts and sources of information; 3) The production and use of media and information.

Thus, the UNESCO Curriculum coincides with the approaches that Potter recognized as belonging to media literacy: skills, knowledge and social activity or practice.

The Curriculum also acknowledges, as a media literacy object, the presence of competence (as defined by the National Communication Association), that is to say, the capacity of the individual to process media content, and that aspect related to interaction and group participation through media and communication.

From this starting point, the focus of the Curriculum is on the following points: a) Knowledge of information and the media prior to the construction of a democratic discourse. b) Assessment and analysis of media and their content. c) Production and use of media. This can be summarized as two distinct aspects: analytical/critical, and productive/participative.

As readers will discover, most of these items figure in the articles of this edition of «Comunicar». Carolyn Wilson (Toronto, Canada) who, along with Alton Grizzle, is one of the original authors of the UNESCO Curriculum, carries out a systematic review and critique of this document. She analyzes in detail the global structure of the Curriculum, its coherence and organization, and considers each section to shed light on its pedagogical balance and educational objectives.

M^a Amor Pérez and Agueda Delgado (Huelva, Spain) deal with an aspect related to curriculum development: the approach of competence. They examine the differences between the concept of digital and audiovisual competence and media competence. They start with the educational curriculum in Spain and then analyze six international studies related to the topic of literacy, both digital and audiovisual, and after their discussion, provide a new framework as a guide to carrying out media education activities.

Ibrahim Saleh (Capetown, South Africa) studies the case of his country and its needs in the field of media education. Given the socio-educational situation in South Africa, Saleh presents and discusses the initiatives taken to promote media and information literacy, and points out their weaknesses and the strategies that can be adopted to increase efficiency. He concludes that the UNESCO Curriculum could help improve the current state of media and information literacy in South Africa.

The experimental study conducted by Susan Moeller (Maryland, USA) across five continents reveals a key fact: today's youth, regardless of the context in which they live, are highly addicted to media: they live with them and have real difficulties when trying to disconnect for longer than one day. Moeller's experiments have the added value of providing teachers with an exercise that helps to enhance young people's awareness of their own media practices and, consequently, improve their own media and information literacy.

The article by Samy Tayie, Manisha Pathak-Shelat and Irma Hirsjarvi (Cairo, Egypt; Wisconsin, USA and Helsinki, Finland) uses qualitative and comparative methodology to underline the fact that young people around the world are appropriating the new media, especially mobile phones and computers, to meet their own needs. And this phenomenon, according to the authors, is a global fact that transcends borders and countries, highlighted by the differences in media use between rural and urban areas. The children and youth of the countries studied (Argentina, Finland, Egypt and Kenya) exhibit a change in attitude towards the news media: they are not simply consumers who simply accept media content, but are becoming «prosumers», that is, active users who create content and actively participate in the new networks, according to their own interests. Therefore, the authors advocate advancing media education, media literacy and teacher training in these areas in order to instill in children and young people this new creative and participative attitude that is conscious, critical and autonomous.

Santiago Tejedor and Cristina Pulido (Barcelona, Spain) study how to empower children and youth in the face of possible risks on the Internet. They are especially concerned with «grooming» and cyberbullying. They note that these threats and risks are not uncommon: in Spain according to the data collected, 44% of children state that they have felt sexually harassed at some time, measured against 20% of children in the USA. They stress the need to follow the recommendations of the UNESCO Curriculum and insist on the importance of active strategies for prevention.

Sherri H. Culver and Thomas Jacobson (Philadelphia USA) see media literacy as a tool to promote

civic participation. They analyze experiences in three different contexts: a) Powerful Voices for Kids, an experience of the Media Education Lab at Temple University; b) the Salzburg Academy of Communication and Social Change, c) a World Link project entitled «Cultivating the Net Generation of Youth as Global Citizens and Media Literate Leaders in a Digital Age». In all these cases, the central concepts of the UNESCO Curriculum are seen to be highly effective.

Vitor Reia-Baptista has been involved in several European experiences in media education with film at its core. In so doing, he acknowledges the possibilities of the use of film in the improvement and deepening of the media and information literacy part of the UNESCO Curriculum.

Sara Pereira and Manuel Pinto (Porto, Portugal) present the results of a project entitled «Resources for media literacy», research that was developed at the Centre for Communication Studies and Society and funded by the Evens Foundation (Belgium). This is an intervention project that proposes pedagogical practices of reflection and learning about television, video games and the internet. The results demonstrate the importance of considering the different elements that can enrich students' critical competence.

Finally, Morella Alvarado (Caracas, Venezuela) proposes rules for developing critical reading of the media in schools. The objective is to develop in students a spirit of good citizenship, independence and autonomy to be able to understand the political and institutional contexts of the messages.

Notes

¹ We acknowledge the efforts and collaboration of José Ignacio Aguaded, Editor of «Comunicar» and his team, and Cristina Pulido, of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, whose unstinting efforts have enabled this edition of the journal to see the light of day.