

Education and Audiovisual Communication, Shared Responsibilities

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Literacy no longer means just reading and writing. In the new audiovisual and digital environment, the instruments of knowledge are becoming increasingly more diversified. The language of image complements and sometimes even replaces verbal language. It is a language that impacts more directly on the senses, that has more intense persuasive and seductive powers and, therefore, a great capacity to produce collective imaginaries and to influence people's behaviour. Audiovisual communication employs a new language that needs to be specifically learned just like a written language. We don't only need to know how a certain message is produced in technical terms in order to achieve the planned effect but also have to prepare the receiver of the messages so that he or she knows how to establish distinctions and become active and critical. Given that communicative action can always have a manipulative component and that it occurs in a totally business-based context, it is reasonable to think that education cannot remain apart or ignorant, given the possible perversions of audiovisual communication that may confuse the appropriate socialisation of children and young adults.

Although education is not one of the functions given to audiovisual councils, most of these organisms have approached education one way or the other, turning it into an important part of their study and analysis. We should remember that one of the key functions of audiovisual councils is to protect children and young people, in accordance with the regulations of the European directive

on television. According to this directive, protecting children means ensuring that television channels do not broadcast programmes that are harmful or detrimental to minors. Although harm and detriment may derive directly from the use of television content that is not appropriate for children, we should also bear in mind the fact that the preparation, knowledge, capacity to discern and critical skills of receivers go to make up an essential vaccine against possible injury.

Consequently, thinking about education does not mean ignoring what television channels may programme and transferring the responsibility that the audiovisual media in particular should shoulder to the schools. It is not a question of replacing supervision of operators with an education that immunises children from possible hazards and risks. It is rather a question of acting simultaneously on both fronts, given that it is not easy to determine accurately what might be detrimental, nor is it possible to predetermine the results of education. It is rather a question of not scrimping on any instrument within our reach in order to take full advantage of the huge potential audiovisuals undoubtedly have in socialising minors.

It is this belief that led the Catalonia Broadcasting Council to draw up, four years ago now, its *White Paper: Education in the audiovisual environment*. In this case the aim was to diagnose the issue and propose the most suitable treatment in order to correct any dysfunctions detected. One of the most distressing discoveries was low level and little recognition existing concerning the importance of education in audiovisual communication as a vital element in formal education in general. Although the European Commission constantly insists and makes recommendations in this respect, there are few European countries that can state with satisfaction and in no uncertain terms that their respective states have taken care of the problem. In general, the simplest step has been taken, namely the

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quantitative one. Schools have been filled with audiovisual equipment that, given the speed with which communication technologies are advancing, are becoming obsolete and must be replaced by other equipment. In the best of cases, education in audiovisual communication has been limited to the work of educating *with* communication media. Education *in* and *for* the media has been more difficult, that which is properly known as *communication literacy*. It is not enough to use the new media but these same media, and particularly their content, must also become a specific object of study.

This is the aim that, with the sponsorship of the Catalonia Broadcasting Council, the working group has proposed, led by Joan Ferrés, with the result that now it is being presented as a working document. Efforts have been made to reflect on and determine, as precisely and thoroughly as possible, the concept of *competence in audiovisual communication*. What must a person know in order to be declared “competent”, “literate”, in audiovisual communication? What must a person know to have what we might call an “audiovisual culture”?

The document now being published, whose key chapter is entitled “Competence in audiovisual communication”, has no precedents. This is a groundbreaking project and an essential instrument in assessing, among other things, whether education in audiovisual communication is being carried out well or not, if the results that should be achieved are actually being achieved. This is yet another attempt at promoting an idea that, in our country, is still in the embryonic stage. It is absolutely vital for those in charge of education policy to commit themselves to bringing education in audiovisual communication into the classroom. We may argue about how this should be done but we cannot deny the need to talk about it and to put it into practice. The consequences of ignoring this enterprise will not only be cultural but also political and social. For example, the need expressed in the last educational reform to introduce a subject to educate citizens as citizens cannot ignore what is being done by the audiovisual media and, specifically, by television, constantly bombarding the audience with images and models that are not always coherent with the values that should shape citizen behaviour.

No-one can deny that television is a fundamental means of socialisation. Empirical studies based on teenagers’

perception of television clearly reveal that, in addition to entertaining, television is also a source of information for the youngest among us. As stated by a former head of the Federal Communications Commission, the audiovisual council in the United States, “television is always instructive. The question we have to ask ourselves is: what is it teaching?”. All the articles published in this document help to ask this question and also to answer it by encouraging criticism and reflection. In short, they help to convert the inevitable consumption of television into consumption with the discernment to be able to choose intelligently.