
Transmedia experiences for social and emotional communication challenges: the reading the world academy

Experiências transmedia e os desafios socio emocionais para a comunicação: a “Academia da leitura do mundo”

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Introduction

- 1 The importance of knowledge regarding the mechanisms of social communication and the skills needed to deal with the media and understand its potential have been widely discussed over the last century by several researchers, specialists and political agents. From the 60s, in the USA, with John Culkin and Marshall McLuhan, through the Grünwald Declaration in 1982, the Media literacy in a digital world European directive in 2008 or the Paris Agenda –Twelve Recommendations for Media Education by Unesco, until the most recent reviews in the field, the emerging area of media literacy has experienced a noteworthy projection. At a national and international level, several studies and projects have been looking into this subject (Buckingham, 2001, 2003; Wilson et al., 2006, 2011; MIL Project-OECD, 2010, 2015, 2016; Livingstone, 2016). Portugal follows this trend with several studies, debates and prominent actions taking place (AAVV, [Braga Declaration], 2011; Pinto, Pereira, Pereira, & Dias, 2011; Pinto, 2002; Ponte, 2012; Pereira, 2013; Pereira, Pinto, Madureira, Pombo, & Guedes, 2014).
- 2 The recognition of the importance of the media in the lives of citizens, thus, legitimizes the media ecosystem as an element of culture and alerts to the need of preparing people to know how to live with and in the media world. It is in view of the need to prepare competent citizens for an information and communication society, that, for example, the European institutions, or the Portuguese National Education Council itself (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2011), have established Frameworks of Reference, where they define the essential media competences to acquire throughout one's life and media literacy itself (*Grunwald Declaration On Media Education*, 1982; *La Déclaration De Bruxelles*, 2010).
- 3 This need to engage citizens in an inclusive knowledge society by promoting media literacy has hence been highlighted and addressed by several institutions. In addition to the action taken by international organizations such as UNESCO, it is worth mentioning the intervention of European bodies such as the Commission, the European Council and the Council of Europe [(EAVI - the European Association for Viewers Interests; EU Media Literacy Expert Group (MLEG); European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO); COMMUNIA], but also from national groups or centers, such as the Ontario Association for Media Literacy (Canada), Center for Education Connection and Media - CLEMI (France), Univ. Autonomous Barcelona / Communicate Professional Association of Andalusian Journalists and Teachers (Spain), or the *Equipa De Recursos E Tecnologias Educativas - ERTE / DGE* and the *Grupo Informal de Literacia para os Media - GILM* (Portugal).
- 4 As the world we live in is increasingly the media world that Marshall McLuhan only intuited, images, words and sounds are spread in an uninterrupted way and, frequently, in a transmedia way through television, internet, social networks, radio, press, video games, smartphones and other new media platforms and gadgets. According to available data (INE / Pordata, 2019), 78% of Portuguese people have access to the internet and its penetration rate among young people from 16 to 24 years old was already 99% in 2017 (Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos, 2017). The rapid technological development and the spread of digital media, especially the internet, generate multiple speedy access points on a global scale. Consequently, the perception we have from the world and the reading of reality are driven by information that is rather often mediated by unofficial multiple sources for easy consumption.

- 5 If attention given to the subject of media literacy has grown and gained new and stimulating angles of reflection, reality seems little compatible with what might be supposed given the distance that seems to be maintained between the education system and youth, as Manuel Castells said some time ago and Sonia Livingstone reaffirmed later on (Castells, 2007; Livingstone, 2016). After Livingstone's latest study on young people life and education in the digital age, she concluded that the aspirations of the education system continue "at odds with how young people and families imagine what learning is good for" (Livingstone, 2016a). For today's young people, the new media are, above all, preferred meeting spaces where they learn, participate and get deeply involved sometimes shaping pioneering communication practices. Furthermore, and according to Henry Jenkins' thoughts, this also indicates that media acts as a powerful ground for civic and public involvement (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2016).
- 6 In addition, today's media hybridization and textual intricacy frame the complexity of contemporary journalistic discourses. The need to know how to decode the myriad of stimuli available and an inevitable work of interpretation in media and digital immersion are essential for understanding reality. Being competent to say and understand the world today is a complex but critical requirement that results in the urgency of the articulation of mixed competences, which will be effective if combined and not just because they are transversal. Hence, the importance of projects for the promotion of literacy and citizenship among young people, as Maria José Brites stated at the 1st National Congress "Literacia, Media e Cidadania" [Literacy, Media and Citizenship]":

"Considering improving news literacy and participation, it will be necessary to foster projects in which students have a voice and can have an agency to be themselves the main elements of the project, encourage the use of online, promote awareness actions with families and enhance the use of digital by young people."(Brites, 2011. p.537).
- 7 The perception we have of the world never stops being influenced by media discourse, broadcasted ideas and published thoughts in a constant social, political or economic construction of reality. The importance of media work quality is unquestionable for an informed society, and good journalistic work will depend, not only, on the capacity of bringing citizens closer to the world as it is, but also on each citizen's interpretive skills.
- 8 Meanwhile, there have been constant policies updates and adaptations to new societal contexts. The last European Commission's *Study on media literacy and online empowerment issues raised by algorithm-driven media services* (Hoorens, & Lupiáñez-Villanueva, 2017), for example, noted the urgency of improving the media literacy of consumers and reduce their vulnerability to disinformation by triggering people to be aware of their own online behaviour.
- 9 Additionally, the 4th Congress of Portuguese Journalists, in January 2017, approved a final resolution, whose point 11. recommended that "it is urgent to promote media literacy with initiatives in the field of pre-university education and among the population in general" (4th Congress of Journalists, 2017).
- 10 The emerging area of media literacy that tries to enable citizens of all ages to participate on the modern news environment and take informed decisions, has, in fact, had a great projection worldwide (Buckingham, 2001, 2003; Carlsson, 2006; Wilson et al., 2011; MIL Project-OECD, 2010, 2015, 2016; Livingstone, 2016) and in Portugal as well, where research, debates and political proposals can be acknowledged for a more than a

decade now (Pinto, 2002; Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2011; AAVV, [Braga Declaration], 2011; Ponte, 2012; Pereira, 2013; Pereira et al., 2014; Brites, 2015).

- 11 Therefore, today, more than ever, it is important to know how to read the world. It is important to understand the central position of communication and journalism in the public space and to recognize its impact and importance in our own life in society. It is important to know how to distinguish between information and fiction. It is important to know how to participate in the construction of a rational public space, based on values of truth, equality and democracy. It is essential that all young people recognize this importance and become participant and conscientious citizens. The activity of reading has always been “an intelligent, difficult, demanding operation” (Freire, 1997), but the sophistication of today's media discourses take place in a textual complexity that neither facilitates nor contributes to an accurate reading of reality.

1. The Academy

- 12 The “Reading the World Academy: Journalism, Communication and I”, selected to be part of the Gulbenkian Knowledge Academies 2019 network, proposes an immersive experience, which promotes a set of journalistic and communication activities among young people, based on partnerships celebrated between academic institutions (with degrees in journalism and communication), high schools and media. The included themes focus on journalism and communication issues, journalistic language and writing, media representations of the world, and language meanings taken as agents of construction of social perception.
- 13 Together with the educational project of the partner schools, the main objective of the Academy is to provide young people with tools to decode news, question the passive consumption of information and encourage a critical and constructive posture, which suits the challenges of contemporary information and media culture. It is expected that this collaborative experience takes place during the school term, both in academic contexts and social contexts, for example, with workshops and seminars in newsrooms of different media outlets, like news agency Lusa, RTP TV or *Público* Newspaper), and cultural institutions like, for example, the News Museum.

2. Framework and Goals to reach

- 14 The “Reading the World Academy” aims at developing skills to deal with changing and complex communication by contributing to the enrichment of media and journalistic literacy among young people between 14 and 25 years old. A multidisciplinary team of professors and researchers from the School of Communication and Media Studies of the Lisbon Polytechnic Institute leads a national action network made up of partnerships with six university and polytechnic institutions, six secondary schools from their corresponding communities, the collaboration of mainstream and regional media outlets, cultural institutions and City Councils.
- 15 The six academic institutions, namely the University of Beira Interior, the Portalegre Polytechnic Institute - Higher School of Education and Social Sciences, the Tomar Polytechnic Institute - Abrantes School of Technology, Setúbal Polytechnic Institute - Setúbal College of Education, Algarve University and the promoter of the project - the

Lisbon Polytechnic Institute – School of Media Studies and Communication – all have communication and journalism degrees and will contribute to the national network of the project by providing human resources and facilities to implement the Academy of Reading working agenda.

- 16 The immersive and participant methodology aims at inviting 300 youngsters to participate in activities that try to develop their skills of communication, self-regulation, critical thought whilst becoming more conscious and demanding citizens (OECD, 2018). The experiences provided until 2022 are supposed to enable the creation of tools, which allow decoding of news, questioning the passive consumption of information and feeding a critical and suitable attitude to face information challenges. The project's core idea is to develop information reading practices capable of instilling a positive change in society.
- 17 Being skilled to explain and understand the world, being conscious and active in society are urgent needs that lack innovative approaches (Couldry, 2017; Ponte & Batista, 2019). The proposed activities aim to explore and discuss the impact that information has on each youngster' personal and social life and to encourage participants to become aware of their biased opinions and communication experiences through practical tasks. The added value of this academy lies in its qualified immersive methodology: diversified activities, organized and monitored by teachers from accredited institutions in the area, in partnership with recognized institutions and organizations, which invite young people from high schools and colleges, with an interest in communication and journalism, to work as a team in the analysis and discussion of critical communication issues and the construction of good practices.
- 18 From the 60s with the *Grünwald Declaration* (1982) until recent years, the emerging area of media literacy has had a widespread reach. At international level, there are several studies and projects on this subject and Portugal follows the trend with interesting studies, thought-provoking public debates and striking actions (Brites, 2015; ERC, 2019; MILObs, 2018; Ponte & Batista, 2019;). Now, if the attention given to the subject of media literacy has expanded and gained new approaches, real life seems little compatible with what might be expected, given the complexities and disorders that evolve in terms of fake news, for example, and its consequences.

3. Procedures

- 19 The Academy follows an immersive and participant methodology based on students' availability within their school curriculum and schedule. It is expected to hold 8 to 10 working sessions lasting 90 to 160 minutes each, distributed during one academic year. It is organized and monitored by professors, researchers and specialists in the field of communication sciences and journalists, with the collaboration of a wide range of media institutions. The project working agenda (from September to May) challenges young people to different transmedia experiences, which trigger skilful communicational competences.
- 20 The actions take place both in spaces of the academic institution and national and regional media partners' newsrooms and studios. Regarding the academic institution, there are many facilities available for the project, namely classrooms and training labs; multimedia equipment with access to the Lusa news agency; communication labs with individual workstations; computer labs equipped with cutting-edge technological

hardware and software; virtual television studios, post-production workstations, audio-visual equipment; radio workplaces with post-production workstations; multimedia labs, audio-visual equipment centre for planned school-based tasks. The actions taking place in media and cultural partners' locations explore the specificities of their cultural and professional area and facilities.

4. Evaluation and monitorization

- 21 The Academy is responsible for all the evaluation system and monitoring procedures considered relevant and essential elements to the project's objectives, since it is argued that only by assessing procedures is it possible to determine whether a program works, if it is necessary to change strategies to meet its purposes (Alexandre, Barata, Castro, & Colaço, 2017). The Academy team monitors and evaluates the project starting with the constitution of two main clusters: an intervention group and a comparison one. In the evaluation process, items such as the profile and number of participants involved in the action are patterned, the change in behaviour in the use of social networks acknowledged and change in the connection with news information identified, for example. The submission of full questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of the activity's agenda is carried out on both clusters, whereas the intervention group answers a short and customised survey – a logbook after each agenda session.
- 22 Whilst monitoring the intervention group, quantitative and qualitative analysis is carried out, checking items such as participants' attendance, expectations for actions, relation with the media, news consumption habits, interest in news information, usefulness of media content consumption, etc. Focus groups are also considered for skills assessment in specific contexts. Furthermore, the data made available by online quantitative analysis platforms will provide information for the exploratory work with the continuous support of the Gulbenkian Knowledge Academies network.

Conclusion

- 23 The "Reading the world academy: journalism, communication and I" provides a broad-based experience and understanding of media and communication to 14 - 25 years old young people. Since competences are not acquired automatically but instead need to be learned and developed through a constant knowledge exchange with the community around participants, the academy offers an up-to-date engagement agenda with a mix of journalistic and media activities planned by communication experts, who support media literacy. The national network project action follows strict evaluation processes that are constantly monitored and customised according to major participants' interests and needs on developing communication, critical thinking and self-regulation competences. The reader of the academy is supposed to learn critical thinking as a basis for meaningful and effective participation in the community and in a culture of democracy. Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are together mobilized in the activities in order to empower students to deal with media and communication challenging frameworks that insist on hindering social and personal readings.

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ABSTRACTS

The “Reading the world academy: journalism, communication and I” is an applied research project promoting a transmedia experience for young adults from 14 to 25 years old, and it selected critical thinking, self-regulation and communication as key competences to be developed. The project has been conceived by a multidisciplinary group of researchers and journalists, selected as one of the Gulbenkian Academies for Knowledge and implemented by various Portuguese academic institutions with communication and journalism degrees (Faro, Portalegre, Covilhã, Abrantes, Setúbal and Lisboa). In this paper we would like to discuss the

rationale behind this reading academy and assess the national collaborative experience main challenges. The Academy final goal is to provide more structured data about how knowledge, skills, attitudes and values can together be mobilized in order to deal with contemporary media challenging contexts that insist on hindering reality readings.

A “Academia da leitura do mundo: o jornalismo, a Comunicação e eu” é um projeto de investigação aplicada que promove uma experiência transmediática para jovens entre os 14 e os 25 anos e que aposta no desenvolvimento de três competências chave: a comunicação, o espírito crítico e a autorregulação. O projeto foi concebido por um grupo multidisciplinar de professores, investigadores e jornalistas e resultou da urgência de questionamento e exigência essenciais para a compreensão das narrativas transmedia atuais. Neste artigo pretende-se apresentar as propostas de trabalho desta Academia da leitura, acolhida por várias instituições académicas Portuguesas especializadas no estudo da comunicação e jornalismo (Faro, Portalegre, Covilhã, Abrantes, Setúbal e Lisboa) e selecionada para integrar a rede das Academias Gulbenkian do Conhecimento 2019. O objetivo da Academia até 2022 é investir numa experiência que permita discutir como poderá o conhecimento, as competências, atitudes e valores ser mobilizados para uma leitura crítica do mundo.

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