23

PORTUGUESE JOURNALISTS TRAINING TEACHERS IN THE NEW MEDIA EDUCATION LANDSCAPE DURING COVID-19

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Media literacy and journalism: aims and objectives

The project 'Media Literacy and Journalism: pedagogic practices with and about media' is focused on training teachers in media education, and aims to answer the following research question: to what extent can journalists and teachers collaborate in the development of MEDIA EDUCATION sustainable projects in k–12 schools?

The project follows a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2014; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017), collecting data through questionnaires (beginning, end), observation, field notes, and potential interviews with teachers and other community members. It assumes an action-research logic (Lavoie, Marquis & Laurin, 1996; Mertler, 2019), not because journalists play a role among students, but because teachers participate as co-researchers since they collect data while implementing the projects (e.g. from students, their parents, and other community members) and write final reports (each teacher produces a report on the training).

Due to the pandemic, this role of teachers as co-researchers became even more important, in line with what Pope (2020) states:

> making modifications to a research project does not mean that the project was bad or failed. Research is often fluid and changing. What a researcher plans may not live up to the reality of the field. Particularly important in qualitative research (…), is that at times, in order for a project to be successful, a researcher may need to cede control and power to the participants
>
> *(p. 3757)*

As part of the Media Literacy and Journalism course, 146 journalists and other media professionals have worked with 230 teachers so far, who have developed media literacy (ML) activities with around 2000 preschool children and K–12 students. Firstly, journalists helped teachers design projects adapted to their schools and communities. After the training, they continued to offer teachers regular support and monitored the developments. Therefore, some of the projects extended beyond the training course and are still ongoing.

The first training courses (January–May 2019) showed the following:

i   teachers are really interested in attending ML training;
ii teachers are very demanding and this was the reason why other journalists rather than regular trainers were asked to participate in the training sessions, thus meeting the teachers' needs (e.g. video production);
iii activities and projects move more easily and faster when someone from the school board is attending the training;
iv the projects (e.g. school radio, online and printed newspapers, TV documentaries, social media pages run by students, debates, and training on disinformation) need regular monitoring;
v   most of the developed activities are replicable.

These results have been considered while planning and implementing the second year of the project, but they were insufficient to face the pandemic lockdown. In this sense, we took the following measures:

i   retrain journalists on digital learning platforms use (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams);
ii adapt teacher training sessions to online settings;
iii create an official website (https://www.associacaoliteracia.pt), offering support to new school projects and initiatives;
iv support ongoing MEDIA EDUCATION projects (initiated as a result of the 2019–2020 training courses) adapting to online settings;
v   hosting a pilot edition of the course aimed at preschool/primary school teachers.

The analysis below focuses on items (iv) and (v). In addition to training teachers, the journalists helped them structure MEDIA EDUCATION projects, offered guidance, and monitored the activities developed in schools and communities (e.g. video production, social media pages, school newspapers, newsletters, podcasts, school radio programs). The main aim of this continued support was to ensure that the projects were focused on developing MEDIA EDUCATION competencies, such as (i) producing multiformat media messages; (ii) managing the relationship with media and media content; (iii) solving problems through strategic and creative thinking and artistic performance; (iv) participating through media and technology; (v) reconstructing narratives and expressing worldviews; (vi) being reflective and critical toward media and their products; and (vii) learning by doing, role-playing, and playing (Scolari, 2018).

The core role of journalists in media education

A decade ago, Hobbs (2010) advised educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers that using news and journalism in the context of K-12 education and strengthening citizens' capacity to assess credible and qualitative media messages were crucial challenges for Digital Media Literacy programs, as well as acknowledging "the challenges faced by journalism today and in the future" (*idem*).

Nowadays, in the context of journalism crisis, "infodemic" (Nielsen et al., 2020) and propaganda, in which "doctored photos, deepfakes, and cheapfakes are just the tip of the iceberg", it is crucial to teach about fake news and propaganda while showing learners that

professional journalism is key for democracy since it informs, investigates, analyzes reality, promotes mutual understanding, gives voice to the people, advocates, and mobilizes people to act (Hobbs, 2020a) in the "participatory culture" (Jenkins et al., 2006).

Involving media professionals in education is not new, since the first newspaper in education programs started around 1940 and remained active for at least five decades in dozens of countries. And there are important examples of this, such as CLEMI, in France (established in 1984). At the turn of the 20th to the 21st centuries, as "respect for journalism has declined, former news media professionals have sought to restore its reputation through media literacy educational initiatives" (Hobbs, 2016, p. 145). Some good examples are the American projects First Draft, News Guard, and News Literacy project.

More recently, a set of fact-checking projects developed activities to be carried out at school as media literacy practices. However, Frau-Meigs (2019) states that their contribution to education should be analyzed carefully since these initiatives ignore the history of the field and the development of specific competencies beyond critical thinking on news. These projects usually provide one-shot school interventions without much follow-up, and do not scale up to national level and reach a limited number of students (*idem*), so it is important to design and implement sustainable projects that scale up.

In addition, as stated by 50 European ministers of Education (Council of Europe, 2019), it is urgent to

organise quality initial and continuous training for teachers in media education (…) facilitate the cooperation of all stakeholders (…) support the contributions of fundamental and comparative research and innovative teaching methodology in order to build evidence-based policies (…) encourage international cooperation.

Having in mind that ML, i.e., the outcome of MEDIA EDUCATION (Buckingham, 2003) "is widely understood as the knowledge, competencies and life skills needed to participate in contemporary society through accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media messages in a wide variety of forms" (Hobbs, 2015, p. 2), journalists must be trained in media literacy, and then take part in teacher training and collaborate in the design and development of sustainable and highly participated community projects that follow the model "whole-school approach" (Raulin-Serrier et al., 2020).

The Portuguese context

MEDIA EDUCATION has always had a modest place in Portuguese curricula (Tomé & De Abreu, 2019) since it never achieved the state of an independent subject. Further, it is currently just one of the 17 domains of the curricular component 'Citizenship and Development', which are organized into three groups: (i) Human Rights, Gender Equality, Interculturality, Sustainable Development, Environmental Education, and Health are mandatory in all cycles; (ii) Media Education, Sexual Education, Institutions and Democratic Participation, Financial Literacy, Road Safety, and Risk must be addressed in two of the three cycles; and (iii) Entrepreneurship, Work, Security, Defense and Peace, Animal Protection, Volunteering, and Others. These topics are approached in one of the cycles.

The compulsory education system consists of basic education (first Cycle, four years; second Cycle, two years; third Cycle, three years) and secondary education (three years). The curricular component 'Citizenship and Development' is cross-sectional in the first Cycle and

is an autonomous subject in the second and third Cycles (with quarterly, half-yearly, or other duration), while at secondary level, it may be an autonomous subject, part of a subject or a cross-sectional area.

Since 2016, several ministerial documents opened doors to MEDIA EDUCATION in schools, namely the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (Ministério da Educação, 2017a), which promotes the organization and implementation of pedagogical and didactic school projects related to day-to-day challenges in students' lives in schools and the community. Also, the "Exit Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education" (Ministério da Educação, 2017b) states that teachers must organize pedagogical activities focused on the critical analysis of diverse information sources.

In this context, and following a proposal approved during the National Congress of Journalists, in 2017, the Portuguese Journalists Union organized the project Media Literacy and Journalism, aimed at Middle and secondary school teachers, so they can better develop MEDIA EDUCATION with their students. Since November 2017, 143 journalists were trained in MEDIA EDUCATION (78 in 2017, 65 in 2019) at the National Training Centre for Professional Journalists (CENJOR), 50 of them having been certified as in-service teacher trainers by the Ministry of Education.

Portuguese journalists are known to collaborate with schools on media production, as happened in the 1990s when the Ministry of Education launched the 'Media Press Week', which became a regular activity in secondary schools. Other important initiatives involving schools, journalists, and other media professionals, started then and still exist, such as "Público na Escola" (by the daily newspaper "Público"), "Media Lab" (daily newspapers "Diário de Notícias" and "Jornal de Notícias"), or "Visão Júnior" (weekly magazine "Visão"). But a structured project like Media Literacy and Journalism had never existed before in Portugal.

In 2018, the journalists planned a 40-hour (20 synchronous and 20 nonsynchronous) program on media literacy for teachers, which was approved by the Ministry of Education. The main areas of this program are (i) media literacy and journalism (history, democracy, ethics, media routines, fake news, and participation); (ii) international and national research results and models on citizenship; (iii) project method (designing, implementing, reporting, and assessing); (iv) exploring classroom resources; and (v) producing sense-making practices' worksheets.

Between January and April 2019, 100 teachers (five classes of 20, in Porto, Águeda, Lisbon, Évora, and Faro, one per educational region) were trained by journalists. A new program, involving 21 teachers, started in the Azores, in February 2020. On March 7th, six new courses began in Braga, Bragança, Cascais, Lagos, Lisbon, and Setúbal (110 teachers). All programs were interrupted because of the lockdown, on March 14th, 2020, and were only concluded between October and December. Another program, aimed at preschool and primary school teachers, scheduled for March 11th, in Caneças, Lisbon neighborhood, did not even start until September. This global situation meant it was time to act and redesign a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt the project to the postpandemic world.

From face-to-face to b-learning in a peripheral territory

The Media Literacy and Journalism Project has been extended to the peripheral territory of the Azores islands in February 2020. The training was adjusted to three sessions (7h+6h+7h) instead of the planned five 4-hour sessions, and three journalists were simultaneously in the

classroom (usually there is just one), to make better use of class time in a territory where the logistics are the hardest due to isolation and meteorological instability. During their stay in the Azores, journalists trained 10 local colleagues, so they could train local teachers in the future.

Twenty-one teachers from five islands (Terceira, Faial, Pico, Flores, and São Miguel) attended the program held at the school EBS Madalena, in Pico. The first 2 days were theoretical–practical. Teachers were organized in groups of two to four and planned media education projects to be implemented in their schools until March 21st, 2020, the last training day, which ended up being canceled due to the pandemic.

Journalists and teachers decided, however, to continue collaborating remotely (Zoom, WhatsApp), and adapted the projects already planned, namely: the blog 'West Wind' (Flores); the multiplatform newspaper 'The School by me' (Pico); the Newsletter 'Info Piquinho' focused on the volcano in Pico island (Pico); the TikTok video project focused on giving students a voice (Pico); the Podcast 'The School and the World' (Terceira); the School Newspaper 'Neurónio' (neuron) (São Miguel); and restart the school radio station (Faial).

The last two sessions (3.5 hours each), which focused on sharing results, took place on October 26th and 28th, 2020. Two of the projects reached the local communities: the newsletter 'Info Piquinho', an eight-page PDF publication, including journalistic stories about Pico's volcano, infographics, and pictures, produced by students and teachers; the school newspaper 'Neurónio' was distributed with the local daily newspaper 'Açoreano Oriental', the oldest Portuguese newspaper still in circulation (Figure 23.1).

The projects suffered adaptation issues, but all of them were accomplished keeping quality and in-depth activities. Teachers were highly motivated and ended up asking for more cooperation from students to attain the goals. The students participated and interacted through media, both at the school and the community levels, produced videos on TikTok, produced video-recorded interviews with people from the community, planned and produced reports, organized and produced newsletters and podcasts, and wrote articles that were published in the school newspaper and/or the webpage of the regional newspaper. The training caught the attention of the local media outlets, resulting in several news pieces that raised the awareness of local communities about the importance of ML.

Figure 23.1 Outcomes of MIL projects (from left to right): "Piquinho" newsletter, "Neurónio" newspaper, published monthly with the regional newspaper "Açoriano Oriental", a multimedia webpage run by students, and the dissemination of the project through an article on the regional newspaper

Cooperation with media companies in online challenges

During the 2019 Media Literacy and Journalism teacher training program, the school AE Cerco, in Porto, created a 45-minute weekly pilot class on media education (Portuguese schools can decide on a part of the curricula) aimed at two secondary classes (grades 11 and 12). Since the results were well received, in the 2019–2020 school year, the school board extended the time dedicated (to six 45-minute classes per week), the targeted grades (fifth, seventh, and tenth), and the literacies covered (Media, Artistic, Digital, Scientific). All students of those grades attended six face-to-face classes per week on a rotating basis (8 weeks dedicated to each literacy) through the school year, benefiting from pedagogical dynamics focused on their role as authors.

After the lockdown, teachers quickly realized that it would be too boring to replicate online the face-to-face pedagogical plans. Instead, they decided to create weekly challenges, such as interviewing relatives about how they were coping with confinement or creating posters and other materials to raise awareness of the pandemic-related disinformation, with a focus on strategies to critically evaluate information and tackle disinformation. "Initially, we thought that they were not available to talk and to show themselves through the webcam, but it was not the case", teachers referred.

In April 2020, the Media Lab team of Jornal de Notícias (a national daily newspaper based in Porto) started a collaboration with AE Cerco twice a week, which allowed teachers and students to produce simulated TV news services through Google Suits. They chose the topics, produced the news, and presented as if they were doing live reporting. "They have become increasingly more efficient: for instance, on how to use their voice, or face a camera, but also more curious, critical, and responsible", teachers stated.

In the current school year, the challenges were given the name: "School changes, new scenarios" and were extended to grades fifth to eighth (four 45-minute classes per week). At secondary level, there are no dedicated classes, but media education is part of most subjects: "We are learning a lot, for instance, to check information sources or media representations, and we apply these techniques in our classes", teachers stated.

Online pandemic Fridays for students

In April 2020, the school AE João da Rosa, in the south of Portugal, designed a distance learning plan that kept Fridays free for online meetings between students and teachers to discuss the weekly work and to identify difficulties in distance learning (e.g. new routines, platform access, tech devices).

Class 8B decided that this space should be personalized, extended, and flexible, going beyond weekly work self-assessment. It should include (a) planning, discussing, and presenting activities related to students' well-being; (b) Media Education activities, since the school was involved in the Digital Citizenship Education project, developed by the Council of Europe, in 2019, as one of the 10 selected in Portugal to pilot new educational resources.

Led by a teacher who attended the Media Literacy and Journalism Project training course in 2019, the group started the project 'Building Bridges', consisting of online exchange with Njegos School (Montenegro, Central Europe), based on activities aimed at making their voices heard in multiple formats (i.e. text, video…) and languages (Portuguese, English), thus connecting formal and informal learning spaces (online/offline). About 300 students from both countries, aged 12–16, established common digital teamwork rules.

The Fridays' activities started at 9:00 AM and lasted as long as all students wanted them to. The head class teacher supported them, helped them solve their problems, face their fears, implement their suggestions, and make their voices heard.

Different types of activities were carried out through Google Classroom, such as self-assessments; testimonials about the confinement; symbols of freedom during the confinement; combating misinformation; and common digital teamwork rules. 'Building Bridges' (later extended to other classes) contributed to developing students' critical thinking, awareness, motivation, and empathy.

New innovative approach in times of pandemic

The Media Literacy and Journalism program was adapted for preschool and primary school teachers and approved by the Ministry of Education in February 2020. 31 teachers enrolled in the edition scheduled for March 2020, which has been canceled. The program was adapted to online settings, and 29 out of 31 teachers accepted to participate (two classes, since online courses were limited to 15 participants) between September and December 2020.

The initial plan foresaw the creation of a Makerspace (Marsh et al., 2019) at the local government headquarters, where projects crossing media education and STEM could be developed by teachers and their pupils, under trainers' participative observation to collect data. This plan was canceled, and teachers worked in regular classrooms, in groups of two, planning and implementing workshops, and collecting data (e.g. video, photos, assessment grids). A total of 30 workshops were planned and 16 were implemented (one per group), such as a) preschool: (i) creation of a planetarium using a microwave plate engine, balls of foam, a set of Christmas lights, inks, and wires; (ii) exploitation of the children's story "Corre, corre cabacinha" (Run, little gourd, run), and performing it on a shadow theater after having produced the 3D modeling of characters; and (iii) creation of simple musical instruments using common materials (balloons, wrenches, and plastic tubes) after exploitation of the book "Wild Symphony" (Dan Brown) and then performing the Beethoven's 'Turkish March';

> b) primary: (i) learn and practice how to grow beans from seeds and share the practical knowledge (+ practical tools) with preschoolers; (ii) create geometric solids from cardboard and then a quiz on this topic using and managing electrical circuits; and (iii) analyzing traffic signs existing around the school in Caneças and Islamabad (Portuguese Foreign language pupils), after the exploitation of the story "Why animals do not drive".

Besides having developed the workshop, teachers and pupils planned and produced videos or storytelling using PowerPoint explaining their creative process. The teachers considered that the students learned skills and competencies, such as "the structuring of an increasingly elaborate scientific thought", the "autonomy in their observations (…) and in the organization of records", the ability to identify "and resolve problems from situations that surround them (…) reflecting on the results", the use of "computer tools" (…) the collaborative work and the critical spirit regarding the work developed, for example in the "presentation of works", the "development of aesthetic sense, creativity, and leadership" and "resilience". The children also highlighted skills and competencies, such as "doing a PowerPoint presentation, not making mistakes in recordings and recognizing voices in recordings", "friendship, group work, and creativity", "knowing how to solve problems together", "learning from mistakes and living with colleagues" and that "unity is strength because all together we can change things".

Lessons from confinement

Seven core ideas arose and shall be considered in new media education:

a   Moving from face-to-face to online training was not a problem for most teachers, and it did not matter whether it was only part of training … (the Azores) or the whole training (the Lisbon area) was online.

b   Turning face-to-face programs into online ones should have been done immediately after the lockdown. Postponing the next sessions, hoping that the pandemic situation would be overcome, was the wrong decision, since the sessions took place online, but only between October and December 2020. In the meantime, 38 out of the 110 teachers gave up.

c   Having shifted to online immediately, as most teachers agreed during the training assessment, could have generated space for increasing teachers' confidence in online self-expression and familiarity with digital tools, and for improving their emotional coping & life satisfaction (Hobbs, 2020b), as the Media Education Lab (2020) did through the project "Virtually Viral Hangouts".

d   Teachers are willing and have proved to be able to participate in the project, not only as trainees but also as co-researchers, co-creating and implementing ME projects, collecting data from these projects, and providing feedback from students and other community members.

e   Results showed that as had happened in previous face-to-face training on ME, teachers are able to develop media literacy activities with their pupils, using traditional and/or digital technologies, during in-service teacher training courses and are able to overcome the lack of technologies in their classrooms by using their own devices or pupils' devices (Tomé, 2018).

f   Sustainable projects that arose from the first phase of the Media Literacy and Journalism project were easily adapted to the new scenario (e.g. Porto, Olhão), especially because they were directly supported by the school boards (ME has specific dedicated spaces in Porto, and had the full Fridays in Olhão), but other projects were interrupted or simply fell, which evidences the crucial importance of continuous monitoring and support after the teacher training.

g   Even through online teacher training run by journalists, ME helps students understand media production, distribution, and dissemination processes, which are key to empower students to be able to analyze, resist, critique, and create (Hobbs, 2020a), i.e., become safe, savvy, and social learners, able to analyze, evaluate, create, and apply what they have learned, who have evolved from literate user to fluent user (Ribble & Park, 2019).

Concluding remarks

UNESCO suggests that prerequisites for access to information and knowledge and to promote a free and pluralist media system are (i) understanding the functions of the media; (ii) critically evaluating content; (iii) making informed decisions; and (iv) producing media content. By captivating media practitioners (journalists) to ML training, and involving them in the school's environment, the project achieved UNESCO goals. These achievements were possible because the Media Literacy and Journalism Project is being developed in partnership (between the Journalists Union in Portugal, the National Training Centre for Journalists, and the Ministry of Education), which allows a large group of journalists and other media professionals to reach all preschool and k-12 teachers.

In the future, more broadened ME training courses could be developed, updated, and revised, according to the available outcomes. There is a growing number of teachers trained in schools, and more journalists are trained and available to support schools, through both the Media Literacy and Journalism website and the formal non-for-profit organization (NGO) created to manage the project. Lessons learned, the transformation of in-class training to remote learning, and the expansion of the target to preschool and primary grades are also key.

To replicate this project abroad, we must first refer that we should focus more on the intervention model and less on the developed activities. Having the stakeholders working in partnership, it is crucial to proceed with certified teacher training (e-learning or b-learning), reduce contact hours, and increase the number of asynchronous hours, as well as interpersonal relationships outside of synchronous sessions (among trainees and trainers and trainees). It is also key to train the trainees on online learning in preschool and primary school. Finally, it is crucial to produce data collection instruments, co-create assessment tools and monitor resources, and ensure that trainers are available to work with teachers in an ongoing logic.

The basic assumptions have been tested, evaluated, and proved. The chosen approach succeeded. On the one hand, this encourages and supports teachers to tailor their ML school projects rather than offer ready-made ML projects. On the other hand, it makes journalists available to support the development of those projects, monitored by academics and the Ministry of Education itself. And the results were positive on three levels: (i) improving the performance of practitioners (teachers, journalists, others); (ii) ensuring the sustainability of the projects created; and (iii) informing policymakers.

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