VIDEO EDUCATION AND TEACHERS TRAINING. A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Technological change and the advance of digital technology lead to changes in many aspects of our society, and education is certainly one of those aspects. Education also inevitably changes as a direct result of the change in information processing. UNESCO, in the global report on education published more than 20 years ago and entitled Teachers and teaching in a changing world, described the profound impact of ICT on the way teachers and learners gain access to knowledge, and, therefore, in the teaching-learning processes, too: “Although much more needs to be learned about the educational potential of the new technologies, it is clear that they are likely to have a bigger impact on the formal education system than most earlier technologies that have been applied to education. (… ...) the impact is likely to be two-fold: on the nature and type of learning materials available to students, and on educational methods. (UNESCO (1998: 90).

As a direct consequence of this impact of ICT, authors who address the issue of teacher training generally talk about significant changes in the roles of the teacher, who now would act more as a facilitator of learning than as a provider of information.

Teacher training on ICT and media, like in the case of any other professional, is largely a result of the social and technological changes experienced in recent decades, but it is clear that in the case of teachers, there are other more important reasons. Among the most close to their educational work, we might note, first, the incorporation of ICT and new media as teaching resources, and, secondly, the need to incorporate digital Media Education and develop competence in formal education.

The need for a permanent teachers training is not only a direct consequence of technological development, but also, and above all, is a “necessary improvement” to make education turn technological development into social progress. The need to improve and humanize the digital society entails changes in education and, therefore, the adequate training of teachers. These changes, as we noted earlier in this chapter, must be seen as a “necessary improvement”. Teachers’ training should not have as its main objective to follow the trail of technological progress, but to enable teachers and educators to make that technological progress in social progress, progress that will lead us towards a new more just global Society.

If changes in education and teaching are seen by the teachers just as a logical consequence of technological change, it would be technological trends that determine educational reforms and not vice versa, as desirable: that educational aims determine the use and integration of technology in education.

In the UNESCO study “The information technology and communication in teacher education” we are warned to this effect: "the teacher education institutions may either assume a leadership role in transforming education, or left behind in the path of relentless technological change. (UNESCO, 2004: 15). Education and teaching are already undergoing an inevitable transformation. We cannot decide whether ICT will be present or not in the XXI century classrooms. As teachers and educators we can only decide how, in which way, we will
integrate our educational media, whether following technological discourse, or based on the educational principles and objectives which should inspire our work.

1.- Approaches and key aspects of Teacher training on ICT and media

When referring to media presence in educational institutions we distinguished two basic ways: as resources to facilitate teaching and learning, and as subject matter. This false dichotomy has been transferred to teachers training programs, and, while we advocate here for integration of both aspects, there are many cases in which education systems address teacher training on ICT entirely separate from media education.

In these cases, when it comes to training in new technologies, whether for students or for teachers, there are two priorities: - access to technologies and - skill to use them. This approach corresponds to a technocratic conception of teacher education and teaching in general, after which - according to Zeichner (1983) - lays a metaphor of 'production', a vision of teaching as an "applied science" and a vision of the teacher as primarily an "executor" of the laws and principles of effective learning. This technocratic conception, criticized by Zeichner and many others since almost three decades ago, has been making its way and imposing as dominant in a neoliberal capitalist society where students as considered "customers" and where educational returns are analyzed and measured with market criteria.

We do not intend to downplay the technological dimension of teacher training in ICT. The skills to handle the new equipment are obviously needed. That is why this technological dimension is included in all classifications of objectives and content of teacher training in ICT.

Most of the authors and educational authorities make very clear that to the technical dimension of teacher training another didactic or educational one has to be added. Although not all of them seem equally convinced, there is a general belief that teacher centers cannot be turn into computer schools. However, among teachers is also fairly widespread the belief that what is really needed is access to equipment and "computer courses" to learn how to use them. In this teachers’ opinion the potential advantages and drawbacks of ICT in teaching is something they could guess once they can use the video or computer. They demand more technological training and less pedagogy.

Needless to say that our proposal for teacher training goes beyond providing access to ICTs and training teachers to operate devices and use digital programs. This would be only one part of teacher training in new multimedia technologies. In fact, we believe that these technical skills to use a computer can be acquired most easily by your own and outside of educational environments. In education and in teacher training more attention should be paid to critical-reflective content than to the instrumental and technological contents.

Although we admit that the technological dimension is necessary, we make clear that it must not be considered as the most important one, but rather as a part of the pedagogical dimension of teacher training, or as part of an educational project.

Therefore teacher training in ICT should not be reduced to providing access to technology and showing the teachers how to use it. Teachers should also learn:
- How ICT are and should be in the classroom: Their role and potential in learning (and in education).
- How ICT are and should be in society, by enlarge: Their role and potential in education (and in learning).

Many authors give us rankings of the dimensions, aspects or essential content of teacher training in ICT, ranging from purely instrumental to the more thoughtful considerations on the Information Society in which we live. In the past (Gutiérrez, 1998) we have identified three important dimensions of teacher training in ICT. We continue to maintain that teachers need to acquire:

a) Knowledge and skills on the potential of ICTs as tools, teaching resources used in
classrooms, distance education systems and non-formal education, ie “teaching potential” of ICT.
b) Knowledge of the “hidden curriculum”, the implications and consequences of ICT, both
during intentional learning, formal education itself, and, above all, in informal education
provided by mass media. We mean the “educational potential” of ICT.
c) Knowledge of contexts: the school context where media are used as teaching and learning
resources, and society in general, outside educational institutions, where media are not only
sources of information and entertainment, but also educational agents.
If we do not limit teacher training on media to technological and educational dimensions, we
will inevitably have to refer to the study of the social importance of media and its educational
influence, to the usual "media education" contents. In this line, as already noted, the European
Parliament recommends that media education modules be incorporated into teacher training
for all school levels.
The examples given in next section show us how this global an integrative approach of
teachers training in ICT and media According to the authors, and based on a large experience
with European teacher training courses in video education over the last decade, this teacher
training has a great impact and potential on the professional development of teachers.

2.- European Video Education Courses for Teachers

As we said before, improving teacher training has always been seen as a key factor in
improving education. The last decade has seen a variety of efforts to this end in almost all
European nations. The European Commission (2010: 5) has also recognised the need to
improve and promote teacher training: “In view of the increasing demands placed upon them
and the growing complexity of their roles, teachers need access to effective personal and
professional support throughout their careers, and particularly during the time they first enter
the profession.” There is an obvious consensus that ongoing teacher training is important for
the professional development of teachers in Europe.
Our experience with our European teacher training courses in video education over the last
decade has also revealed the impact and potential that teacher training has on the
professional development of teachers. Our intensive week-long media courses offer a host of
ideas to teachers as well as the obvious advantages of learning and exchanging with colleagues
from around the continent.
In the following text we would like to illustrate what a video education course in Berlin looks
like and what the main ideas behind it are.

2.a.- The main ideas of the courses

Each course which has taken place over the last 10 years has had the same goal: equipping
teachers with the main concepts of video education to enable them to pass these
competences on to their students. We have sometimes had participants who expected to be
trained as video producers during the course in order to help them create video materials to
use for their teaching. This is obviously also useful, however our courses concentrate on
teachers acquiring competences that they can then pass on to their students. The ultimate
goal is that video education contributes to making producers out of consumers - to helping
young people become more active themselves in their media experiences, being able to
articulate their opinions and to participate more actively in the modern world.
The course itself involves a five full day week which takes place at the Kulturring centre in
South East Berlin. The course is taught face-to-face. (We have also recently started offering
additional online courses.) Each day includes a short input on different areas of media
education and video production. The teachers are then given specific practical tasks to be
carried out in small teams of two or three colleagues. Courses normally have between 10 and
15 participants to ensure enough space for interaction but at the same time enough individual
support. Many of the tasks have a link to the city of Berlin – such as local languages, history or art. We also offer a colourful social programme to develop a group identity. This can include: joint meals, local excursions, school visits, visits to local television stations, visiting sights related to Berlin’s history or to museums such as the Television and Film Museum at Potsdamer Platz. The detailed programme changes with each course and also responds to the needs and interests expressed by the participants before the course starts.

The course focuses on video education: we understand this to be a combination of media education and video production. The media education component very much follows the conclusions of the European Council on media literacy in the digital environment of November 2009 – “the ability to access media and to understand, critically evaluate, create and communicate media content” (COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN UNION, 2009). During the course we have the chance to discuss what media education means to the individual participants and to exchange about how the different countries implement media education in their school curriculum. But we also do several short exercises, such as the editing of shared still images to explore how meaning is created and can be easily changed and manipulated. This then leads us to the idea of representation – how meaning is created but how different audiences can perceive or read the meaning differently.

Within the area of video production we look into how events and sequences can be recorded and edited using different technologies - ranging from very basic recording devices to sophisticated video production technology. We also include an introduction to visual language: how the video camera can be used creatively with different picture framings and camera movements.

The specific tasks given to the teachers are normally connected to a school subject, e.g. art, biology, history or languages. For example, a history task might explore how specific recent or past events in Berlin might be represented at a museum or place of interest. Language tasks might explore the visibility of different languages in the multi-cultural inner-city areas of Berlin and how individual words from different languages can be visualised. Art tasks might explore sights such as the East Side Gallery or the visual architecture of the Jewish Museum or introduce simple stop-motion animations using still images. At the same time, the tasks include different media genres such as documentary, documentation, role play or news programmes. They also include a range of different source materials such as photos, graphics and paintings, video footage, sound effects and music. Links to some of the outcomes of the tasks can be found below.

All of the tasks are then evaluated by the teachers. We also offer two main evaluation sessions during the five full days. The interim evaluation helps to make sure that the course meets the needs expressed at the beginning. We are keen to make the course as relevant as possible for each participant and that the outcomes can be integrated into their teaching practice straight away.

Most of the tasks pick up on ideas which we have developed in our main European multilateral projects over many years:

- Television News on Europe: [www.23muskeltiere.de/europe.htm](http://www.23muskeltiere.de/europe.htm) (using the genre television news to bring across content)
- Media Education across the Curriculum: [www.mediaeducation.net](http://www.mediaeducation.net) (finding specific starting points for media education in different school subjects)
- Speech Bubbles: [www.speechbubbles.net](http://www.speechbubbles.net) (using video to promote languages in Europe)
- DIVIS: [www.divisproject.eu](http://www.divisproject.eu) (using video production for language learning)
- The viducate network: [www.viducate.net](http://www.viducate.net) (collecting and promoting best practices linked to active citizenship, creativity and intercultural communication)

2.b.- The pedagogy behind it
Video education is not an isolated activity, but involves a mix of different learning methods - communication competence, team work, intercultural learning and evaluation. Our aim is also to integrate it across the curriculum and use it as a contribution to transform education into media education.

Communicative competences play an important role in audio-visual production. We already mentioned the use of visual language - exploring different ways of how a video camera can be used. Video editing adds a new visual meaning to this through the change and overlay of video footage. Sound effects and music offer additional layers of communication. At the same time we like to begin every video project by writing down ideas – collecting ideas and writing them down in the form of a storyboard or short script.

Video education can be practised extremely well in team work. Each project needs to include planning, writing, recording, editing and evaluation. All of these project phases can be actively discussed in teams. When editing together a team discusses the video clips, what ideas and emotions they associate with the images and sounds and what kind of message they would like to create. This is an exciting moment where students are then able to talk about their own media experiences and where a video project can help foster critical media competence.

At the same time we believe that video projects can be helpful tools to encourage intercultural communication. Within a European course this is rather obvious and happens partly automatically. We try to strengthen this dialogue by specific tasks. A first homework the teachers are given (before they even come to Berlin for the course) involves capturing a still image from their home environment and sharing it online with the colleagues. And we encourage teachers to connect with each other once the course is over and use the video education ideas for European school exchange projects.

The video tasks focus on the ideas and not on the production. We are less concerned about the quality of the production but more interested in how the ideas developed, how the message was created and if the final message that was intended is actually read and understood by the rest of the group. We therefore evaluate all phases of the process, including: How well did you work as a team? How well did you manage your time?

2.c.- The technical part of the course

Video technology has changed dramatically over the years since our first course. It used to be quite complicated and technically demanding to transfer and edit video footage. This has all become fairly straightforward in recent years. The first courses we offered needed a lot of attention for software and hardware issues, often spending a long time getting all the video footage onto the computer and successfully creating a short video. Nowadays it is possible to use a huge range of technology for recording video. This includes still cameras, smart phones and web cameras. Video editing has become accessible and fast, allowing a lot more potential for video education within the classroom.

The goal of the course is not however to become a professional video producer. We rather stress the importance of using basic technology, and especially technology which is available in the school already. This is the reason why many teachers use their still cameras to record videos. These are often good enough for short educational work. The same applies to video editing. Free software such as Movie Maker or iMovie offer more than adequate solutions for most of the project work in schools. If teachers come with previous experience in video production then we offer additional input in advanced editing using semi-professional video editing packages in the area of multiple image overlay, sound post production and the use of a blue box.

We also encourage teachers to consider having their students carry out part of the video tasks outside of school - as part of homework or as additional after-school activities. This can on the one hand ease the possible issue of limited time but also can connect school work with home activities, can promote inter-generational learning (for example in interviews with
grandparents) but as well simply connect more strongly with the interests of young people today.

The emerging web 2.0 technologies offer more and more possibilities for extending and developing video education. Initially this concentrated on streaming possibilities where video outcomes can reach a larger audience than a simple classroom screening. Easy embedding and linking features make it possible to share a video across different platforms with very little effort. Special features such as automatic translations for captions are very useful tools for international school projects. Developing online tools already allows for videos to be edited completely online. This can develop into collaborative video work across different groups and settings in the long term. Social networks can help teachers to stay connected easily after the end of courses and keep exchanging their video results without any additional costs.

2.c.- Next steps, networking and outlook

When we started with our first teacher training course in 2002 in Berlin we were keen to use teacher training courses as a platform to spread the ideas and materials we had developed in our first trans-national European project. Over the last nine years we can see how this has been a great success. We have furthermore developed a long-lasting network of colleagues across Europe who apply video education in their teaching practice. When the one week course is over we are keen to motivate teachers to become part of this network.

We encourage them to formulate a first action plan of what they want to do once they are back home again. This needs a very specific first activity as well as longer term ideas of what could be done in the current or coming school year. The teachers are also encouraged to look into ideas for connecting with each other and possibly starting a first eTwinning or Comenius school project.

The teacher training courses have become exciting events for connecting with new teachers. We have also been encouraged by the large amount of positive feedback from participants.

Two comments from teachers:

- “I put into practise what we did in Berlin. The result was very impressive in the classes: the students love creating a story and filming. They see the teacher very differently. And I thought, the problem is you can’t do this with every class. But the idea is good, because once they did this, they listened better for the next lessons.”

- “I have never thought how I can use photos, films and movie maker in my teaching, but after participating to the course I have learnt many things that helped me to diversify my teaching and the students enjoyed the new ideas ....Teachers and students appreciate very much this sort of presentations because they are very instructive and they are not boring as they used to be, we usually invited the history teacher to talk about the event and nobody was listening.”

The course homepage can be found under: http://course.mediaeducation.net

Contact us if you would like to get involved in one of our future activities.

References:

- COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN UNION (2009). “Council conclusions on media literacy in the digital environment”. Retrieved on the 7-08-2011 from:


  http://www.unesco.org/education/information/wer/PDFeng/wholewer98.PDF


Video examples from previous courses (with different themes) can be found here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG7YPfTGHAo (history)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mSnAHJI6SI (language)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JPd3mp16X4 (staging languages)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alPcbLEvF8Q (art)