

Should we construct a new paradigm for media education?

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«What we want in the world is to tell all of those who are resisting and fighting in their own ways and in their own countries, that you are not alone, that we, the Zapatistas, even though we are very small, are supporting you, and we are going to look at how to help you in your struggles and to speak to you in order to learn, because what we have, in fact, learned is to learn.»

VI Declaration of the Selva Lacandona
EZLN revolutionary committee June 2005.

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And so we continue to talk about education about the media, for the media, through the media... An introduction to this issue could lead us to repeatedly reference authors who are respected and highly specialised in an issue that is not new: media education.

It's simple and clear, education, media and collective intelligence are part of the same chain, segments of the same story. If this relationship is so obvious, why do we need this text? It must be because: Education is communication, and communication in the 21st century is, increasingly, produced, shared and distributed through digital media. Digitalisation makes it much cheaper to transport information. For some, the medium is perfect. These are normally the people who have forgotten about the content, the message, the knowledge. But there is a simple dilemma - transmitting information does not generate knowledge unless we act on it. Some specialists suggest, and I believe it is paradigmatic, that **unless the transmitter becomes a transmitter-receptor** (what Kaplún would call EMIREC, from the Spanish) **there is no**

communication. Remember: communication = education. Is technology necessary in education? No, but social dynamics have determined that we live in a Network Society, we can't ignore this. Is general intellect necessary in education? If we want to be critical, understand and transform reality, then the answer is: always.

As Kaplún explains, «Communication **is the process** through which an individual enters into **mental cooperation** with another until they achieve a **common consciousness**. Information, on the other hand, is any **one-sided transmission of messages** from a transmitter to a receptor»¹.

Let us then consider collective intelligence and media education as correlative concepts. A correlation that begins with a model focused on what the theorist-practitioner of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, called dialogic (from a **transforming concept** in which a critical vision and creativity are highly encouraged, the function of education is **reflection-action** and the assessable objective is the capacity to **think-transform**), this model is what guides me. And now that that technology seems to be a touchstone in the areas of culture and educational, it's not a bad idea to remember its importance, because media don't liberate, they are media. Because technology isn't neutral and neither should it be.

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Seville, June 2005, candidates sitting exams

for positions in the Andalusia children's education system were asked about *ICT (Information and Communication Technologies)* integration in the second level, setting out and developing every element of the curriculum (objectives, contents, methodology, attention to diversity...) - What is the correction template proposed by the government? To develop, focus and act exclusively in the «Computer Corner», that is, that the only educational technology that we can integrate is the exclusive use of computers. If we study educational software, we will find many good examples, but in general terms these are directional programs, not based on a model of dialogue and transformation and, of course, focussed on the effects, the results, behaviourism. Are computers «bad»? No, what's bad is the model that takes it and turns it into a small learning machine based on giving correct answers.

In short, the government has been tending towards the integration of one element, the technological, without taking into account the overall value of communication. We can't develop the use of ICTs in education, at any level, as simply a process of **instrumental literacy** in relation to a machine that does everything.

Even so, the Andalusia government has taken a first step; what we are asking for here is the next step, which perhaps should have been the first. Because we dearly hope that the implementation of ICT centres in the Andalusia educational community is not just playing to the gallery. If that was the case, we would have a big problem.

To put things in context, for the past two years, the Education Department of the autonomous community government of Andalusia has been implementing centres known as TICs (from the Spanish initials of Information and Communication Technology), which install one computer for every two students

in all classrooms. It is also based on an open, collaborative philosophy and, with the aim of cutting costs, (and following the pioneering and model example of Extremadura's autonomous community government) it uses a free software operating system: *Guadalinex*, an Andalusia distribution of *Debian*.

Have they understood the philosophy on which free software is based? To explain it further, Professor Guíérrez Martín, in a book that should be bedside reading for those in charge of these things, directly states:

«The challenge of interactivity in educational applications [and in all education using media] is not, as some seem determined to believe, to use the possibilities offered by the technology in order to invent the perfect and autonomous 'machine for communication or teaching', but to help individuals achieve this autonomy using digital technologies in the learning process.»²

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Actors, writers, musicians and politicians brought together for the *Mesa Antipiratería* (anti-piracy roundtable conference) went to the senate to take part in an awareness raising day in defence of **the original**. The president of the *Senado*, Javier Rojo, and the president of the *Mesa*, Pilar Bardem, claimed **education** was the solution to the current problem of intellectual piracy. The day's events began with a presentation by Juan Antonio Castellanos, the representative of *Apple Spain*, who pointed out that technology should be the «best legal ally for defending the rights of creators» and claimed there was thus the need «**make it easier to buy music than to steal it**». After his presentation, Juan Luis López Escuerdo, from *Microsoft Spain*, drew attention to **his company's programs that are specifically designed to educate children** in regard to intellectual property rights.

Juan Mollá, the president of the *Asociación Colegial de Escritores*, a writers association, talked about the need to educate society because «it is only through education that we can make **people respect art** in its different forms». The poet Luis García Montero pointed out that buying books or records «means **guaranteeing the freedom of creators**». The actor Carlos Castell added a clear message to the other presentations: «Education as the only road to raising society's awareness of the **value of the original work**»³

This extract brings up a few pearls that we can't help drawing attention to - it's obvious that *Apple* and *Microsoft* shouldn't be the guarantors of «digital literacy», or at least that's not the model we're applying here, so why were they invited? Another issue is that in this book it is clearly demonstrated that the downloading of any copyrighted material from the internet is not piracy, it's a right⁴. Freedom should not be confused with criminalisation. We are against piracy, the kind that is for profit making purposes. But in relation to education, culture and personal use, we have (and we hope we will continue to have for a long time to come), a right to private copies, and, above all, a constitutional right to access to education and culture.

And of course we should use education, to promote access to information, to generate communication, to be able to listen/learn/enjoy music, books, movies that are not released in Spain or are sold at ridiculous prices. Education is public and free, we should encourage libraries (and fight openly and resolutely against the European directive that wants to impose a tax on loans⁵... the battle is taking place on many fronts, and we can't give in to the needs of the big corporations - they don't encourage creativity, copyright wouldn't even allow me to think what I'm thinking right now, right? No, it's not better to buy than to share. Can you imagine if

there were payment systems for each didactic unit or subject?

«We can't study *Plato's Dialogues* because we have to pay copyright for quoting Socrates, and given that Socrates didn't write anything down, we have the inheritors of Plato, who wrote what his master Socrates said, and they are also asking for their cut. So, we apologise, but whoever wants to study Plato will have to get a patch and download it from the devil's networks.»

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Access to information should be free, open and universal, and that's why the digital divide, local development and communication are important issues we can't ignore, and why we can't leave them in the hands of the big corporations.

We know that technology doesn't free us on its own, technology is not the solution, is not the final purpose, is the tool. And this is where collective intelligence plays its part. When we've referred to General Intellect here, we were talking about the construct that we use as a basis for understanding that communication, knowledge and dialogue are the challenge. Construction and creation should be collective, dialogical and at the same time committed to whatever it proposes. To be precise, we're not talking about using it as a panacea, no, we're sorry, panaceas don't exist. We're talking about a sum of individuals, who cooperate and develop this common consciousness that Kaplún was talking about earlier. When we say that the model is collective construction, we're only making it clear that reflection-action relations must take place from this perspective.

We can apply the image to the phenomenon of wikis and all their possible variations and form. Wikis are a very simple online tool that allows us to create contents (such as a text)

collectively. As users we can start writing in a wiki, and a friend can contribute to or correct that text immediately. The potential is in its **accessibility** (we just have to press EDIT on any page in a WIKI and begin making changes), the **immediacy** (we don't have to send each other a text and then re-post it, we always work on the same text) and the **memory** (all previous versions are saved, so we can recover the «original» at any point).

One of the projects that has best developed and used this technology is *Wikipedia* «anyone with a modem can not only consult *Wikipedia*, but also change it. And see how their changes are changed. And change those changes to that change. And join forums to discuss the reasons for changing the change to that change [...] *Wikipedia* is not ordered or run by anyone. *Wikipedia* does not try to exhaustively define a field by giving (and having) the last work. [...] *Wikipedia* is not a product, it is produced.»⁶

And so, should we build a new paradigm for *media education*? We are already doing it. Now we just have to add, refute and continue. The aim of this text is to apply these examples to the case of education, and so, we keep on learning.

NOTES

1. Kaplún, Mario: Una pedagogía de la comunicación. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre. Proyecto Quirón, 1998 (p. 64) Las negritas son nuestras.
2. Gutiérrez Martín, Alfonso: Alfabetización Digital. Algo más que ratones y teclas. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2003 (pgs. 44-45)
3. Extracts taken from La Mesa Antipiratería reivindica en el Senado la educación como forma de erradicar la piratería de bienes culturales published in CINE POR LA RED, pay per view link (http://www.porlared.com/noticia.php?not_id=20841), last consulted on

21/07/2005

4. Poner aquí el número de página y el título del artículo de David Bravo
5. Campaign against the Library tax (<http://exlibris.usal.es/bibesp/nopago/>)
6. Córdoba, Antonio: *Meet Wikipedia*. Barcelona: elástico.net (<http://elastico.net/archives/005295.html>), consultado por última vez 15/07/2005.

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