Media Audiovisual: A Case Study in the New Spanish Scholar Model Facing the European Crisis

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Abstract

This article describes the research on the implementation of the Integrated Centre of Communication, Image and Sound in Asturias (Spain). Management and teaching experience in this new centre of communication, is a new model in response to the European trend, and first outcomes resulting from the adaptation of the Spanish Education System to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The study redefines the process of training in New Information Technologies. Quasi-experimental and descriptive methods of research have been used (selection of the subject of study – population/students without random samples). The implementation of this new training model allows us to observe how an education community adapts itself to the European Reference Framework, how school management, learning methods, particular multimedia contents and its resources and devices of contemporary messages interact within a documented book for education.

Keywords: *New Audiovisual Technologies, ICT applied to Education; Vocational Higher Education; Multimedia Education.*

Introduction

The present study describes the response of the Integrated Centres of Vocational Higher Education to the challenges of a region in crisis. These centres are education institutions created in order to promote "Lifelong Learning Education" integrating different levels of education although in this case only what it is considered as high-level education[i] was analysed. The design of these centres[ii] follow the education guidelines developed by the Spanish legislation[iii] as well as the proposals made by the European Council of Lisbon in 2000, which sets a ten-year term for Europe to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

In this case, the approach is put into practice with a flexible training focused on labour demands, with different alternatives for education interrelated. Next we put forward the training test carried on at the Integrated Centre of Vocational Higher Education in Communication, Image and Sound[iv], dependent on the Spanish Public Administration of Education, and we describe its implementation in Langreo (Spain). This paper is based on a publicly funded project developed from 2006 to 2011. The development of the research continue with the guidelines within the initial project -*Research and Development for training of*

288

teaching and management staff at Integrated Centres- coordinated by the School of Education at the University of Oviedo (Spain).

Context of crisis

We considered the social background of the students as well as demographic characteristics which define educational policies (Coates, 1993, 40). The social and cultural background of this Centre is that of a region submerged in a social and economic crisis, targeted for industrial reconversion of mining and transferring the primary industrial activity into services. This region is an example of the aging European population (Sadei, 2006, 133), which has an impact on a lack of students and this tendency makes the students become something to be achieved and satisfied (Perez, 2000).

In this region – Asturias – there was not a strong audiovisual cultural professional sector due to the lack of a regional TV channel which is in contrast to the increase of multimedia and audiovisual emissions at a telematic, national and international level. Emissions that spread in worldwide broadcasting as well as communication devices are being diversified by the use of the Internet, video-telephony, videogames and audiovisual mini-players.

Traditionally, there has been structural difficulties in this region (Lazaro, 2002) and a lack of regional endeavour for spending in innovation and R&D which did not attain 0,6% of GDP, this is below the Spanish average (0,85%). Specifically, the *Education Facilities* within the 4.A Statement of Priorities received 115.258.019 € for the period 2000-2006, one of its objectives being the improvement of the regulated vocational training. The decline of the industrial mining sector led to seek competitive business solutions to recover lost jobs as well as to design training strategies for human resources, and comprehensive and complementary actions for boosting employment. Today, the global economic crisis requires setting effective and innovative education practices – a new model giving response to expectations and justifying the investment made.

The Department of Education (University of Oviedo) provided our project with methodology and all of its professors joined the project since its beginning in 2006, when the Centre[v] was inaugurated. Provided with new technologic audiovisual education-based resources, its high cost involved a predictable optimization and maximization of its performance. Thus, we took into account funding and commitments made: European Structural Funds (European Social Fund - ESF) on Economic and Social Cohesion, Convergence, Training and Fight against Unemployment (Programme for reactivating the mining regions 2001-05), being Asturias priority objective no.1 within less-favoured Europe.

In the region of Asturias during the academic year 2005/06, we observed in the economic reports[vi] an estimate for education of 673 million Euros, of which 552 millions

were assigned to formal regulated training and its fifth part, 121 millions to non-formal education that is, continuing and occupational -unemployed-, funded from the European Social Fund. This 121 millions were distributed among 180 regulated public centres and 2343 diverse centres. During the year 2007, 110 students of the regulated training in Communication, Image and Sound graduated in Asturias whereas during the same period 2805 students were qualified in Occupational Education.

Some managers of education centres[vii] give answers to this multiple range of offers. In Spain, New Technology in Education is mainly found at the non-regulated, non-formal sector (it lacks of support and control by the State). Prestigious universities to limited significant academies are found in this big group. Considering this information, multiple options and education branches seems to exist in and outside the regulated education system, which limit endeavours to make coherent the objective of European convergence of education. This Integrated Centre is designed to assess informal and non-formal education in a near future, putting into practice the European directive (Bjornavold, 2001) that considers training areas beyond the regulated formal sector.

The same European Framework for High-Level Education set out the guidelines for the project to put the innovative methodology into practice, and provided with the teaching autonomy established in the above-mentioned Spanish Law (*RD 1558/2005*) which defines a new educational model. This Law was the object of the first research and meetings of the team for this project, making it possible to experience the European Qualifications Reference Framework and to follow the 1999 Bologna Declaration: quality enhancement of education, mobility of teachers and students due to the recognition of diplomas (Berleur & Galand, 2005, 52).

Besides, frameworks for non-formal education which is to be recognised in the EHEA are not defined in a steady way. That is a system sometimes supported by the Education's or Social Services' administration, by other diverse institutions most of them with high European resources and uncertain diplomas recognized in to the regulated education system (Greenfield, 2009, 70). Recognitions that cause to reconsider the very model of regulated training and which should be evaluated by this model of Education Centre.

Objectives of the study

The Spanish Law *R. D. 1558/2005* on the creation of Integrated Centres was the referent text to be used. Its main aspects are the close relationship with the labour and social context of the Education Institution, the autonomy in management and pedagogical decisions and the integration of all lifelong learning education systems for the citizen by means of initial/ regulated training, occupational training courses for the unemployed and continuing professional retraining. Thus, the development of this autonomy enabled an innovative activity in terms of management and pedagogic decisions in order to achieve an ongoing improvement of the educational process itself as well as an adequate use of resources and excellent academic results.

Objectives:

- To set out and develop new teaching methodology strategies connected with curricular contents (audiovisual) in accordance with the importance, progress and needs of the background (social/ professional/ European).

- To set out and develop alternatives for managing and organizing an Education Institution which will incorporate all education sub-systems (initial/regulated, occupational and continuing).

- We also measured the accession of graduated students into employment, levels of enrolment in the centre, spreading and application of this methodology in other centres, teaching materials, and literature in the field of science and education published for that purpose.

Methodology

Revision of the state of the discussions was made during research considering previous scientific theories about training in ICT. This theory reference framework collects training experiences *with and for* devices, where the teacher and his/her activity is the fundamental key in the development and interpretation of these new cultural situations (Bartolome, 2005). Thus, Cabeza (2001) says that the incorporation of technological resources may alter contents and sequence of contents so as to result in a different curriculum. We reviewed the reduced synchronic number of similar experiences in the region, in Spain and abroad, where these type of centres are linked to the university field; for these cases, their development and potential link with our present project were revised. We also followed legislation set by the European Qualifications Framework and the Bologna Declaration of 1999 regarding the free movement of workers, the exchange of recognised knowledge among different western education systems, and the harmonisation of approaches, levels, validation of diplomas as well as education areas.

A descriptive method is used in order to revise curricular contents and educational models concerning ICT. The method is based on a documentary revision, description of aspects of the new ICTs as well as the strategies that make ICTs an efficient tool for the transfer of knowledge. This is a study to find its significant variables and causal relations.

We also used the participant observation technique in which the researcher applies the design, he/she is also a member of the teaching staff and makes part of the community observed. It is a method of action research that enriches all the process but involves the need of a proven and permanent verification of outcomes. These demands and conditions were considered as they may question the rigor of the research. We were conscious of the complexity of education phenomena due to their qualitative character which deals with aspects such as values, beliefs or meanings which are non-sensitive to experimentation.

Therefore, we had to develop methods under a multi-methodological approach, that is, by using different observers for the same phenomena so as to compare results and attain reliability levels in measurements. We tried to control the threatening level to the internal validity of the research, so individuals with a lower bias estimator participated: new teaching staff, students and management staff who restrict inertia and pedagogic habits which may alter the practice of the new educational model.

In favour of the multi-methodological approach, several simultaneous tools were used for data acquisition together with qualitative techniques of participant observation:

a)   Groups of debate set out on the records of the teacher's meetings where aspects of the subjects proposed for the project were defined and discussed: Potential causes, main characters, hierarchies, interrelations, rules, etc. Alternative strategies and solutions were proposed.

b)   Records and results of academic assessments.
c)   Questionnaires about samples.
d)   Statistic annual reports of the Centre and of the Administration of education.
e)   Records of the follow-up of the teaching training for the teaching staff.
f)   Reports from the Administration of Education elaborated by inspectors of the education service.
g)   Data resulting from participant observation of the teacher's resources and methodology.

We considered the academic results as dependent variable and features that determine them as independent variables resulting from the new training model of the Integrated Centre, established at the Spanish Law *(RD 1558/2005).*

Design of the Educational Model

The autonomy for organization and teaching of these institutions and a flexible framework enabled the development of the educational model, methodologies and contents whose results are described below:

Modification of the subjects taught: Descriptive analysis of new education strategies in ICT
The present research considers these variables in order to understand new contents in curriculums and processes in New Information and Communications Technologies, particularly referring to the audiovisual field.

A quick development brings together audiovisual features with informatics in Multimedia (Okamoto, Cristea & Kayama, 2001, 12). This fact reorganizes basic education terms such as *tool* and *language* as well as forms, concepts, stereotypes and structures of knowledge within the different dimensions of knowledge in an individual (Haake & Gulz, 2008, 8). A new approach for a European education institution requires setting singular, different education strategies specifically linked to Multimedia and distance training.

Cultural control of the Multimedia and Audiovisual narrative strategies

We are particularly interested in the function of new social ICTs as pseudo-trainers. The traditional teacher's activity is appropriated and redesigned by integrating a new figure of the teacher in his/her messages, which responds to interests and typical strategies of the great media (Fombona, 1997). We observed that Multimedia narrative techniques and its strategies not only represent a parallel school but also a reference model that seems to be prevailing on the traditional educational model. The effectiveness of these strategies makes its contents to be commonly in daily conversations and creates a specific network of values and counter-values (Fu, 2006, 820).

Knowledge is also managed from new forms, devices and information hypermedia information platforms. This shapes new learning and work methodologies. Thus, these new channels are key elements when it comes to organize learning as shown in the similarity found on most of the messages of social media and streams of opinion. The integration of Audiovisual and Informatics in Multimedia (Teofilova & Saliev, 2003, 424) entails a significant change from the paradigm of teaching to the paradigm of learning. This trend benefited from technologic advancements, the increase in broadband communications as well as the integration of different simultaneous resources for the enhancement of the education process and the obtaining of a personalized learning in given environments. Techniques of smart tutoring and study through interactive website – all of them represent new models which are not free either from pitfalls and handicaps.

In the research we measured the **frequency of use** given to different technologic resources in our students' daily life (Table 1), its good global assessment is emphasized.

Technology assessed by students	Use (0 nothing – 10 very much)
Mobile phone (Voice)	8.5
Traditional TV	7.5
Work (no entertainment) via network (Internet).	7.4
Cinema	7.3
Multimedia phone system (data+music+video)	7.1
Photography	7.1
Multimedia players (I-pod…)	6.8
Work (no entertainment) using PC (word processors, design, etc.)	6.5
Video signal recorder devices (VHS, DVD)	6.2
Games/ Entertainment using PC	6.0
Handheld video game console	3.3
Video Film	3.3

Table 1. – ICT's preferences. Source: Personal Research 2007.

Audiovisual messages continue to control every communicative environment. The fact that people spend more than 200 minutes watching TV messages by per day is a correlation that seems to increase in times of crisis when there are 100 minutes spent during a PC session by person during his/her free time. This amount of time is transferred from traditional TV device to audience-made audiovisual formulas; and its messages respond to the interests of the addresser's customers (Shahid & Tang, 2007, 6457). That means that people – mainly the youngest – watch every time less generic TV shows and they choose specific programs according to their demands (pay-TV channels, on line videos, programs viewed on mobile phone, etc.).

Besides, the 2007 OPA Europe Internet Use At Work Media Consumption Study analyses Internet users from six European countries and stresses reading as the task that users often stop doing as a consequence of the use of the Internet. They also stop (following this order) watching TV, listening to radio and to music. Also, the more common uses of the Internet is the search of news, music, files and software downloads and watching videos on line. Here we realize again the hegemony of the audiovisual field in this new form of cultural transfer.

Therefore, contents associated to New Technologies must be updated and adapted to the changes suffered by its own devices which determine those contents. These are changeable, dynamic, flexible devices that fit to its users' demands.

We affirmed as Eco (2006) did, that the introduction of the Internet has an impact on learning and students look up directly the information on the Internet instead of using books. Thus, a new subject to be taught at school would tackle the new models for organizing and providing support to information so as to create knowledge.

It seems that traditional audiovisual mediums cannot progress anymore in the field (cinema, generic TV, etc) therefore it has to be studied now as something integrated in networks and in areas of Internet data exchange (WEB 2.0), telematic virtual worlds (MMOs…) with high number of users, etc. All of that thanks to the use of specific broadband which solves the problem of broadcasting for interactive data channels with live image.

The telematic *worlds* (World of Warcraft, Habbo Hotel, RuneScape, Club Penguin, Webkinz Gaia Online, Guild Wars, Puzzle Pirates, Lineage I/II, and Second Life) enable the exchange of information, and they become iconic data in a great way, where the user doesn't have to go out as they simulate that real life. However this virtual world lacks of effectiveness in the treatment of abstract and conceptual contents (e.g.: a philosophic thought) because the image is so powerful that deletes and restricts the content to a secondary position. Primitive gratifying instincts are encouraged (laugh, pity, hurt…) against the capacity for abstraction essential for the development of a reflexive awareness.

New technologic environments for Knowledge, new audiovisual educational model

We observed that the efficiency of this new ICT narrative is boosted by the interests of the companies that create the messages. Contents are introduced under proven successful formulas which have become communicative and cultural patterns worldwide following the guidelines and strategies of marketing (Ferrell & Hartline, 2006). These guidelines rule contents and speech of social communication to make them profitable – therefore during a TV show a CD of music, games, a film coming afterwards or t-shirts of its main characters will be promoted.

At the beginning of this paper we mentioned the need for developing strategies that will seek the customer/student and his/her fidelization. This is a response to market economy approaches where supply and demand struggle to find their breakeven point. The models of quality management and management approaches toward the customer (Murgatroyd & Colin, 2002) have a special connection with these marketing techniques:

- To plan so as to gain markets with limited customers/students who buy their products. The profile of profitable customers is studied and that of minorities is discriminated. Marginalized people and particular ethnic groups are forgotten as far as great strategies concern.

- Clear specification and maximization of tangible objectives: number of customers, sell of products, etc. Efficiency criteria for actions depend on tangible results at the short term.

- Material things are especially valued in detriment of social goods and products.

- These techniques have great power of communication; they use communicative solutions from resources and devices of other systems (theatre-related techniques, radio, music or education itself). Communication is direct and contents and forms are recreational.

In brief, for these new media forms are as important as its contents. Messages focus on feelings, on the sensitive and instinctive part of the individual where the *possessions* and the *I* are valued – happiness at the short term (Robinson & Martin, 2008, 568), whereas the traditional educational model focus its contents on reasoning. We agree with Samaniego (2008) in the need for bringing the entertainment strategies closer to learning, and also with Sevillano (2008) in showing that the new educational design must review its approach insisting on tasks as the mean to attain educational objectives, training of cognitive analytic and reflexive abilities focus toward the action. This project propounds the encounter of these two educational models.

Analysis of new academic profiles. Trends in the new teaching staff model

This Education Centre and these contents linked to ICTs are suitable for their development through innovative and specific educational approaches. Throughout the project and successive discussions, basic questions regarding the educational methodology to be implemented were made:

- What model of teacher does suit for this present moment and for this context? One who trains efficient workers or one who trains versatile minds in another cognitive dimension?
- How should the ideal teacher for students and families be? The role of the new teacher responds to a new teaching process where students' prospects are a priority. We question though, if the professional should be guided only by observing their patients in order to diagnose.

We carried on a study on the students and *the profile of the good teacher* from *his/her self-experience* as a student (Fombona, 2008) resulting in the following aspects:

1º- A close person, without a sense of superiority and whom we can talk to.
2º- Someone who knows the updated contents very well.
3º- Someone who helps everyone (and each student) any time (even out of school day).
4º- Pleasant.
5º- Someone who teaches in a clear and interesting manner.
6º- Someone who energizes the course with diverse activities, debates…
7º- Someone who is sure of his/her role, who "knows how to gain respect without a lack of reprimands".

Students also asses the following aspects although to a lower extent:
- To be passionate and to have a vocation for teaching by valuating the contents taught.
- To have a good communication with students.
- It does not matter if the teacher is demanding.
- To be able to understand and appreciate different opinions and subjective aspects (creativity, effort…).
- To be quiet, attentive, sincere, encouraging, reflexive, practical, non-repressive…

Therefore, this is a significant insight for the satisfaction of students considered as customers within the ISO 9001 trends of enhancement and quality which also started to be developed in this Education Centre from a concept of positivism where achievements must be proven at the short term. Nevertheless, we realized that the educational activity brings results at the medium/long term which is in contrast with these standards of quality that check the features demanded by the market in view of the next insertion of students. Throughout this project, this Integrated Centre responds by providing with a model of comprehensive teacher who pays attention to the aspirations of his/her audience/customer that is, students who will give an assessment.

Trends in the new model of student

In the data collection observed by the teaching staff, there is a coincidence when it comes to stress the following keys: students are in contact with forms and contents from media since the beginning of their life and at a very important time during the comprehensive development of attitudes and habits. Audiovisual documents are seen whenever and in diverse technological devices. In the case of TV, there are programs for adults all day long whereas programs for children disappear when it is actually during this age that children have a very receptive and influential perception (Michel & Roebers, 2008, 1230). In the case of videogames, its influence is increased due to the addictive power being developed. Once again, these models create a new profile of student, as the above-mentioned measurements showed:

- Student's quick response to incentives, with gradual greater information, positivist and practical insight.
- Decrease of the reading habit.
- Diffuse, inconstant attention, resulting from a limited ability of concentration, saturated with never-ending incentives typical of the audiovisual narrative.
- Habit of understanding without an effort, without boosting the ability of thinking and limited deeply comprehension of problems.
- A superficial understanding of reality, shaped as a poor structured mosaic.

This project suggests participating in these trends with the corresponding above-mentioned methodological responses as strategies for the audiovisual model.

Conclusions

This new experience still continues in Asturias (Spain), and it is willing to be shared with rest of the Education Community. Strong points:

- At the Integrated Centre the new proposed model for the convergence with the European Education Area is practiced. We have achieved the integration of different sub-systems and levels of education, and we have approached methodologies to the audiovisual professional sector. Currently, at the Integrated Centre we aim at combining the management of regulated initial training with Continuing and Occupational Education. We have to respond with a unique and integrated model of school management integrating these three models of lifelong learning programmes: regulated traditional training, occupational training for the unemployed and continuing professional retraining for current employees.

- The autonomy of the Centre enabled to establish guidelines of management which before were only available to private centres, such as the possibility of making profit or the free management of equipment and human resources at a public centre.

- At this Centre administration, the standard ISO 9001, is developed for adapting and unifying management rules, to give response to users/students' demands. Tasks of

self-evaluation of the teaching staff are included within this process of improvement. In this sense, students' interests have a special significance as they must access a professional market where there are tangible objectives at the short term, by consequently displacing intangible aspects such as values.

In terms of weaknesses of the educational model, the harmonisation of norms, branches and systems have not been achieved yet nor the recognition among different levels of education, such as regulated and non-formal education.

Referent to the conclusions from the new curriculum related to new ICTs, this project has demonstrated that training in these subjects entail certain features:

- ICTs applied to education are dynamics; they develop their own devices, contents, communication techniques and any approach quickly become ancient.
- Students require dynamic and updated contents connected to the technological advance of the environment, as social media offer them daily.
- Both students and teaching staff must be aware of the professional profiles demanded by their own context and trend of their audiovisual culture.

It is necessary to integrate new strategies to the educational model where new multimedia contents and new educational methodologies are coherent and have a close connection. These new educational approaches do not have a direct impact on the level of academic performance of students but they give an answer to cultural demands, to new technologic devices and forms of knowledge which differ from traditional educational resources and schemes. From this insight, contents, forms and methodologies gain the same significance, and the educational model should use any of the proven efficient strategies being described in the social media field.

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