

# Social media and media education during initial teacher training

Evangelia Kourti

## Abstract

In this article issues are discussed concerning the necessity and the process by which Pedagogical University Departments sensitise students in media education, especially in social media. Through the presentation of a media education workshop involving students of the Pedagogical Department of Early Childhood Education, special emphasis is given to the workshop design, to students' previous media experience as a background for the development of critical analysis and audiovisual production skills as well as to the necessity of investigating students' attitudes to the media in their productions.

## Introduction

The need for media education from preschool levels is well recognised - whether supported or not - by formal educational institutions in Greece. The recent proposal (2011) for a media education curriculum (called Audiovisual Expression) in the broader context of Aesthetic Education for all levels of compulsory education,<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that the Recommendation of the European Commission (20.10.2009)<sup>2</sup> is now understood or at least accepted by the Greek State. This Recommendation stresses that media education is an important factor in active citizenship in today's information society, points out that it is a crucial pedagogical challenge



and proposes a specified number of goals to be achieved by both Member States and the media industry. In a world where the media are omnipresent and an important part of modern culture, it is expected that the educational system and teachers will note the need to reduce the distance that separates the school from its social environment, and to recognise (without an alarmist or overoptimistic attitude) the increasing importance of media in the social life of children and young people, in addition to the contribution of media education in promoting the active participation of citizens in society. Furthermore, this requires that teachers become "cognitive partners" of the media, daring to move beyond

standard schooling, not undermining media culture but using it as a base (Jacquinot-Delaunay, 2001a). This requires a student-centered teaching method which helps the students to discover knowledge by themselves and a teacher who adopts a reflective stance on their own relationship with the media, on the way they perceive their own role and the role of media in society and on the lives of young people. Moreover, within the prevailing “technological optimism” of the last years, the teacher should be able to evaluate the consequences of social, economic and political changes that accompany the ever changing technology, and to conduct a continuous review of concepts like “quality”, “responsibility”, “creativity”, “media environment”. For this purpose, an appropriate programme of teacher’s personal development and training in media education and the “languages” of media is necessary in order to be able to implement them in the classroom and evaluate students, who often know far more about the media than the teacher (Buckingham, 1988). To avoid any misunderstanding, it has to be clarified at this point that it is not suggested here that children and young people’s greater familiarity with the media observed in recent years means that they have adequate knowledge of media and their “languages”.

One of the structural weaknesses of media education, along with the difficulty of the school to understand its role in the society and its harmonisation with our school students’ interests, is considered the lack of teaching media education to teachers during their initial training (Bevort, Frau-Meigs, Jacquinot-Delaunay and Souyri, 2008). Although the debate on teacher’s media education remains an open question<sup>3</sup>, in general these authors argue that the absence of this subject matter in university, during the initial teacher’s training, contributes to the stagnation of the situation. Thus, the field encounters difficulties in asserting itself and the result is the absence of a general conceptual framework which is necessary to establish practices and the absence of theoretical models transformed into methods. The reality according to Thierry de Smedt (in Bevort et al., 2008: 41), is that “teachers are recycled rather than specialised” as teacher’s lifelong training is more developed. In this context, teachers seem to be, even now, the “weak link” of the system.

### Training future teachers in media education

The lack of trained teachers in media education is particularly noticeable in Greece although in recent years some organised efforts have occurred.<sup>4</sup> Amongst these is a semester long, optional course (designed as a media education workshop) aiming at the sensitisation of undergraduate students in media education in the Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Athens, based on fundamental elements in media education: representation, language, production, audience (Buckingham, 2003 · 2007). This sensitisation is primarily achieved through the experience of creative production, taking into account that people have a better understanding of the conventions and characteristics of media products when they have a direct experience of the production process (Buckingham, 2003). The main objec-

tive of producing media products as part of this workshop is to promote more reflective ways of media usage, so that the knowledge already acquired by students slowly through their everyday experiences could gradually move from passive to active enabling them to acquire a more systematic, critical understanding of how media work (Buckingham, 2007). Moreover, by being involved in production, students move between play and fantasy, and are able to select and create stories, via which they can indirectly explore issues related to the social dimensions of their identities and in a way fulfill their wishes and express perceptions (Kourti and Leonida, 2007). Each production is thus inspired by the experiences of learners and their personal culture, which leaves its mark on the way they present themselves in their productions and they deal with issues of their own identity, relationships and everyday life. Exploring future teachers’ attitudes and perceptions on the media, a key element in their daily lives as reflected in their productions, is critical for the design of their education in media.<sup>5</sup> Usually the effectiveness of media education will depend not only on the force of political decisions but also on the way teachers approach media and understand their role in society and everyday life. A superficial, recreational use and endorsement of the media, and an unreflective stance (without suggesting that the dimension of entertainment and pleasure media offered to children and adults should be underestimated), or an attitude of fear towards them, does not allow teachers to adequately prepare children and young people for a society where the media (old and new) are the perceptual and cognitive space through which they conceive external reality (Chailley, 1997; Jacquinot-Delaunay, 2001b).

In the above context, after a presentation of the workshop design, the relationships of the students with the new media, as presented in their productions, are discussed.

### Description of the media education workshop

In this workshop 20-25 students usually participate. First, the students are divided into small groups of 3-5 participants. Following the principles of experiential learning, the first aim is to bind the team together, create an atmosphere of trust and establish a contract of cooperation. They begin by presenting themselves, give a name to their group, and agree on a matter of common interest. Each group then undertakes to carry out a specific project production. Since in recent years an important element in leisure time for more and more people - especially children and young people - is the use of social media, the construction and operation of a blog throughout the semester was chosen to be the production project<sup>6</sup>. The theme of the blog was freely chosen and only last year were students assigned as a theme the construction of a blog complementary to a study subject of their choice or of a broader educational interest, without any other further restriction.

In the various course subject matters, the integration of social media as flexible platforms for collaborative learning with multiple uses<sup>7</sup> has become common practice. Similarly,

the use and creation of blogs by teachers and students is being increasingly encouraged.<sup>8</sup> But what makes creation of blogs interesting, in the context of media education, is that by definition they contribute to interaction, cooperation, active participation, a sharing of resources and information, and this enables the development of critical thinking. Social media – as well as media education – require from individuals the ability to read and write media texts simultaneously. Bruns (2008), referring to blogging but also to other emerging applications which democratise continuously the development of content in digital media (see Wikipedia, Second Life, etc.), has proposed the term “produsage” (production/usage) to describe these new complex forms of interaction that occur during the production and reception of messages, as the boundaries between them are becoming more blurred and increasingly vague.

In this context, creating a blog, one of the oldest, established and still popular forms of publication on the Internet, was chosen in this workshop as a characteristic example of the digital convergence culture where, according to Jenkins (2006), old and new media collide, public and private media intersect, and the power of the media producers interact with the power of the media consumers in unpredictable ways. The blog also marks the development by students of an environment of disclosure of their ideas, thoughts, opinions, and knowledge, using both written language and image - still or moving - through a variety of posts or articles (texts, sounds, photographs, sketches, video) as a means of expression. It allows self expression and expression of opinion on events but can simultaneously provide information that is an alternative to the official media and also allows participation in the public sphere. In parallel, as an asynchronous communication tool, it allows reflection by the producer. Moreover, there is no need for special software to create the blog. It is easily uploaded and managed, is under the control of its creator, does not require keeping archives, while it can also be connected easily, via hyperlinks, to other forms of social media. Users can set it up so that entries can be posted automatically to their profile pages on other social networks, with the possibility of enriching it with photos, videos, content from other social media (YouTube etc.). It is multimodal as audiovisual design and writing in different genres is involved while constantly generating questions about intellectual property, copyright, and the moral issues on the Internet.

During the first meeting in the workshop, apart from some theoretical presentations on communication, time was devoted to introducing both theoretical and practical issues concerning the creation and use of a blog, the audiovisual language from semiotic and *mise-en-scène* approaches, the collaborators and the different phases of audiovisual text creation. For more technical issues (editing a video, for example) a specialist was invited. It is worth noticing here, anticipating any possible misunderstanding, that we are not referring here to the production as the simple use of media in its technical dimension, i.e. the production by the groups using figurative symbols or the use of media as learning tools. What is being referred to is the cultivation of a broader critical understanding of media education in the Internet era, through which both the characteristics of media texts, and

their social, economic and cultural ramifications can be addressed (Buckingham 2007).

Every group of students creates its own blog (via blogger) on the theme agreed by its members; upload the relevant written and audiovisual texts with a commitment to produce at least one audiovisual texts (video).<sup>9</sup> During the workshop, students specify the goals of their production, design and implementation of their production, evaluate its results, and regularly present and discuss in the broader group the issues that they faced during the production process of their project in the light of broader theories and critical approaches to media. In this context, learning through the production process involves a dialectic relationship between action and analysis, between “practice” and “theory” (Buckingham, 2003). At the same time, what is especially sought is the cooperation between the groups and amongst group members, both inside and outside class, when dealing with problems arising during production. In this context, students function as partners and as evaluators – as audience – of the productions of the other groups. Through self-assessment and feedback received on their productions, as Buckingham suggests, students are expected to begin to understand the relationship between “intention” and “effect” and thus to recognise the complexity of the creation of meaning. This knowledge certainly creates the future foundation for students of a more theoretical approach in their relationship with the media and their role in everyday life, as well as the benefits in their use and exploitation in the learning and teaching processes, given the involvement of pupils in media and social networks from a very early age.



In addition to the blog, students are expected to deliver at the end of the semester, a portfolio – a kind of diary – where they keep record of the development of the tasks in the workshop, the theoretical and practical issues arising during the process concerning media, their languages, preoccupations and the progress of their group. Furthermore, every group has the obligation to enrich - outside the workshop - the portfolio with material from the Internet or other media on issues relating to the objectives of the workshop and production (for example, articles on social networks etc.). This of course leads the members into a discussion about what is a suitable choice and why it should be included in the portfolio. In this context, each group tries to clearly organise, synthesise and describe in the portfolio its achievements but also to effectively externalise what has been learnt by its members during the semester (within and outside the workshop). The portfolio material is therefore not only a collection and compilation of relevant data on the media but also an effort to reflect on the creative process of the group and is evaluated in order to demonstrate the grasp of, the understanding, the implementation and the capacity to synthesise a given set of concepts mentioned during the workshop that relate to media education.

The blog and the portfolio are evaluated and given the same grade for all members of the group while there are also oral exams concerning the theoretical part presented during the semester. In general, the workshop is evaluated by the students positively with suggestions for further technical support.



Given the temporal, spatial and financial constraints of running this workshop and considering the little or nonexistent experience of students in blog creation and audiovisual texts production (their experience in audiovisual productions is usually limited to videos taken with their cell phones and, in rare cases, to videoing of friends/family gatherings

without any further processing) the final productions are quite impressive in such a short time. Based on discussions held in the workshop, this can be explained only by students' previous experiences with other media as users, which is transformed into new knowledge.

## Students blogs

In the last two years, only female students participated in the workshop. They created 10 blogs (five groups for each year). In general, it appeared that, beyond the requirements of the course, the blog and audiovisual production functioned as a "performative context" in which students represented aspects of themselves, their views and wishes, and at the same time were taking part in cultural practices of representation both within and outside the formal workshop structures (Potter, and Banaji, 2012: 89), as will be shown below.<sup>10</sup>

Students' discourses and views on media and their relationship with them, as reflected in their productions, provide elements enabling an understanding of how they approach the media and understand their role in society and everyday life. In this context, presented below, there is an initial analysis that focuses on the blog's titles as the identifier of the group and thus its identity, the theme of the blog and the content of audiovisual productions of the groups taking into account the limitations imposed by the context in which these blogs were constructed and the gender of group members. The following analysis and conclusions relate to these specific groups and are the basis for discussion with suggestions for further investigation.

The names of the blogs (see Table 1 and 2) denote the widespread use of English by students, as only one of the groups used the Greek language to define itself.<sup>11</sup> The spelling of the name is most often characterised by the special "economy" of the language used in Internet communication where there is shortening of words, no spelling rules, acronyms, etc. (for example, "a(d)ds", "wifi", "LA.V.", "show 4 you").<sup>12</sup> In the names, there are distinguishable references both to the group itself (see, friendship among members, interests or characteristics of members) and to children (reference to their studies). Relationship with the media are noticeable in the name of three groups: "wi-fi girls", "a(d)ds experts", "matoria (craftsmen/ reference to 'Bob the Builder'). Concerning the theme of the blogs, three categories can be distinguished: ecology ("green kids", "m-b.bees", "craftsmen", "happy five friends"), leisure ("kids R us", "show4you", "high heels") and media. In the media theme blogs, students discuss issues concerning the Internet ("wi-fi girls"), child and advertising ["a(d)ds experts"], edutainment ("LA.V."). Although only 3 blogs were about the media, almost all audiovisual productions of the groups - within the broader theme of the blogs - concerned media or their use in spreading their messages (television news, tv shows and quizzes, ads and so on).

The research material in its totality allows for multiple readings and analysis of student identity, gender, interests, concerns, and the like, which can easily be discerned in the brief presentation of the groups and their productions (see Tables 1 and 2). Here the focus will be on two audiovisual

productions that make direct reference to social media and were created by students from group 1 (free choice of blog's theme).

The first production (group “wi-fi girls”, with the blog theme on information and discussion about the Internet) is titled “Andreas connecting people”. This is a paraphrase of the famous advertising campaign of the mobile phone company Nokia (“Nokia connecting people”). In the video, we follow the story of five young women who communicate through various media (facebook, skype, phone, sms) and the sole topic of discussion is the problematic relationship of one of them with a man called Andreas. Considering that this is a very serious problem, they decide to meet face to face in order to discuss this situation further. In a screen, divided into five windows, we see the friends getting ready to go out. In the next sequence, we see the friends meeting in the hall of the same house and we realise that they live together and communicate with each other from their rooms using various media. Besides the interesting information about the daily use of social media in their lives, of interest here is the fact that somehow these students believe that only through face to face communication can serious problems be solved. Thus, by parodying the advertisement they wish to imply that Andreas and not cell phones or some other media can connect people. The parody or imitation of various popular formats and genres of media is a common phenomenon in creative production in the context of media education.<sup>13</sup> According to Buckingham (2003), the way in which students approach media reveals “that they are well aware of ‘media language’ and that they maintain a rather ironic and possibly even hostile distance” (p. 154). The design of this group's blog, the theme, the choice of texts and videos posted, the topics discussed by the students and the entire production of their video proves their skills in using media and understanding of how they operate. In the discussion on their video, the students confirmed that the mode of communication described is familiar to them, as they use this mode to communicate with their siblings through various media from their rooms.

The reservations about social media are brought up again in a more direct way in the production of the group “high heels” (the theme of their blog is students' information on studies, work and leisure time). The title of their video is “face to face” and refers, of course, to face to face communication in relation to mediated one. The life of a student, who is very sociable, changes the day she is given a laptop (a gift from her parents). She begins to participate for hours in various social networks, becomes isolated from her friends who are looking for her in vain on the phone, and she loses

the opportunity to meet a handsome young man who tries to communicate with her in order to return her student's ID that she lost in the entrance to her building. When the computer is out of service she returns to “real life”, rediscovers her friends and meets the young man. In this video, we distinguish a technophobic attitude as its creators appear to argue that the preoccupation with the Internet makes people somewhat ineffective, the use of social networks leads to isolation, and the destruction of social and emotional life in the real world. It is worth noticing that the young woman seems powerless to resist the supposed power of the media and only when the computer is damaged and not on her own initiative, does she rediscover her friends.<sup>14</sup>



## Conclusions

Although during the semester it was apparent that students live in a media rich environment, have knowledge of “media language” through their daily experiences with social media, expressed enthusiasm for the new knowledge they acquired and joy with the practical use of active communication technology in the workshop, the analysis of their actual productions highlighted their resistance, ambivalence and reservations about them. The stereotype of isolation due to digital social networks and the power of face to face contact are particularly conspicuous in their productions. The discrepancy observed here has its roots in the fact that even today, despite the familiarity of most people with the Internet, the discourse on communication through it is still largely controversial and divisive. Probably, the tendency adopted by the

**Table 1**

<b>Name of the group</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Video's title</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Happy five friends	Ecology (for parents and children)	<i>The Santa went crazy</i>	News programme on the topic of Christmas presents from recycled materials. Direct connection to Santa Claus's house where he explains why he will only bring gifts from recycled material this year.
Kids Rus	Activities for children	<i>Try it and you will be convinced</i>	A mother buys a video game for her child and eventually she becomes an addicted player herself.
WIFI girls	News about Internet	<i>Andreas connecting people</i>	A group of young girls constantly communicates with each other through various media in order to solve the problems of one of them with her boyfriend. They decide to meet and discuss the issue closely and it appears that all reside in the same house.
High Heels	Information for students (about work, studies, leisure time, shopping)	<i>Face to face</i>	The story of a young woman who has been given a laptop (a gift from her parents) and becomes isolated from her friends. When the computer breaks down, she regains her friends.
Ta mastoria (craftsmen)	Ecology	<i>Let's stop water running out</i>	Advertising campaign about the lack of water.

**Table 2**

<b>Name of the group</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Video's title</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Ad(d) experts	Advertising to children	<i>Master in Advertising</i>	TV quiz on the positive and negative effects of advertising on children.
M-b.ees	Ecology	<i>The bees'message... bzzz</i>	Advertising campaign for the disappearance of bees.
Greenkids	Environmental protection	<i>A world without end... the world of recycling</i>	Animation on recycling.
Show 4 you	Entertainment for children	<i>The show step by step</i>	Small documentary on film production.
LA.V	Edutainment	<i>Modern learning</i>	A grandmother and her granddaughter are talking about the old and new ways of playing and education. Emphasis is given to edutainment.

students is to underline the negative aspects of the Internet and underestimate or even ignore the positive. What causes the fear here is mainly the effect of the Internet and its services in young people's social life.<sup>15</sup> This tendency is observed each time a new communication technology appears. In this context, not just the latest media such as pop music, film, television, video games and Internet, but almost all popular forerunners, including poetry, drama, novels, radio and comics, were challenged and treated with skepticism when they first appeared, to be vindicated once the next media appeared (Kinder, 1991). However, while there is skepticism as to the influence of media on children and young people, simultaneously many hopes are invested in the media for the education of children. These hopes created students' newspapers, educational television, film screenings at school and so on. It appears that the bipolar axis of entertainment-education remains a constant parameter in the history of media and of the beliefs about them. In this context, if the ironic and critical dimensions of their work on media are explained to students during discussions on their productions, this, in combination with their subsequent reflections, encourages them to reach more conscious concepts like stereotypes, representation, and the like, which otherwise are understood mechanistically (Buckingham, 2003).

A consequence of the contradictions about the media for teachers themselves, is the development of different strategies to face and use media in the school context. This may lead either to a disregard for the media experiences of children, or to their integration and use for educational purposes as a sort of auxiliary tool in teaching and learning for different subject courses, or to the creation of media education courses as a supplementary lesson in which children can learn without having teachers change other school practices or to base all school practices on cooperation between schools and the media (Jacquinot-Delaunay, 2001b). The latter possibility indicates the new identity for the teacher, discussed initially, as the "cognitive partner" of the media, a vital necessity in an environment where it is consistently argued that it is insufficient to think about how to promote or renew media education, but there is a necessity for all education to be part of this media environment (Jacquinot-Delaunay, 2008). In this context, even if media education often encounters resistance – and even the indifference of educational policy makers (many authors highlight the lack of political will), it should not encounter resistance – consciously or unconsciously – by a large number of teachers. The role of media education during initial teacher training in sensitising them regarding their own attitudes as well is of critical importance.

## Notes

1. See Curriculum for Audiovisual Expression (Scientific Field: Culture - Art Activities - proposal b. on the site <http://digitalschool.minedu.gov.gr/info/newps.php>. For a discussion on the exact definition of the interdisciplinary field of media education (for example: education for media literacy, audiovisual expression, media education, etc.) see Buckingham (2007) and Kourti (2008).
2. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:227:0009:0012:EL:PDF>.
3. The question here is whether all teachers at all levels of education have to be trained in order to be able to apply, each in their field, methods that provide media education too or if the media educator is a new specialty and therefore should receive special training. See Nika (2007) and Rivoltella (2007).
4. See Nika (2007) and Introduction and relevant chapters in Kourti (2012).
5. For Greek teachers' attitudes on media, see Aslanidou (2008).
6. For different stages in the history of media education and the necessity to make a synthesis of digital literacy and media education after 2000, see Jacquinot-Delaunay et al. (2008).
7. To upload course's activities, to provide references to study, to discuss among the students and teacher on any subject, to communicate with parents, to post photos and other products of the class etc.
8. See, for example the Ministry of Education's competition "xeblogare" held in 2008 aimed at secondary school students that encouraged them to make their own blog. (<http://www.kseblogare.gr>), or the possibility offered to teachers to post their blogs on the site <http://blogs.sch.gr>.
9. Over the past year, each group's blog was also linked to accounts created by the group (with the same name) in other social networks (facebook, twitter and the like); students participating in the workshop were expected to communicate between them by uploading different kinds of texts or sending comments.
10. It is noticeable here that some groups uploaded in their blogs more videos than they were asked for, as a kind of experimentation in different genres from their first video (for example, animation, making-of, parodies of serials etc.). They also uploaded some of them in YouTube (one has had over 2358 hits so far), in order to show not only the knowledge acquired and their opinions but also to share with strangers and acquaintances their experience in the workshop and participate in this way in the global dialogue enabled by social networks.
11. In one case, Spanish is used. However, the group's name "LA.V." (Las Ventanas = the windows) is a homonym for the English word "love" and semantically refers to Windows in computers.
12. About writing in Internet communication, see Kourti (2003).
13. The same group made a second video, a parody of the popular television series *The Island* (*Nissi* in Greek) on the destruction of the files of a young woman in her computer (PC, *Pissi* in Greek).
14. This group made a second video entitled "Apocalypse NOW" (the word apocalypse has two meanings in Greek: apocalypse and revelation) which concerned the making of their first video and photos of the group members. The soundtrack of the video is a song describing an adult who decided to remain a child.
15. Certainly, this technophobic discourse is not the only one expressed in the public sphere. There were many advocates or "prophets of the Internet society" (for example, Negreonte, Levy, Queau, Gates, etc.), while there were also many supporters of a rational use of technology. For more details, see Kourti (2003).



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**Evangelia Kourti** is an Associate Professor of Social Psychology specialising in communication at the University of Athens, Greece. Her research interests cover the scientific fields of communication and communication skills, media and children, the psychology of cyberspace and the history of psychology.