Media Literacy and ICT in Education treading together: exploring how new digital technologies can help promote media literacy in secondary students.

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____ **(candidate)**

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Date: _____

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Abstract

Media Literacy and ICT in Education treading together: exploring how new digital technologies can help promote media literacy in secondary students.

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The media landscape has radically changed in the 21st Century with the emergence of the internet and the new digital media technologies. For young people growing up in this increasingly connected and mediated world, this provides a lot of opportunities and challenges, and educators around the world have sought to investigate and understand what the best practices are for teaching children and teenagers how to navigate in this digital world in a safe, dynamic and productive manner.

In this context, two fields of studies have increasingly gained attention in educational debates: ICT in Education and Media Literacy. The former is well established in many places around the globe, especially in developed countries, as schools are improving their technology structure with the acquisition of new equipment and digital devices. Media Literacy, on the other hand, still has a low status within most education systems, even in rich countries.

This research project suggests that the fact that more and more students have access to the internet and digital media devices in the classroom opens an exceptional opportunity for Media Literacy Education. Young people can use the technology available to create digital media artefacts, such as video, digital magazines, animation and podcasts, and this provides both teachers and students the chance to discuss media literacy topics in the classroom.

In Ireland, most schools in the country have a good technology structure to support media literacy activities in the classroom. Following this opportunity, this study aims to investigate how these digital technologies can be used to promote media literacy practices in the classroom. In order to do so, a media literacy programme was developed and delivered to secondary students.

This thesis takes a qualitative approach and uses three case studies in Dublin to investigate the potentials and limitations in the use of these technologies to develop media literacy knowledge and skills. Using interviews, questionnaires, field observation and artefact analysis as methods for the investigation, this study provides some important understandings on how the new digital technologies can be used to help promote media literacy in students.

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research Project

The objective of this research project is to investigate how the use of digital media technologies in the classroom can help promote media literacy in students. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to both Media Literacy and ICT in Education fields by providing information on the many ways in which digital media can be used to facilitate learning about media topics, and also suggestions about best practices involved in this learning process.

This research project focus on young people's experiences with media in general, but especially with digital media. The media have long been part of young people's lives, particularly after the proliferation of the so-called mass media in the last half of the 20th Century (Masterman, 1985). After the emergence of the internet and the new digital technologies, the relationship between young people and the media has grown even stronger. Despite significant socio-economic disparities around the world, the number of children and teenagers who have access to the internet and digital devices has grown exponentially in recent years, and in some developed countries young people are spending a significant amount of hours in front of a screen chatting with friends, playing games, watching videos, creating content, learning a subject and participating in various discussions and debates (UNESCO, 2018; Global Kids Online, 2019).

This situation has prompted scholars from different fields to deliberate on the problems and opportunities that this closer relationship between young people and the media has brought about. Topics such as data privacy, internet safety, disinformation, coding, screen time, game culture, online identities, new literacies and others have increasingly been part of debates worldwide, emphasising the importance of preparing children and teenagers to access, interpret, evaluate and use all forms of media. In the media literacy field, studies and practical educational interventions have sought to understand how young people engage with this new media culture, and how media literacy educators can propose learning strategies to address these problems and opportunities, advocating that media literacy education

should be part of young people's formal education (Coiro et. al., 2008; Benzemer and Kress, 2016; Marsh et. al., 2017; Hobbs, and Tuzel, 2017; Potter and McDougall, 2017; Burnett and Merchant, 2018; Buckingham, 2019).

In Europe, media literacy education has gained some ground in many developed countries both in primary and secondary education, usually taught in a cross-curricular manner, linked to other curriculum subjects such as English, Arts, or History. However, as of 2014, there was still a lack of concrete national educational strategy, most countries did not have a media education curriculum, and many experiences had to rely on initiatives put forward by enthusiasts at school level (Hartai, 2014). Besides, there are also variances in the way media literacy is approached in different countries, with different priorities in terms of pedagogy and learning outcomes (McDougall, Zezulkova, Driel and Sternadel, 2018).

At the same time, the fact that the internet and digital technologies have become more accessible and ubiquitous has continuously affected the relationship between technology and education, and this has had a significant impact on schools. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are increasingly becoming part of both teachers and students' lives inside the classroom, especially in rich countries, and this also requires the development of strategies and guidance for the use of ICTs in education (European Commission, 2019).

This research project assumes the position that the fact that schools are increasingly using ICTs such as computers, tablets and the internet for learning purposes offers an opportunity for the implementation of media literacy practices both at primary and secondary level. This is because digital media technologies allow students to create digital media artefacts, such as movies, animation, podcasts, digital magazines, games, photo stories and many more, and the production of digital media artefacts is a practice that can be used to teach young people about media topics (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007). In this sense, teachers could incorporate media literacy elements into their subjects using a cross-curricular approach and use the technology available to discuss media topics, such as semiotics, media representation, information literacy and critical analysis. Another possibility is for media literacy educators to develop media programmes as a separate subject in the curriculum.

1.1 The problem and the opportunity

In Ireland, where this research project takes place, ICT in Education has acquired a high status within the educational system (O'Neill, 2014). In 2015, the Irish Government launched the Digital Strategy for Schools, which enabled schools across the country to invest in technological infrastructure and teacher training. There has been a consistent effort to integrate digital skills in the curriculum, and secondary students have increasingly had access to subjects such as coding and computer science (Republic of Ireland. Department of Education and Skills, 2015a). As of 2020, most schools in Ireland have at least a basic ICT structure with Wi-Fi internet connection and digital devices such as computer laptops or tablets.

On the other hand, media literacy education is still at the very early stages in the country. Even though in recent years there has been a significant progress in the field with the launch of the first media literacy policy in the country (Broadcast Authority of Ireland, 2016), which also enabled the formation of the first media literacy network in the country involving people from different sectors of the society, very little has changed in terms of media literacy activities in schools.

In this sense, the Irish education system offers both a problem and an opportunity for this research project. The problem refers to the lack of media literacy practices in Irish schools and the lack of a national curriculum that incorporates media literacy as a core subject. The opportunity, on the other hand, refers to the fact that schools around the country are well equipped with technology infrastructure and digital devices, and this can be used to promote practical activities with the use of digital media in the classroom.

From an educational point of view, the opportunity to address the problem mentioned above raises a series of issues and questions. For instance, teaching materials would have to be designed to support teachers. At the same time, it can be argued that teachers would have to go through some kind of training to able to incorporate digital devices in their lessons and address topics related to media literacy topics. In some situations, the curriculum would have to be adapted to accommodate this new media literacy content across different subjects, or offer some room for media literacy to be included as a separate topic. In terms of learning

stages, there would need to be a strategy to decide at what age students would start using digital media to learn about media literacy topics.

All those issues and questions are relevant and would need to be addressed in order to create a strategy for the implementation of media literacy practices in Irish schools. However, this research project understands that there is a more pressing issue that should be addressed in order to assess the opportunity created by this new digital media environment in schools. This issue is related to the understanding of the many ways in which digital media can be used in the classroom, and whether or not these practices can indeed lead to the promotion of media literacy in students. This is the focus of this study and the next segment presents the main research question and the sub-questions that are proposed to address the aim of the research project.

1.2 Research questions

This research project centres on the main question: ***to what extent can the use of digital media technologies in the classroom help promote media literacy in students?*** The idea is to investigate the potentials and limitations of digital media in a learning context, exploring how the use of these technologies by both teachers and students can contribute to the learning of media literacy topics in the classroom.

Research Sub-questions.

- ***To what extent is the production of digital media artefacts a key component of media literacy education***? There many ways of teaching media literacy, and one of them is through the production of digital artefacts. This sub-question addresses the importance and the efficiency of this learning practice as a strategy to teach about the media.

- ***How the production of digital media artefacts helps promote creativity, cultural engagement and critical awareness in students?*** The second sub-question addresses specific social functions of the media literacy model developed by the researcher that will be presented in chapter 5.

- To what extent do semiotic resources and multimodal communication facilitate students' ability to communicate ideas, explore their own cultural references and perform critical analysis? Digital media allow students to communicate ideas through different modes of communication. In addition, in many educational settings students also have other semiotic resources at their disposal, and those resources can also be used to create meaning. This sub-question explores in what ways participants can make use of physical, material and digital resources to create meaning and express their ideas.

- How the use of digital media for study and research develop in students awareness about false, manipulated and biased information? In the information age, one of the main challenges media education is to understand how young people access, evaluate and use the information they find online. This sub-question addresses this important issue, exploring to what extent the use of ICTs in the classroom help students with this practice.

1.3 Research design

In order to address the research questions, the first step was to understand what it means to be media literate in the 21st Century. An in-depth analysis of the main media literacy traditions and streams of thought was conducted to establish the main theories, concepts and ideas in the field, and based on this analysis a media literacy model divided into learning stages was designed to serve as a conceptual framework for the research activities carried in this work (please refer to chapter 5).
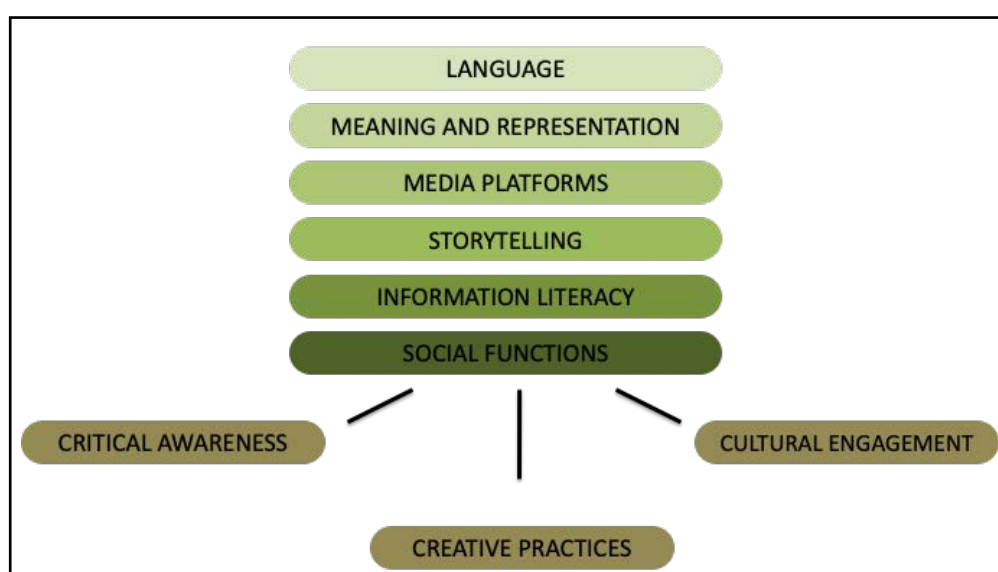
Figure 1 – Media Literacy Model

Also, in order to investigate how digital media technologies can help promote media literacy in students a media literacy programme was designed from scratch, covering different topics related to media literacy and using different applications for the production of digital artefacts (please refer to chapter 6). The programme was comprised of five workshops, each of them covering a different topic and using different digital applications. The content was developed taking into consideration my own experience as a media educator, and also some current tendencies in the media literacy field.

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4	Workshop 5
General topic	The media	Refugee crisis	Food & Environment	Shakespeare Legacy	Global Warming
Media topic	'Testing' workshop	Meaning & Semiotics	Photo manipulation	Moving image	Advertising
Dig. artefact	3 different artefacts	Digital magazine	Photo story	Movie	TV Ad

Table 1 – Media Literacy programme

1.3.1 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The chosen research approach for this project was the case study because it allows for an in-depth description of the activities being investigated and the analysis of meaningful characteristics within real-life events (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). It has an exploratory nature (Stake, 1995) in a sense that it aims to explore the many possible outcomes of the media literacy programme without testing a particular hypothesis, and also a explanatory nature (Yin 2009) as it endeavours to understand how the learning process takes place during the activities.

The project adopted 'purposeful sampling', which "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998: 77). For the study, a total of 81 students were selected from three schools in Dublin. In order to ensure a more diverse sampling, schools were chosen based on differences in terms of social class, religious ethos, cultural background and gender. All students were taken the Transition Year (TY) programme, which is the first year of the Senior Cycle in the Irish education system – students are around 15-16 years old. The

reason for choosing the TY programme is because this particular year offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of timetable and topics that can be addressed. Each school is responsible for designing its own TY programme, and this is a good opportunity to implement learning activities that are usually outside of the national curriculum, such as media literacy education.

1.3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

This is a qualitative research project with an essentially subjective and socially constructed object of study. It seeks to explore and interpret meanings and processes that are brought to life in a learning environment, investigating how the participants learn, behave and attribute meanings to their experience (Merriam, 2009).

The study was carried out in the premisses of the three schools using their own structure, with the exception of the iPads, which were provided by Dublin City University. Schools were asked to provide a large room for the activities, wi-fi internet connection and a projector. The idea was to use a very basic structure so that similar learning practices could be carried out in other schools around the country.

The data was collected using method triangulation, i.e., the use of multiple methods to collect information, as follows:

- **Field Observation**: notation of naturally occurring events and naturally occurring conversations in a dairy.

- **Focus groups**: discussion with students after each workshop for about fifteen minutes, recorded with a digital recorder.

- **Artefact Collection**: Collection of the digital artifacts produced by the students.

- **Questionnaire:** Two questionnaires with both open- and closed-ended questions were given to participants, one before and one after the media literacy programme.

1.3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The data was coded and analysed using an inductive process - a process whereby "research findings emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2003: 5). The analysis followed the process of *data reduction* (summary and arrangement of data into manageable components and meaningful categories), *data display* (mapping of the main themes in a visual form in order to understand how these themes relate to each other) and the *drawing of conclusions* (rigorous assessment of data in terms of their connections with the research questions, and verification of conclusions being drawn by the researcher) outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994).

1.3.4 REPORTING AND FINDINGS

The data collected from the four different methods mentioned above was analysed and reported in four different discursive chapters exploring and highlighting the three main themes that emerged from the data pool, showing examples of student's works and using indicative quotes from students to verify the analysis.

Theme 1 – *Meaning-making practices*
Theme 2 – *Information Literacy and Critical Awareness*
Theme 3 – *Popular Culture and Creativity*
This study provides evidence that the use of digital media in the classroom has great potential to address topics related to media literacy and, as a consequence, help students become media literate. The use of digital media allows students to engage in unique meaning-making practices in which they articulate different modes of communication to express themselves and create stories in various formats and with different learning outcomes. Using different semiotic resources such as text, image, moving image, sound and body language participants constructed stories about different topics related to real life issues, reflecting on their choices as media producers and engaging in productive discussions with their peers.

This study also present examples of how students use digital media to perform critical thinking on many different topics, and how the way they articulate this criticality through digital artefacts can help them express their opinions and learn through the exchange of ideas with their peers. In terms of information literacy, the study suggests that students are aware of the importance of collecting good quality

information whilst doing an online research. However, this awareness is not materialized in practical actions during the activities, which suggests that they need more guidance from teachers and facilitators to perform this kind of activity.

This research project offers some important clues about how students use their own cultural repertoire to articulate ideas and create content, and how their everyday references can be a source of motivation and engagement during a learning activity. Finally, this study also discusses the creative aspect of media production, analysing how students used the resources (both digital and non-digital) available in imaginative ways.

1.4 Researcher's background

My first contact with media literacy education took place when I encountered the Educommunication movement in Brazil. As a media and communications manager working in a secondary school in São Paulo, I learned that it was possible to bring media and education together. I then began to develop media projects with students, and this was my first experience teaching about the media. A few years later I took the Masters in Media, Culture and Education in the Institute of Education (IOE), University College London, where I wrote a dissertation entitled '*Bringing education and communication together in order to transform the school: the educommunication experience in Brazil and some thoughts on media and cultural studies*'. In the IOE I had the opportunity to study the main figures in media literacy and cultural studies, and also came across ideas that would radically change my view about meaning-making practices with digital media, such as the ones put forward by Gunther Kress.

In Dublin, I started a voluntary work in Bridge21, an educational programme based in Trinity College Dublin that offers a model whereby students learn through a project-based, technology mediated learning approach. This experience offered me the opportunity to work with transition year students – 15-16 years of age – in an environment full of technology and with a socio-constructivist approach to learning. In there, students create videos, podcasts and animation, but the pedagogical approach is grounded in computer science, not in media studies. It was in Bridge21

that I first enquired about how technologies could be used to teach young people about media literacy topics.

Since 2015 I have run a media week in Bridge21 in which I have explored some learning activities involving media literacy theories and practices. This experience has strongly influenced the conceptualization of this research project, as well as the design of the media literacy programme that I used in this study.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

Following this introduction, the thesis is organized into 12 chapters.

Chapter 2 – *Young people, media literacy and Ireland: an introductory context to the present study*. This chapter introduces the reader to the current context whereby young people are both consumers and producers of media content. It also provides an overview of the Irish education system and the opportunities it offers for this research project. Next, the chapter discusses the historical context of media literacy education, providing some important concepts and definitions in the field. Finally, it suggests three main areas within the field that are analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 – *An examination of the Critical Awareness (CA) and the Creative Participation (CP) traditions*. This chapter discusses the two main traditions in the Media Literacy field, which I termed Critical Awareness and Creative Participation. The former has an emphasis on the critical aspect of media literacy, empowering students to be able to critically analyse media texts and make informed decisions. The latter, on the other hand, highlights the learning opportunities offered by the media, emphasising cultural and creative aspects of media use.

Chapter 4 – *New Literacies.* This chapter presents theories, concepts and ideas from the third area within the media literacy field. This area is grounded mainly in studies carried out after the emergence of the internet and the new digital media technologies, and it discusses how the concept of literacy is changing in the face of a new communication environment full of information and new meaning-making practices.

Chapter 5 – *Media Literacy Model*. This chapter presents the Media Literacy model that was developed based on the analysis of the three main media literacy traditions. The model is used as a conceptual framework for the design of the media literacy programme and also for the data analysis.

Chapter 6– *Media Literacy Programme*. The chapter introduces the reader to the media literacy programme that was designed for this study. It contains the main pedagogic references that influenced its content, and it outlines all the five workshops in detail.

Chapter 7– *Research Design.* The chapter discusses in detail how this study was designed in terms of its objective, research questions and methodology, presenting all the relevant information on how the data was collected, analysed and reported.

Chapter 8 – *Introduction to the data analysis*. The chapter gives the reader an overview of the learning experience as a whole, discussing the school environment, students' responses to the workshops, and my own experience as both researcher and facilitator of the activities.

Chapter 9 – *Meaning-making practices*. This chapter presents the first theme that emerged from the data, and it analyses the various meaning-making practices carried out by students during the activities, highlighting the opportunities that the digital technologies offered to participants, especially in terms of the different modes of communication available to them.

Chapter 10 – *Information literacy and critical awareness*. The second theme is presented in this chapter, analysing, first, how students access, evaluate and use the information they find online and, second, how they critically produce and consume media messages.

Chapter 11 – *Popular culture and creativity*. The last chapter of the data analysis discusses the third theme that emerged from the data, exploring how students used their cultural references during the learning activities, and also how the digital media technologies allowed participants to be creative.

Chapter 12 – *Discussion and Conclusion.* The chapter discusses the main findings from the previous four chapters and draw conclusions from this analysis. It also

presents the main contributions to the media literacy field and some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Young people, media literacy and Ireland: an introductory context to the present study.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with an analysis of the current context involving media and young people, discussing the main ideas, concepts and figures in the field in order to understand how children and teenagers are being affected and participating in the new digital media environment of the 21st Century. Next, I provide the reader with an overview of the main aspects of the Irish educational system that are relevant to this research project, with a special emphasis on policies and actions related to media literacy and ICT in education. The reader is then introduced to a brief historical context of media literacy education, from its origins in the early 20th century to the emergence and proliferation of digital media during the 2000s. The aim is to situate the reader in relation to key periods and figures in media literacy and correlated areas, such as cultural studies and critical theory, and how they have made an impact in the development of the field. Next, some definitions of media literacy will be introduced and discussed. The field has recently encompassed many different areas of study and, therefore, has become so broad, that scholars and educators have at times struggled to find a common definition for media literacy. Based on the arguments discussed, I present a definition which serves as a guidance for the development of the media literacy model in chapter 5. Finally, the reader is introduced to three main areas within the media literacy field, their main concepts and key figures. These three areas will then be further analysed in chapters 3 and 4.

2.2 Media and young people

Media are everywhere. Since the last Century, with the spread of radio, magazines, newspapers, movies and television reaching a mass audience, the human experience on this planet has been highly connected with mediated communication. For young

people all over the world, the so-called mass media have been a source of information, entertainment and education, among other things, providing them with stories, both real and fictional, full of representations, stereotypes, symbols, social constructions and emotional experiences (Masterman, 1985; Richards, 1998). After the technology revolution during the 1990's (Castells, 1996) and the emergence of the internet, the move from the more traditional mass media of the 20th Century to the new digital media of the 21st Century revolutionized the way young people engage with and consume media products and artefacts. It is fair to claim that a lot of what children and teenagers know about the world around them is conveyed through media and, moreover, now they are not only consumers, but also producers of media. This signals a major shift in their relationship with media in general (Jenkins, 2006).

Despite economic and social disparities among countries, access to the internet and the use of devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops are increasing all over the world (UNESCO, 2018; EU Kids Online, 2020). In some developed countries, young people on average are spending almost 9 hours a day in front of a screen and checking their mobile phones at least 150 times a day (Buckingham, 2019: 8). In the U.S., according to a recent study (Anderson and Jiang, 2018), 95% of teenagers reported having their own smartphone, or at least an easy access to one, and 45% of them claimed to be online on a "near-constant basis" (Ibid: 8). Still in the U.S., for teenagers ages 13-18 the most common source of daily news is social media, and not newspapers or magazines (Kahne and Bowyer, 2019). In developing countries, such as Brazil, Bulgaria and Montenegro, almost 9 in 10 children have access to internet through mobile phone or desktop computer, and more than 80% of boys and 50% of girls play games online at least weekly (Global Kids Online, 2019). In terms of preferences, young people use digital media for different reasons and purposes, and this is reflected on their favourite platforms and services. YouTube, for instance, is one of the favourite digital platforms for teenagers and it is widely used as a source of entertainment, whereas Facebook has lost its position as the most popular social media platform among young people, replaced by Instagram and Snapchat (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). One of the reasons for that may be the fact that youngsters seem to have a preference for platforms where the content is more visual, whereas older people, like their parents and teachers, usually prefer a format that have a good balance between text and image (Von Reppert-Bismarck, Dombrowski and Prager, 2019).

In the 21st Century, media culture for young people involves some 'old media' practices, such as watching TV programmes, listening to radio shows, reading magazines and watching movies, even if this is not always done on the more traditional platforms like a TV set, a paper magazine or a cinema screen. It also involves some 'new media' practices such as texting friends and family, participating in online communities, attending online courses, creating, selecting and sharing digital content, and playing online games (Hobbs, 2011a; Burnett and Merchant, 2018). All these practices, whether deemed old or new, provide materials that have a significant impact on how young people understand their place in the society, how they construct their identity, and how they form notions of gender, class, race and sexuality (Kellner and Share, 2019: XI). Even though there is a general understanding in the media literacy field, especially among scholars influenced by the British cultural studies, that teenagers are not simply passive consumers of media products (Buckingham, 2003), it is undeniable that the media have the power to influence the way people behave, consume and understand the world around them (Kellner, 2002), and for this reason it is important to understand both the positive and negative sides of the way the media impact young people's lives.

Since the emergence of the internet and the new digital technologies there has been a great deal of discussions and debates about both the benefits and the dangers that this technology revolution has brought to children and teenagers. As such technologies become more accessible, they increasingly influence the way young people communicate, behave, learn and interact with their peers (Kersch and Lesley, 2019). There is no doubt that the internet and the new media have brought many advantages and opportunities for young people in many different areas of their lives, such as in learning, communication and entertainment. However, many challenges have also appeared, such as problems with disinformation and fake news; hate speech, bullying and inappropriate content in social media platforms; and the threat to data privacy (Livingstone, Nandi, Banaji, and Stoilova 2017; Wilson, 2019). Moreover, because the digital revolution is relatively recent, many questions about the uses of digital media remain unresolved and are still subject to heated debates within academia. There are concerns, for instance, about children and teenagers' uses of tablets and smartphones (Haddon and Vincent, 2015); mental health problems, such as depression, as a result of too much exposure on social media (Keles, McCrae and Grealish, 2020); and teenagers becoming violent

because of too much violence in games (DeLisi, Vaughn, Gentile, Anderson and Shook, 2013). However, studies that support these claims are sometimes considered inconclusive and accused of relying on weak and unconvincing evidence based on correlations and/or associations between variables, and not direct causation (Buckingham, 2019). They are also criticised for suggesting a kind of technological determinism, whereby in this case the new digital technologies are assumed to be the leading cause of many social and psychological problems for young people, not taking into consideration a range of other factors involved in their lives (Livingstone and Smith, 2014). In the middle of these debates we find ordinary people, like parents and teachers, who are trying to understand the best options for their children and pupils. In topics such as screen time, for instance, while many governments and regulatory organisations are focused on risks and harms, there are plenty of studies that foreground the benefits involved in children using digital technology at home together with their family (Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2016).

This new media environment in part also comprises some very powerful technology companies playing a crucial role in the way young people engage with technology. Facebook, the leading social media platform in terms of both users and revenue (Aboulhon, 2020) also owns Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp. Alphabet owns Google, the leading search engine, that occupies 90% of the market share (Statcounter, 2020) and also YouTube, the world's most popular video sharing platform. Those two companies' numbers suggest a huge concentration of power, which has prompted many concerned stakeholders, including governments, to question their practices and their impact on ordinary people's lives. There are questions in relation to their business model, whereby users' private data is used to sell products and services on the platform, and whereby clicks generate revenue, which encourages sensationalistic content that favours quantity over quality. Based on individual users' data, algorithms determine what each user will experience, which brings concern over the so-called 'filter bubble' (Pariser, 2012). This term refers to an online experience that confines people to a very narrow reality and prevent them from having a more comprehensive involvement with the digital platform they are using. As Mihaidilis (2018: 53) puts it: "(t)his landscape is further entrenched by massive technology conglomerates that are more powerful than ever before, and that regulatory bodies have little control over. As a result, their algorithms dictate how and where information travels, often prioritizing attention over depth, extracting data over providing diversity, and favouring the sensational over

the subtle". In this sense, these giant tech companies are not simply delivering content, but they also shape the content their users experience, and for this reason they have increasingly been held accountable for the many ways in which they affect their users.

This brings into account how governments and policymakers are dealing with this new digital media environment. Issues related to data privacy, copyright, digital piracy, hacking, data security and many more have been addressed by politicians all over the world. Recent events such as Brexit in the UK, Donal Trump's election in the US and Jair Bolsonaro's win in Brazil have raised questions on how digital platforms can be used to spread false information and influence voters' preference (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Avelar, 2019). There are concerns over how politicians can use social media to spread propaganda and harm their opponents (Woolley and Howard, 2018); how governments can interfere in other countries' politics through digital platforms (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018); and also how they can use digital technology to destabilise other countries' democracies through espionage and privileged access to citizen's data (Hjortdal, 2011). In relation to young people, politicians have been asked to look at how digital media can have a negative impact on children and teenagers, and take action to prevent that tech companies cause any harm to them. This has resulted in some promising actions, such as the introduction of legislations to protect children from harmful content on social media (Livingstone, O'Neill and Mclaughlin, 2011) and provide media literacy education for young students (Klobuchar, 2019). More authoritarian propositions have also been proposed, such as a limit for social media use for every child imposed and monitored by the state (Orben, 2018). The plurality of such initiatives signal that digital media and the internet have increasingly been addressed by governments around the world in relation to regulation, consumer protection, corporate liability for various online activities, and codes of practice.

In the education sector, which is one of the focuses of this research project, the internet and the new digital technologies have had a significant impact on both structure and classroom practices for young people. Following a great hype around the possibilities that ICT could offer to education, they have been welcomed by some educators as a solution to many problems that exist in schools. Embracing a kind of technological determinism, there has been a significant excitement around the use of ICT in the classroom in hope that technology could transform education

for the better (Selwyn, 2016), providing teachers with the tools they need to deliver the content and allowing students to achieve their learning outcomes in the best way possible. It is well documented that technology can indeed facilitate many tasks for both teachers and students, such as in accessing and organizing information; using devices to create and share digital content; and using digital media to display videos and other digital materials. However, technology itself is only a tool and cannot solve all the problems by itself, and much of the enthusiasm around the wonders of technology to improve pupils' education has not materialized in the way many people hoped for (ibid). Even though there seems to be a great potential for technology to make learning more convenient in some circumstances (Attewell, Savill-Smith and Douch, 2009) and improve children's motivation to learn (Passey and Roberts, 2004), studies suggest that a "simple increase in ICT provision does not guarantee enhanced educational performance" (Livingstone, 2012: 8). Furthermore, "a passion for the latest technologies and tools outstrips school administrators' interest in the development of curriculum content or teachers' or students' knowledge and skills" (Hobbs and Jensen, 2009: 5), which results in poor training for teachers and poor development of appropriate pedagogies that link ICT with educational practices. Also, it is argued that, without taking the social aspects of learning, the use of digital technologies in education can even increase social inequality among young people and promote individualistic neo-liberal tendencies that undermine any attempt of a more collaborative aspect of education (Selwyn, 2014).

In some educational settings digital media have brought the opportunity for students to develop some technical skills, such as the ability to use information and communication technologies to interact with the world in various ways. Coding, for instance, which is the ability to use programming language in computers, is nowadays considered by many as a very important skill for young people and has become a common practice in many schools around the globe (Schleicher, 2019). In relation to media literacy education, which is the main topic of this research project, the fact that many schools now have access to an internet connection and digital technology has opened the opportunity for young students to create media artefacts such as digital photos, posters, advertisements, short movies and podcasts. This, in principle, means that educators can use this opportunity to discuss topics related to the media with their pupils, such as media representation, popular culture, creative production, journalism, communication theory, semiotics and political

economy of the media industry, and thus help young people acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and navigate the media environment. Within the media literacy field, media production has been acknowledged as a very important part of media education (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran 2006), and the fact that it is becoming increasingly easier to produce media artefacts in schools suggests that media literacy education has a good opportunity to become part of students educational activities. Moreover, studies about media literacy practices with young people suggest that some of these practices can indeed increase students' knowledge about news, politics and general civic information (Ashley, Maks and Craft, 2013; Mihailidis, 2018), improve their critical understanding of media topics such as disinformation and fake news (Murrock, Amulya, Druckman, and Liubyva, 2018), and foster knowledge and skills associated with creative production and agency (McDougall et al., 2018).

However, for most countries this is still far from reality. Even though media literacy has increasingly gained attention in education spheres around the world, and has recently been acknowledged by UNESCO as an indispensable tool to promote citizenship (UNESCO 2016), media education is still far from being a permanent subject of the curriculum. In Europe, as of 2014 media literacy education was not present as a separate and compulsory subject of the national curriculum in any country, and most EU member states did not have a clear policy or educational strategy for the implementation of a media literacy curriculum in schools (Hartai, 2014). In some countries like in Finland and France, topics related to media literacy are taught in a cross-subject manner, integrated with History, ICT or the Arts, for instance, but not as a separate subject (Henley, 2020). In the UK, where Media Education has had a long tradition, Media Studies is a well-established field in secondary education, and there are many media education elements present in the English subject (Buckingham, 2015b). However, some critics argue that in recent years government policies to promote media literacy in schools have depreciated its educative purpose and reduced it to digital skills (Wallis and Buckingham, 2019).

In this sense, the current social, cultural and technological contexts around the uses of media – especially digital media – suggest that young people urgently need some form of media literacy education to help them understand how this media environment works, making informed choices when consuming media texts and

becoming responsible citizens when producing their own media artefacts. Also, the opportunity to teach media in schools through practical hands-on activities has never been so significant in terms of technological structure and resources, given the recent investments in ICT in the educational sector worldwide and the use of digital media for teaching and learning practices.

2.3 Media Literacy in the Irish context

A report from 2007 organized by the School of Media at Dublin Institute of Technology and the School of Communications at Dublin City University on the topic 'Critical Media Literacy in Ireland' offers a comprehensive account of how media literacy education evolved in the country since it first entered Irish schools in the late 1970's and the many attempts to promote media literacy in Ireland (Barnes, Corcoran, Flanagan, and O'Neill, 2007). Throughout the three decades that preceded the report, vocational programmes for students were developed incorporating elements of communications studies and contemporary culture, following a growing interest among teachers in teaching subjects related to media studies. Organizations such as the Irish Film Institute (IFI) and the Curriculum Development Unit of the Dublin Vocational Education Committee, based in Trinity College Dublin, played important roles in organizing seminars in film and media studies, developing teaching resources and offering training for teachers (ibid.: 24). However, when the report was launched it was acknowledged that Ireland was still "trailing behind world leaders in the field" (ibid: 06), and that the subject still had a very low status within the educational system. According to the authors, the main emphasis was on technical skills acquisition, such as computer literacy and correlated knowledge and abilities and there were many problems with the way media literacy education was being addressed by educationalists across the country. With no separate Media Literacy curriculum at either primary or secondary education, many schools across Ireland had some elements of Media Literacy Education in subjects such as English, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), but the lack of teacher training and appropriate educational resources was a major problem. Furthermore, because the topic was not compulsory and not formally tested, its practical application in the classroom was totally dependent on teachers' disposition to promote and teach the subject (ibid: 25).

Seven years after this report, Brian O'Neill, one the leading media literacy figures in the country, organized a report on Media and Information Literacy Policies in Ireland which showed the situation had not changed very much, as media education in the country was still "under-resourced and in need of further development" (O'Neill, 2014: 2). However, one important event took place in 2009 that was a seed of a much bigger and more significant transformation that would take place some years later: the Broadcasting Act, which determined a new role for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) in promoting Media Literacy. According to O'Neill (2014: 6) "under the Act, the BAI are given ancillary functions to encourage and foster research and to undertake measures and activities which are directed towards the promotion of media literacy. The Act also provides financial support for media literacy through the Broadcasting Funding Scheme which may be used to support new television or radio programmes promoting media literacy". This new role was important for the development of a media literacy policy, which came seven years later and will be discussed further ahead. Brian O'Neill also emphasized the importance of a significant progress in the area of ICT in Education in schools, which had been supported by both the government and the private sector, whereby schools were being equipped with computers and other digital devices, and teachers were receiving appropriate training to deal with the new technologies available. Following this, students received digital literacy education in a cross curricular way, which opened opportunities for practical, creative and critical engagement with digital media. The report suggests that, unlike Media Literacy Education, Ireland was doing fairly well with ICT in Education compared to other European countries (European Schoolnet and University of Liège, 2013).

The importance and strength of ICT in education in the Irish educational system mentioned by O'Neill received a substantial incentive in 2015 with the launch of the Digital Strategy for Schools (Republic of Ireland. Department of Education and Skills, 2015a). With an investment of 210m euros, the Irish government put forward a plan to provide schools across the country with enough funding which enabled them to increase their investment in technology, acquiring digital devices, subscribing to digital services and enhancing their internet connections. Over the course of 5 years, the government would work to integrate digital skills in the curriculum, embedding them within various subjects and providing secondary students with the opportunity to study more in-depth ICT subjects, such as coding and computer science. For teachers, the Digital Strategy meant more ICT skills

during their initial teaching education and further training. These developments were celebrated by schools and other associations connected to ICT in education, such as the Computer in Education Society of Ireland (CESI), the most important organization in the field in the country responsible for the promotion of IT in education through many activities, including an annual ICT conference for both academics and practitioners. Technology companies, such as Google and Apple, have also taken part in funding ICT in education projects and organizing teacher training across the country (OECD, 2015: 77).

This advancement in ICT structure and teacher training meant, among other things, that schools in Ireland were becoming more prepared for activities involving the use of digital media. With digital technology increasingly becoming part of classroom practices, both teachers and students had the opportunity to use new devices to explore new teaching and learning activities. In practice, this was an opportunity to use ICT not only to 'modernize' existing traditional teaching and learning habits, which was the most common practice among teachers (Butler et. al., 2018), but actually an opportunity to create new practices and explore new possibilities offered by the digital media available. And, as discussed in the previous segment, one of the fields that could benefit from these new practices is Media Literacy Education, which received a decisive boost in December of 2016 when the BAI launched the first Media Literacy Policy for the country (Broadcast Authority of Ireland, 2016). The document contained five objectives and three core competencies related to media literacy, and laid out a strategy to promote media literacy across the country through the provision of an annual media literacy work plan and support for various media literacy activities. Though modest and vague in terms of actual measures and practical actions, the policy was a significant breakthrough for media literacy in the country and resulted in the formation of a media literacy network, known as Media Literacy Ireland, composed of members coming from different sectors of the society, such as academia, industry and governmental institutions. The network became more solid and structured in 2019 when it organized its first national campaign and its first media literacy conference.

In terms of educational activities in schools, though, very little has changed for media literacy education as of 2020, despite the fact that the Irish Educational System offers two opportunities for the inclusion of media literacy practices in schools. The first one is the Junior Cycle reform, whose framework was published

in 2015 containing a plan for its implementation over the following years (Republic of Ireland. Department of Education and Skills, 2015b). The Junior Cycle covers the first three years of secondary education in Ireland, and pupils start this period around the age of 12 or 13. Among the many changes proposed by the reform, one of the most interesting ones was the introduction of short courses. These courses were not compulsory, and their planning and delivery were at the discretion of each school. The National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) initially developed 10 short courses, and one of them was called Digital Media Literacy. Divided into 4 strands – 'my digital world', 'following my interests online', 'checking the facts' and 'publishing myself' – this is certainly the closest Ireland has ever got to a course on media literacy education available for secondary schools around the country. The subject is treated as an ICT-related subject (Junior Cycle for Teachers, 2020) and covers mainly the digital world, discussing, for instance, some technical characteristics of digital platforms, best practices in searching for and presenting information online, and opportunities and risks in young people's use of social networks. Despite that, if well guided this course opens an opportunity for students to discuss their own media preferences, explore their creative side and share their own media experiences in popular culture. According to the Junior Cycle framework, schools can develop their own short courses based on the needs of their students and communities, so this short course in Digital Media Literacy could be used as guide for the development of other short courses related to media literacy, such as journalism, film studies, media representation and semiotics. In terms of results, there is no data on how and with which frequency this short course has been applied in schools, so it is not possible at this stage to evaluate any impact that the course has had on Irish education.

The second opportunity offered by the Irish Educational System for the implementation of media literacy practices in schools is the Transition Year (TY) programme. After the Junior Cycle, the next stage for Irish students is the Senior Cycle, which is comprised of two years that are compulsory for all students, plus the Transition Year, which is offered by around 75% of secondary schools in the country. In most schools TY is optional instead of compulsory, but over the years the number of students taking the programme has grown significantly, reaching in 2018 72% of the total number of secondary students in the country (Republic of Ireland. Department of Education and Skills, 2019). Even though the programme has occasionally drawn some criticism over its effectiveness and suitability, overall

it is well evaluated by the vast majority of educators in the country and students who take it (Clerkin, 2019). During the TY programme, which is the first of the three years in Senior Cycle – and the 4th year of the second-level education – students have the opportunity to learn subjects that are usually outside of the national curriculum, such as global development issues, legal studies and sports coaching – and also do some activities that would normally be difficult during a normal school year, such as work experience or international activities. As the schools have a lot of flexibility to design their own TY programme, this opens an outstanding opportunity for many subjects, such as media literacy education, to reach young people at the age of 15 or 16 within an educational setting.

In this context, Ireland offers this research project an educational system that has highly benefited from investments in ICT and practical actions around the use of digital technology in schools, including technical structure, teacher training, public and private support for educational activities, and strong networking and knowledge-sharing through organizations such as CESI and others. The country also offers an educational structure at secondary level – through short courses in Junior Cycle and TY in Senior Cycle – that, at least in theory, opens opportunities for the implementation of media literacy practices in schools. This is the setting in which this research project will be developed, taking advantage of the ICT structure in schools to explore how the new digital media can be used to teach media literacy to young students, in this case, to TY students. But what exactly does it mean to teach media literacy? What is the definition of media literacy, or media literacy education? The rest of this chapter will provide a brief introduction to the field of studies – which will be further discussed in chapters 3 and 4 – and explore the many definitions and areas of studies that one finds within the field.

2.4 Definitions, concepts and objectives around Media Literacy.

The Media Literacy field has not arrived at the 21st Century with a solid consensus in terms of its rationale and objectives; on the contrary, there is still a great deal of disagreements among academics and scholars in the field. In a special issue on media literacy published *in the Journal of Communication* in 1998, the editor Alan Rubin starts by wondering:

"For several decades we have been debating issues surrounding media literacy. It is somewhat perplexing why we really understand so little about the subject" (Rubin 1998: 3).

The field seems to encompass so many different approaches and currents of thought that it seems to be very difficult to reach a brief and clear definition. As Rene Hobbs put it:

"Media Literacy is still an umbrella concept, with a wide spectrum of different educational philosophies, theories, frameworks, practices, settings, methods, goals and outcomes" (Hobbs, 1998: 27)

Even after years of research and discussion in the field, scholars still struggle for a coherent understanding of the term. As David Buckingham observes:

"The growth of international dialogue in the field has undoubtedly been of great value; but it's not always clear that everyone is talking about the same thing" (Buckingham, 2001: 6)

Sometimes the differences in the field seem to be about what exactly should be included in the definitions and what should be left out. According to W. James Potter (2004: 32):

"It appears that different scholars are emphasizing different parts of the complex phenomenon. The ideas of the many scholars substantially overlap, but each scholar presents something unique to extend beyond the commonality. It is not as if some scholars are saying a thing is green while others are saying it is red. Instead, it is more like all scholars agree there are patches of green and patches of red"

Such variation in definitions shows that what is understood by the term 'media literacy' is contested and open to multiple interpretations.

Since the 1970's the Media Literacy movement has sparked a great deal of debates around the world involving the fields of media studies, communications and education, especially in Europe, USA, Oceania and Latin America. However, in a global scale, there is still some confusion in terms of definitions, aims, theories and practices involved in the field. Scholars in fields such as Media Studies, Communications, Cultural Studies, Linguistics and Semiotics in different parts of the world have called the field 'media literacy', 'media education' 'media literacy education, 'education for communication', 'educommunication', 'audio-visual literacy' and more recently 'digital literacy and 'media and information literacy' (Brown, 1998; Hobbs, 1998; Livingstone, Van Couvering, and Thumim, 2008; Potter and Burn, 2009; Buckingham, 2015a). In terms of definitions, traditionally media literacy has involved the "ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993: 6), including print journalism, cinematic productions, radio and television programming (Brown 1998: 44). As media technologies evolved and began to be incorporated into educational practices, media literacy began to be confused with ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in education, producing even more disagreements among people involved in the field. David Buckingham (2003: 4) argues against these misunderstandings claiming that "media education is concerned with teaching and learning *about* the media. This should not be confused with teaching *through* or *with* the media – for example, the use of television or computers as means of teaching science or history". In the same book, the author also makes a clear distinction between media education and media literacy: "Media *education* is the process of teaching and learning about media; media *literacy* is the outcome – knowledge and skills learners acquire" (ibid: 4).

The Russian scholar Alexander Fedorov gives another definition of both media education and media literacy:

> "Media education in the modern world can be described as the process of the development of personality with the help of and on the material of media, aimed at the shaping of culture of interaction with media, the development of creative, communicative skills, critical thinking, perception, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of media texts, teaching different forms of self-expression using media technology. Media literacy, as an outcome of this process, helps a person to actively use opportunities of the information field provided by the television, radio, video, film, press and Internet" (Fedorov, 2008: 6).

The term 'media education' is commonly used in Britain, whereas in other parts of the world, like in the U.S. and in Ireland, media literacy is the preferred term among scholars. Following the definitions by Buckingham (2003) and Fedorov (2008), for the purpose of this research the term 'media literacy' will be used as an umbrella concept when referring to the field of studies, and 'media education' only in specific cases, such as when referring to educational theories and practices involved in the field.

Rene Hobbs, currently one of the main figures in the field in the U.S., claims that "most scholars define media literacy in terms of the knowledge and skills individuals need to analyse, evaluate, or produce media messages" (Hobbs, 2010: 3). According to the scholar, media literacy is a "multifaceted (and contested) phenomenon", where a great variety of perspectives exists (ibid: 1). Hobbs understands that much of the disagreements in the field are a result of a lack of articulation in terms of a body of knowledge to define what it means to be media literate. In 1993, at the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, in Aspen, a report was launched stating that media literacy should be grounded in three key elements of the media: production (how media companies operate and produce media messages); text (how media messages are constructed); and audience (how people receive and interpret media messages) (Aufderheide, 1993: 10). Ten years later, David Buckingham (2003: 55-57) argued that the element 'text' should actually be broken into two more specific concepts: language (the codes and

symbolic resources used to create a message); and representation (how messages represent ideas, values and ideologies). More recently, more subdivisions have been proposed in order to add new key concepts in the debate. Production, for instance, may have different conceptual understandings depending whether it takes into account texts produced by media companies or content created by users, such as fun fiction or social media content, for instance (Sayad, 2010, Soares, 2011). Research on audiences have also been grouped into new areas due to its increasingly more participatory and active nature (Jenkins, 2006a).

Historical context and developments in society play an important role in the way media literacy is framed and defined. The emergence of new digital media, for instance, with new devices bearing new properties and affordances with the combination of many modes of communication, prompted some scholars to use media literacy studies to frame a kind of expanded concept for the traditional definition of literacy (The New London Group, 1996; Gunther Kress, 2003). Following studies in social semiotics (Hodge and Kress, 1988), multimodality (Kress, 2003; Benzemer and Kress, 2016) and New Literacy Studies (Street, 2003), in some parts of the world, such as the UK and Australia, learning about media has increasingly been focused on understanding how meanings are created and interpreted within the cultural realm of the new digital media technologies. Luke and Freebody (1999), for instance, writing about literacy education, propose what they call *the four resources model,* a set of competences that everyone should have in order to be considered literate in a multimodal environment. More recently, Potter and McDougall (2017: 15), in analysing the impact of digital media in education, suggest the term *dynamic literacies* as a more inclusive way to describe "the changing nature of meaning-making in the context of digital media and culture", as opposed to "the view of literacy as a static, narrow and autonomous set of codes and conventions".

Another example of this shifting nature of media literacy in relation to definitions and objectives is the current debate around misinformation and fake news. For the past ten years or so, in response to a growing concern over the spread of false information online and the rise of populist governments increasingly using propaganda as the chief means to communicate with their people, media literacy research and practice have been focused once again on the skills and knowledge necessary to develop *critical thinking* (Buckingham, 2019; Kellner and Share,

2019), allowing people to critically analyse information, news and media messages and fight back the 'disinformation age'.

In this sense, the fact that the media literacy field has become so broad means that the way it is defined normally depends on the context in which it is immersed, and the emphasis applied to it.

2.5 Definition of media literacy for this project

Amidst so many different ways of looking at the media literacy field, it is important to provide the reader with a definition that will guide them through the ideas, concepts and methods that will be discussed in this research project.

The term 'literacy' is usually defined as the ability to read and write, but it sometimes refers to a much broader concept. Over the past years, there have emerged many expressions such as film literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, and information literacy, and some scholars in the field such as David Barton (1994) and Gunter Kress (2003) have not been very comfortable with these uses. According to Kress, literacy should only be related to alphabetic writing, and the ability that people have to read and write texts. As he puts it: "for me literacy is the term to use when we make messages using letters as the means of recording that message" (2007: 23). He completely rejects the idea of using the term literacy to designate other competences, such as 'media literacy', 'music literacy', 'image literacy,' and so on, because, according to him, this use of the word literacy as a form of skill or competence might cause the term to become so broad that it would lose any usefulness as a technical term. "The more that has gathered up in the meaning of the term, the less meaning it has. Something that has come to mean everything, is likely not mean very much at all" (Kress, 2003: 22).

The fact is that the term 'literacy'- in media literacy - has been accepted and adopted by the vast majority of researchers in the field, and it will be used in this project as well, as explained in the previous section. However, the intention here is not to use the word literacy as simply a substitute for another term, such as skill or competency, so a further clarification of what literacy means is necessary. For the purpose of this research project, literacy here is understood as a set of skills and knowledge that allow people to make sense of the world around them and communicate meanings appropriately. As Paulo Freire (1978) observed, people

need to learn how to *read the world*, i.e., interpret the reality around them. However, those skills and knowledge are not fixed or static; they are more like a process, fluid and contingent on social practices and cultural contexts. Literacy is, thus, socially situated (Street, 1984, 2003; Hodge and Kress, 1988; Knobel and Lankshear, 2006). This is key to understanding that social and cultural forces are important in shaping literacy practices. In this sense, literacy is not purely technical, and it is never neutral (Street, 2003: 78), and the way people use the skills necessary to exchange meaning is embedded in the knowledge and sociocultural practices of their own community. In the context of new digital technologies, literacy is also multiple (New London Group, 1996) and multimodal (Kress, 2003), dependent on the comprehension of diverse modes of communication and new cultural, linguistic, and semiotic contexts. Literacy is also critical (Knoublauch, 1990; Freire, 1972), because it involves the understanding of how languages shape our worldview through different forms of representations and how they contribute to the maintenance of certain oppressive social conditions of unbalanced power relations, where a dominant group silences the voices of the disempowered ones. Finally, literacy is praxis, that is, "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (Freire, 1972: 126). In other words, literacy involves reflection and action upon the world for positive transformation through empowerment and critical awareness.

In the present definition of media literacy, the word media, plural for medium, refers to communication channels through which information can be carried and conveyed. The media *intermediate* the communication between the world and people, and this mediation, through *indirect* communication, is an essential aspect of it, because the media ultimately give people only an *indirect* or *partial* access to the world through representations and versions of this world (Masterman, 1985; Hall, 1997; Buckingham, 2003). In this sense, the term media refers to all forms of communication channels that intermediate people's access to the real world, such as magazines, newspapers, books, radio, television, cinema, photography, recorded music, video games and the internet. *Mediated communication*, thus, is any form of *indirect communication* through some kind of medium – from newspaper to radio to smartphones.

Following those descriptions, for the purpose of this project, media literacy means the *set of knowledge, skills and practices that allows people to make sense of the*

world and act upon it through mediated communication. This definition, even though short, carries a great deal of ideas, concepts and meanings that need to be further explained, and for this reason in the next chapters it will be further explored through the analysis of the main areas of study within the media literacy field. Finally, in chapter 5, where the synthesis of these key concerns is developed into a Media Literacy Model, the reader will be able to fully explore every concept behind this definition in more detail and realize what the purpose of media literacy is according to the premises of this project.

Before I begin to analyse the main areas of study and construct my own model of Media Literacy, I think it is necessary to historically situate the reader by providing them with a brief context on how media literacy as a field of study evolved throughout the 20th and early 21st Century.

2.6 Media Literacy Education – a brief context

2.6.1 MEDIA AND CULTURE

According to David Buckingham (2003: 6), the starting point for the history of Media Literacy can be traced back to the work of FR Leavis and Denys Thompson:

> "The book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*
> (1933) represented the first systematic set of proposals for teaching about the
> mass media in schools. The book, which was revised and reprinted a number
> of times over the following two decades, contains exercises using extracts
> from journalism, popular fiction and advertisements.".

This first approach to media literacy practices and studies is commonly known as *the protectionist model* (Masterman, 1985, Hobbes, 1998, Buckingham, 2003, Leaning, 2009). In Britain, these studies have their roots in the early cultural theories that emerged as a result of profound social changes caused by the industrial revolution and the emergence of the working class. Up to that point in history, the idea of *culture* was mainly related to the elite or the dominant class, leaving almost no space for the analysis of the cultural expressions of the *ordinary people*.

However, as the British society rapidly changed its structure, embracing new movements with both liberal and egalitarian approaches, such as the ones promoted by the French Revolution, the cultural landscape slowly began to change. In the urban and industrial centres, detached from the controlling influence of the elite, a separate culture of the subordinate classes emerged and became subject to analysis by cultural theorists. Authors such as FR Leavis and Mathew Arnold focused their studies on cultural aspects of the society, especially in relation to popular culture and, later on, as communications evolved, on popular media (Tom Steele, 1999; Buckingham, 2003; Storey, 2012).

The *protectionist* aspect of their cultural analysis comes from the fact that these authors would look at the new working class' popular culture with contempt and prejudice (Storey, 2012). They feared that these new cultural movements would cause the decline of a more traditional cultural cohesion, and for this reason they believed there should be some measures to protect society from this threat. According to Arnold (cited in Storey, 2012: 21):

"The working-class culture is only significant to the extent that they signal the evidence of social and cultural disorder and decline".

The aforementioned book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* from 1933 was written in this context, and it reveals the authors' views on how to 'protect' people from popular culture and mass media. For Leavis and his associates, the aim of teaching about popular culture "was to encourage students to 'discriminate' and resist' – to arm themselves against the commercial manipulation of the mass media and hence to recognize the self-evident merits of the high culture" (Buckingham, 2003: 7). Media education within this model was seen as a form of protection against the media, what some scholars would identify as a form of 'inoculation' against the bad influence of the mass media (ibid, 2003).

At around the same time in Germany, the Frankfurt School, represented mainly by Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, was also examining how the media had an impact on people's behaviours, politics and consumerism. These scholars were concerned with the development of social and cultural studies that would provide a theoretical

framework for understanding how popular culture and the media affect the society. Adorno and Horkheimer were among the first to analyse the expanding roles of mass media in politics and social life. In 1944, they created the term 'culture industry' to refer to the various products of the mass media, and this industry was part of a process that, according to them, would lead to a form of class subjugation (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). However, unlike FR Leavis and his followers, they had a different rationale for the argument: unlike the Levisits' idea that popular culture and mass media were a threat to the hegemonic authority of the elite, for them the 'industrialised' popular culture and media actually had the opposite effect; they maintained social authority and class subjugation (ibid, 1979: 95). For this reason, the Frankfurt School also offered a more *protectionist* or *defensive* approach to media education, where people should critically analyse media texts in other to build a defence against them and avoid the manipulation of powerful media corporations (Leaning, 2009).

In Britain, during the late 1950's and early 1960's, some important advances in the field of cultural studies began to change the way scholars treated popular culture. Authors such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel were among the main figures defending the idea that "by analysing the culture of a society – textual forms and documented practices of a culture – it would be possible to put together the patterned behaviour and groups of ideas shared by men and women who produce and consume the texts and practices of that society" (Storey, 2012: 37). In a clear contrast with the body of work produced by scholars on the protectionist side of the analysis about mass media and popular culture, the theories elaborated especially by Williams and Hoggart would challenge this view by no longer seeing culture as a set of noble and privileged products, but as a way of life. According to them, cultural expression and media texts had not necessarily to do with the approved canon of literature or pieces of fine art, for example; on the contrary, they could take many different popular forms and shapes found in everyday life (McIlroy and Westwood, 1993; Buckingham, 2003).

This more comprehensive approach thus began to challenge the prejudice against popular culture and the everyday experiences of the ordinary people. In '*The Popular Arts',* Hall and Whannel (1964: 35) suggested that instead of fighting against what some would regard as the bad influence of popular culture and mass

media, "we should be seeking to train a more demanding audience". Even though they talk about a "training in discrimination" (Ibid: 37), this is not in a sense of discriminating popular culture for the benefit of high culture, or disparaging everyday practices to celebrate the great canons in literature or art. This is a more nuanced approach to popular culture, one that seeks to understand its meanings and establish cultural and artistic parameters to evaluate the good and the bad within popular culture itself, and not between privileged and popular forms of expression (Buckingham, 2003: 7). The book had an important impact on education at the time, with some teachers embracing students' popular references in the classrooms. This movement was the seed of what would become a few years later a more inclusive and participative approach to studies about mass media and popular culture in schools. Inclusiveness and participation of young people in the educational process are two key pedagogical components that will always permeate the media literacy model developed for this research project.

2.6.2 DEMYSTIFYING THE MEDIA

In the 1970's there was a substantial shift in the way media and communications were studied thanks to developments in fields such as psychoanalytic theory, linguistics and semiotics, under strong influence of Marxist theory, structuralism and counter-cultural activism (Buckingham 1998a; Leaning, 2009). Louis Althusser and his concept of ideology; Michel Foucault and his ideas around discourse and power; Roland Barthes and the semiotics; and Jacques Lacan on language and the symbolic world were among the main figures who had an impact on this new way of studying media and popular culture (Storey, 2012). The main vehicles for the development and transmission of those ideas were the English journals *Screen* and *Screen Education*, which gave rise to what became known as 'Screen Theory', and the most influential exponent of this approach in the UK was Len Masterman (Buckingham 1998a).

Broadly speaking, this model was concerned with the development of analytical tools that would allow people to better interpret and understand media texts. According to this model, whilst a passive audience would simply see what is on the surface of media messages and uncritically consume mass media products, a more trained audience would be able to deeply analyse those texts and messages and

uncover their hidden meanings and ideology (Leaning, 2009: 11). According to Len Masterman (2001), media education in this case was concerned with questions about ideology, language and representation, and its main goal was to reveal the constructed nature and the ideological premises behind media texts, showing how media representations reinforced the ideologies and the political interests of dominant groups in society.

Among the many revolutionary theories and concepts that were being discussed at the time, Roland Barthes' (1957) idea, expressed in his book Mythologies, that the media do not directly reflect the world because the media can only actually provide a *representation* of it, had a strong impact among media scholars. Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model also contributed to this analysis, providing scholars with an understanding of how audiences actively participate in the communication process and construct meanings through collective action based on their social contexts. The idea of 'constructed messages', in the sense that the content of media messages is socially and culturally constructed by the media taken into account a number of factors, is still today one of the cornerstones of media literacy. In order to deconstruct the messages and understand their 'real meaning', free from ideologies and misled representations, the audience would need some analytical tools, especially the ones associated with semiotics. These analytical tools give media literacy education a method, or a framework for students to use when analysing media artefacts, and that is certainly something positive from a critical and methodological point of view.

However, some critics would argue that these tools can also be used in a very protectionist way, as if they were only useful for people to avoid media manipulation. As David Buckingham (2003: 9) put it: "students were urged to put aside their subjective responses and pleasures, and to engage in systematic forms of analysis which would expose the hidden ideologies of the media – and thereby liberate themselves from their influence. *Discrimination* on the grounds of cultural value was thus effectively replaced by a form of political or ideological *demystification*". As I will argue in in chapter 3, analytical tools are not simply 'defensive' tools against manipulative media messages – which we could say is one of its important uses – but actually some kind of 'thinking' tools that help young people understand the mechanisms involved in the production, distribution and consumption of media messages, and this can be used not only to protect them

against some sort of mass manipulation, but also to help them become creative and responsible producers of media content, understanding how, for instance, the semiotic resources available to them can be used to improve their communication skills and self-expression.

2.6.3 PARTICIPATION AND POPULAR CULTURE

The models presented here so far have in common the fact that, regardless of their underpinning rationale, they all have a more defensive approach to the media and they are mainly concerned with developing strategies to prepare people to learn how to defend themselves against the negative effects of the mass media industry. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, this scenario slowly began to change. A new emerging approach to media education sought to move away from the protectionist method and embrace a more creative, participatory and engaging form of dealing with media texts. The first major shift in field was in the way media educators started to see young people's popular culture references and media habits (Buckingham, 2003). Thanks to developments in studies in Psychology and Cultural Studies, educators began to pay attention to what their students already knew about the media, rather than simply assuming that students were passive and uncritical consumers of popular media texts (Leaning, 2009: 13). This logic was part of a process whereby students' culture began to be recognized within the education system as something valid and important for the teaching and learning practices.

This idea of bringing students' popular culture inside the school and taking into account their everyday experiences had long been a very important feature of Critical Pedagogy and the so-called Progressive Education movement (Freire, 1972; Giroux, 2010), and media education practices seemed to be a fertile space for this kind of experience. Consequently, the second important shift had to do with some more progressive educational strategies, such as the increasing use of constructivist theories in media education. Not only students' popular references were being more valued than before; students themselves began to have a more prominent role in the classroom (Buckingham, 1998b). In this format, teachers and students would be in a more horizontal relationship, with the former taking the role of someone who facilitates the learning, rather than imposing it. This would eliminate or at least soften some criticism against media educators who were seen

as some kind of *evangelists* who simply impose their own point-of-view in the classroom. In the new student-centred approach, teachers are not seen as holders of the 'truth' who provide students with the appropriate skills to free themselves from the ideologies imposed by the media; on the contrary, teachers are constructing the learning experience together with students in a more collaborative way (Freire, 2010).

Finally, the third important change was the technology revolution that completely changed the way everyone engages with the media. From the mid-1990s, more and more people were gaining access to the internet and the new digital media technologies. This enabled people to consume media content in a much faster and more interactive way, and also to create and spread media content in various online platforms (Leaning, 2009, Jenkins, 2006b). In line with constructivist approaches to education and the importance of hands-on activities for media education advocated by media educators (Buckingham, 1994), the emergence of these new digital technologies enabled students of media to create their own artefacts in a much easier way (Hobbs and Jensen, 2009). As producers of content using different devices, software and platforms, young people had the opportunity to better understand how media products are planned, designed and disseminated, which enabled them to be part of what Jenkins (2006a: 3) called *participatory culture*, where the older notions of media audience as *passive* consumers no longer made any sense.

This last model is regarded as more participatory than the protectionist one, since it takes into consideration young people's knowledge about the media and their active participation not only as consumers, but also as producers of media content. This does not mean that the critical aspect of media studies should be put aside in favour of the celebration of students' media references (Buckingham, 1998a; Hobbs and Tuzel, 2017, Campos, 2018); on the contrary, this model advocates that students should learn about how the media works – how media messages are constructed following socio-cultural and economic interests, for example – but it also supports the use of media to foster creativity, collaborative work and participation in the media culture. The emergence of this more participative approach does not mean that the protectionist model lost its influence; on the contrary, since the 1990s the media literacy landscape has been a stage for fruitful debates involving those two main streams of thoughts. Besides, the emergence of the internet and the

development of new digital media technologies have caused other areas of studies to approach the media literacy movement, broadening and elevating the debates within the field, such as multiliteracy and new literacies studies (The New London Group, 1996, Coiro *et al*., 2008), cognitive studies (Potter, 2004), and information literacy studies (Livingstone, Van Couvering and Thumin, 2008). The following chapters will discuss in more detail these approaches and show how each of them had an impact on the Media Literacy Model presented in chapter 5.

2.7 Three main areas of study

Throughout history, scholars have proposed ways of dividing the Media Literacy field into specific areas to facilitate the understanding of their main concepts and ideas (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2006; Hobbs and Jensen, 2009; Cappello, 2010; Erstad and Andam, 2013). Following their example, I decided to divide Media Literacy into 3 main areas based on my review of the main traditions in the field. Those areas certainly do not encompass all the different approaches that one can find in media literacy discussions, but they provide a comprehensive scope of the main ideas that make up the field. The three areas that will be discussed in the next two chapters are the following:

CRITICAL AWARNESS
Critical thinking, the fundamental competence for a more critical awareness of the reality, has been one of the most frequently mentioned skills among media literacy scholars. This approach has its roots in the more defensive models of media literacy discussed in the previous segment, in a sense that it focus on people's ability to critically analyse media messages and socio-political contexts in order to empower themselves and avoid manipulation. It is strongly linked to the Frankfurt School, to Cultural Studies and to Critical Pedagogy, especially the works of Paulo Freire (1972), Henry Giroux (2010) and other educators following a more progressive and emancipatory education. Sometimes called 'Critical Media Literacy' in order to stand a clear difference from other fields, this approach is concerned with developing people's critical consciousness, raising issues such as representations in

the media, consumerism, press discourses, media control, political ideology and propaganda.

CREATIVE PARTICIPATION

This approach has the same roots of the previous one; however, it bears a much less protective attitude towards media literacy. Using a combination of media production, creativity and critical reflection, it focuses on how the media relate and connect to young's people cultural and social practices. In this approach, young's people popular culture references are always taken into account and used as the basis for the teaching and learning practices. It has strongly been influenced by the Cultural Studies field and therefore it raises questions about identity, race, gender and power, and it also relies on studies on representation and semiotics to understand how students interpret media texts and create their own content.

NEW LITERACIES

This is the most recent group of studies in the media literacy field. It is grounded in the idea that, as the way people communicate is changing due to the emergence of the internet and the new media technologies, this strongly affects the way media literacy education is conceptualized and put into practice. The underpinning rationale for this area is provided mainly by studies in social semiotics, information literacy, cognitive studies, multimodality, ICT in education and new literacy studies. Studies here are concerned with media messages in this new digital environment, where information comes from everywhere in many different shapes and formats. In this approach to media literacy, questions of access, reliability, interpretation, manipulation and privacy of information are as relevant as concepts of design, multimodal communication and new ways of understanding literacy practices.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter sought to introduce the reader to the Media Literacy field by discussing, first, the relationship between young people and the media in the context of the 21st Century. The objective was to demonstrate how important mediated communication has become to our society, and the benefits, opportunities and

concerns involved in the use of media by young people. The chapter also presented a brief overview of media literacy in Ireland, its history and recent developments in the field, and how the Irish educational system offers an interesting opportunity for the development of media literacy classes in the schools. Next, I discussed some definitions of concepts around media literacy and proposed my own definition for this study, which will be further explored in the next chapters, and introduced the reader to a brief historical context of the media literacy field, showing key figures and movements that have influenced and shaped the way we understand the field today. Finally, I divided the field into three main areas, and, in the next two chapters, they will be analysed and discussed. It is important to emphasize that the areas are totally connected and experiences in media literacy do not conform strictly to one model or the other. However, this division is important for the general analysis of each current of thought and to establish comparisons between different ideas and concepts that have shaped the field over the past years. The objective of the analysis will be to identify and discuss the main theoretical traditions behind the media literacy movement, and then, based on the findings, build a theoretical model of media literacy that will be used as the analytical framework for the research methodology.

Chapter 3

An examination of the Critical Awareness (CA) and the Creative Participation (CP) traditions

3.1 Introduction

This chapter of the Literature Review discusses the two main traditions of the Media Literacy field, which, for the purpose of this project, will be called Critical Awareness (CA) and Creative Participation (CP). A third area, New Literacies, will be discussed in the next chapter.

I discuss both traditions together in order to expose the many similarities and contradictions shared by those two currents of thought. It also reviews how they can complement each other in order to provide a solid theoretical framework for media literacy education. As described in the previous chapter, broadly speaking the CA tradition works with the idea that to be media literate means to be able to critically analyse media messages so as not be manipulated by their ideological discourses. In this way, CA works like a pedagogical framework that guides both teachers and students to think critically about the world they live in, understanding how issues such as mass culture, consumerism, and propaganda influence their lives. The rationale underpinning these studies is concerned with the liberation of individuals from ideological influences of the media through awareness and empowerment, so that they can become agents of social transformation and change. On the other hand, in the CP tradition, to be media literate means to be able to understand the cultural and social practices involved in the process of analysing and producing media content. The pedagogy involves practical activities involving analysis and production of media texts, always valuing and respecting students' own cultural references. The rationale underpinning this theory is concerned with enabling students to participate in the media culture as both consumers and

producers of media texts, improving their critical thinking, creativity and cultural awareness.

The debate between those two traditions has a long history. The analysis of the literature review suggests that they have many points in common - especially in terms of the main theoretical concepts behind their rationale - and also a few disagreements, which is mainly due to how those traditions understand the way media products affect people's lives and in what ways media texts should be used in the classroom. Out of the many differences between them, this chapter will focus on three key aspects of media literacy and analyse how and why those traditions hold different views about them. The first one is how CA and CP deal with students' popular cultural references. As we will see in this chapter, the CA emphasises a critical attitude towards media products, framing them as industrialized mass products with very little authentic value, sometimes contaminated with harmful ideologies that can negatively affect how people behave and think. The CP, on the other hand, argues that people's habits in terms of the media they consume on everyday basis should be acknowledged as legitimate, as they provide important clues about people's tastes, identities and pleasures, which are crucial for the understanding of the socio-cultural implications and effects that the media have on the society.

The second important difference is in relation to media production as an educational practice. This chapter will discuss how the CA movement has questioned the benefits of using media technology in the classroom, with the argument that these practices fall into some form of meaningless technical work, and the media artefacts produced by students would simply reproduce the dominant ideologies of the powerful media organizations. The CP tradition, on the other hand, will argue that media production is key for the understanding of how media messages are constructed. Besides, those hands-on activities would generate other benefits in the classroom, such as collaboration and development of creative skills.

Finally, the last major difference in perspectives has to do with the role of the teacher in the classroom. For the CA, the role of teacher is to provide students with tools and concepts so that they can empower themselves to critically analyse media products and understand how they affect people's lives. The CP does not deny the

importance of critical thinking and empowerment. However, it questions the neutrality of the teacher in the classroom. The argument is that regardless of good intension and expertise, teachers seeking to empower students through media education might be simply imposing their own point of view, rather than opening the discussion for more than one perspective and allowing students to genuinely express themselves.

As it will be clear throughout the chapter, these differences are all interconnected. Moreover, I will argue that it is possible to achieve a balance between these two main traditions if we understand their differences not as different fundamental concepts, but actually as different learning stages within the media literacy education framework. To help with the analysis, I will begin by using as a guide the work of two scholars that have been associated with those traditions: Len Masterman and David Buckingham. I start by briefly introducing the reader to the main concepts associated with their work, and then look more deeply to the foundational concepts that gave rise to the Critical Awareness and Creative Participation traditions.

3.2 The Media Education debate: two leading figures

During the 1980's, the British scholar Len Masterman published two books (Teaching about Television, 1980; Teaching the Media, 1985) that had a very strong influence on Media Literacy Education not only in the UK, but all over the world. According to him, one of the main reasons why people should study the media is because of their ideological importance and their influence as what he calls "consciousness industry" (Masterman, 1985: 2), i.e., an industry that has the power to shape people's perceptions and ideas (ibid: 03). Masterman used the Marxist concept of ideology to raise some important questions about, for instance, how manipulative and deceitful media messages can be, and how these messages would simply reflect ideas and interests of dominant groups.

In discussing media texts, Masterman cites Stuart Hall (1977: 340) claiming that one of the most important aspects of media education is to understand that media messages are constructed, in a sense that these messages do not reflect reality as it is, they are not "windows of the world" (Masterman, 1985: 21), but instead they

carry the values, intensions and interpretations of those who created them. Media messages are made of *representations* – images, concepts, ideas etc. – and the audience use these representations to create an image of the world around them. This construction, Masterman (ibid: 20) emphasises, is never aleatory or natural; on the contrary, they always have specific goals and purposes. Besides, the powerful people who control the means of communication are the ones who have the power to tell stories about the world as if they were natural and normal, i.e., as if they were the absolute truth. It is the same idea of the *falsely obvious* that Barthes (1993) brings in his book *Mythologies*; i.e., a process by which ideologies become naturalized. What follows is that the ideological power of the media can be said to be proportional to the seeming naturalness of their representations. What passes as true, real, universal, "is actually selective and value-laden constructions within which are inscribed particular interests, ideologies, and ways of making sense" (Masterman, 1985: 21).

Throughout the book, Masterman works with three ideas that form the basis of the CA tradition. *Manipulation*, which is a concept linked directly to the idea of 'passive audiences' – people are not fully aware of how powerful the media are and thus consume their products without realizing they are being manipulated. *Liberation*, which implies that people should free themselves from the ideologies of the media in order to become active consumers. And *empowerment,* a key idea to understand how people should develop their own critical thinking to understand how the many facets of the media work and use it for their own benefit.

The Critical Awareness tradition found an interesting counterpoint in the work of David Buckingham, one of the most respected scholars in the field of media education. After the publication of Masterman's *Teaching the Media* (1985), Buckingham published a series of works, along with other important scholars in the field, where he sought to deconstruct this idea that the media should only be studied in order to protect people against their manipulative texts. In 1986, in an article for the journal *Screen* called "Against Demystification – A response to 'Teaching the Media'", Buckingham (1986) criticizes Masterman's arguments about how media education should be taught in schools, and in the following years he continues to raise important questions about the CA methodology and proposes a different way of seeing the media and especially media education. It can be argued that this

historical moment in the mid-1980's was the birth of the Creative Participation tradition as we understand it today.

Buckingham rejects the idea that students should be treated as passive consumers of media texts and that the media should be regarded simply as the "purveyors of dominant ideology" (1998: 8), an instrument of manipulation sustaining relations of oppression and domination. Far from denying the power of the media industries and the importance of understanding how ideologies may influence people's thought and behaviours, Buckingham claims that media education should be primarily concerned with the way students interact with media texts, looking at this interaction without prejudice and valuing young people's tastes and pleasures (Buckingham, 2003). He recognizes that Masterman's arguments are not as protectionist as the "cultural defensiveness" (2003: 10) based on the discrimination of popular culture that was the mainstream current of thought in works from the first half of the twentieth century, such as the ones by F.R. Leavis. However, at the same time he claims that this new tradition became a form of "political defensiveness", i.e., simply "a means of disabusing students of false beliefs and ideologies" (ibid: 11).

According to Buckingham, Media education should become less defensive in its approach, acknowledging that young people are more independent and critical than previously believed. Moreover, he rejects Masterman's understanding of the media as a very powerful 'consciousness industry' (Masterman, 1985) that impose ideological beliefs on a passive audience. For Buckingham, Media education should not see the media as something necessarily harmful, and should not treat children as passive victims of a manipulative industry. Instead, it should focus on what children already know about the media and value their own experience with media texts and products. As he put it: "(Media Education) does not aim to shield young people from the influence of the media, and thereby to lead them to do 'better things', but to enable them to make informed decisions on their own behalf. In broad terms, it aims to develop young people's *understanding* of, and *participation* in, the media culture that surrounds them (Buckingham, 2003: 13).

This brief introduction to the works of Len Masterman and David Buckingham helps us understand the main positions defended by these two traditions within the

media literacy field. In the next segments, I provide the reader with a look at the historical foundations of the ideas discussed above and move forward to analyse more deeply the main differences and similarities between the two traditions, and how they both contribute to the development of media literacy education.

3.3 The Historical Context

The historical foundation of the critical approach to media literacy education begins with the theoretical work of the Frankfurt School on Critical Theory. Following Marx's critical methods, Frankfurt theorists such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal and Hebert Marcuse developed a dialectical method in order to analyse how the dominant ideologies function and the kind of awareness necessary to spot them (Kellner, 1989). They introduced a logical and consistent critical approach to studies of mass communication and culture, and developed the first well-documented critical theory of the cultural industries (Kellner, nd: 1). The Frankfurt school combined critique of political economy of the media, analysis of media texts, and audience studies to understand the social and ideological effects that mass media had on audiences (Kellner, 1989).

In 1944 Adorno and Horkheimer coined the term *culture industry* "to indicate the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial requirements which drove the system" (Kellner, 2002: 32). For the Frankfurt School, the rise of popular culture through the media was seen as a problem, a threat to human freedom. Because all media messages were loaded with the dominant ideology of the existing capitalist societies, the media industry was responsible for the ideological transmission of messages through popular culture forms in newspapers, radio, film etc. (ibid, nd.). For this reason, the German scholars saw the new forms of communication technology of their time as perpetuators of ideological manipulation and social control. According to them, standardized cultural goods such as music, movies, magazines and newspapers were being produced following a factory-like process, which contributed to audience passivity and also to what they regarded as the two main problems with the media products: homogeneity and predictability (Storey, 2012: 64).

Another important point about mass media is made by Herbert Marcuse. According to him, "the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote the false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood" (Marcuse, 1968: 14). Marcuse (1955) also claimed that the power of the media was such that it was even replacing the family as the main social institution responsible for socialization, which, according to him, would cause the decline of people's autonomy, the rise of audience passivity and the manipulation of people's minds. He reinforces this idea in the book *One-dimensional men* (1968: 26), where he claims that the media are new forms of social control that produce the false needs and alienation through "one-dimensional thought and behaviour" necessary for the reproduction of dominant ideas.

Frankfurt School theorists and more specifically Adorno understood that mass culture limits people's understanding of reality around them because its products are pre-digested and designed for easy and passive consumption. This, in turn, undermines people's capacity to reflect on any new form of cultural expression that do not fit into predetermined cognitive, social and cultural patterns. What follows is a constant reproduction of the same cultural patterns as a closed system of thought, not leaving space for a meaningful participation of the masses, who uncritically accept dominant patterns of thought and behaviour. (Kellner, 1989; Cappello 2016). This situation would maintain social authority and the conformity of the masses that are "caught in a circle of manipulation" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 121), from which is very difficult to escape. In this sense, media texts assume a very powerful role to ensure social obedience in the society, imposing ideological representations and meanings to a submissive, and thus passive, audience.

Those ideas about mass media, ideology, manipulation and individual emancipation spread all over the world and have influenced studies in many different areas. In Britain, during the 1960's and 1970's Cultural Studies was emerging as an academic field of studies, and many scholars such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart were interested in analysing how the media constructed their messages and how the audience responded to them (Hall, 1990). Marxist and

post Marxist theories were being combined with psychoanalysis, semiotics and structuralism to explain how the human cultures are constructed and organized. Some of the main contributions of this period for Media Literacy were the theories developed around the idea that, at least from a theoretical standpoint, there is a separation between the natural world and the world of the ideas – represented by culture – and that human culture is constructed through symbolic representations of the real. Language, understood here in its broadest sense as both a system of representation and a signifying practice (Hall, 1997), acquires an enormous importance. As Jacques Lacan (1989: 72) observes: "the world of words creates the world of things". According to him, in modern societies the realm of culture is superimposed on the realm of nature, and the symbolic is like a network of meanings that creates what we experience as reality (ibid). It is in this context that Media and Cultural Studies scholars turn their attention to Ferdinand de Saussure, for instance, seeking to understand the structures of language and how they produce meanings, and to Claude Levi-Strauss, in order to understand how he analyses everyday cultural norms and practices such as cooking and modes of dress from a structuralist point of view (Storey, 2012).

This idea of an underlying structure governing all aspects of people's social and cultural lives was very appealing to those media scholars who, just like the Frankfurt School, wanted to understand how the media created and distributed their popular texts in order to disseminate their ideology. One of the main theories developed for this purpose during this period was the 'Screen Theory', organized and presented in the pages of the journals *Screen* and *Screen Education* in Britain. *"Screen was the most significant vehicle for new developments in semiotics, structuralism, psychoanalytic theory, post-structuralism and Marxist theories of ideology"* (Buckingham, 2003: 8), offering an important space for debates around analysis of the media and their effects on society as a whole. The goal of Screen theory was essentially to understand how the media, through their languages and symbolic representations, would be able to make people adhere to certain beliefs that are imposed on them by a dominant ideology (Nash, 2008).

One of the most influential figures for Screen was Louis Althusser. Althusser saw ideology as a force capable of shaping people's consciousness, representing "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"

(Althusser, 2006: 109). According to him, ideology was embedded in everyday practices of what he called 'ideological state apparatuses', i.e., social institutions such as the school, the church and the media that dictate how people should think and behave. In this sense, ideology would give people the false belief that they are self-determining agents in full control of their lives, when in fact they are being affected by ideological processes all the time (ibid). Through his analysis of ideology, Althusser gave a significant contribution to Cultural and Media Studies offering analytic tools to understand the *problematic* of media texts, i.e., the underlying ideas or structures from which a text is made.

Another important figure during this period who had a central influence on studies of ideology and mass media was Antonio Gramsci. Unlike the Frankfurt School theorists, Althusser and many structuralists who saw culture as an instrument of domination and manipulation acting to impose the ideology of the dominant classes, Gramsci saw culture as a contested terrain (Grasmci, 2006). Even though he acknowledged the predominance of one class over others, he refused the idea of a dominant ideology imposed from above. He developed the concept of *Hegemony* to explain that power is always a result of "negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups" (Storey, 2012: 83). He noted that the idea of cultural, social and political common sense among people living in a society is never something fixed, but it is actually fluid, constantly transforming itself. As Fiske (1989: 291) puts it: "Hegemony (…) posits a constant contradiction between ideology and the social experience of the subordinate that makes this interface into an inevitable site of ideological negotiation and struggle".

This idea of *negotiation* was central to studies of popular culture, as it allowed people "to think of popular culture as a 'negotiated' mix of what is made both from 'above' and from 'below', both commercial and 'authentic', a shifting balance of forces between resistance and incorporation" (Storey, 2012: 84). This idea of negotiation is also supported by the Foucauldian concept of power. For Foucault, power is not a negative force used by dominant classes to oppress the masses; power actually circulates in all levels of society through particular social practices, moving in all directions, and power relations are always negotiated through imposition and resistance (Rabinow, 1991). In relation to popular culture and the media, this suggests that the media's power is in some sense negotiated with the audience.

For media and cultural studies, those concepts of *hegemony* and *power* represented a new way of seeing the audience as an active player who actually does not accept ideological messages submissively, but rather participate in the negotiation of meanings. This idea is reflected in Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model, which had a significant impact on the development of media studies by proposing a more active role for the audiences based on the understanding of how social contexts shape different interpretation of texts, and how collective action has the power to reinterpret and change the messages people receive from the media. This more active role of the audience opened up opportunities for studies about how people make sense of and consume popular culture. The submissive audience that passively consume cultural products gave way to an active one who combines, reshapes and transforms what they consume, directly participating in the construction and exchange of meanings. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, for instance, carried out a series of studies during the 1970's where they sought to understand the youth sub-cultures and "the way that cultural hegemony is maintained, structurally and historically" (Hall and Jefferson, 1993: 5). Using concepts of ideology, hegemony and semiotics from Althusser, Gramsci and Barthes, respectively, the authors analysed how young people adapted and transformed popular culture texts in a way that allowed them to create new meanings and shape their identities in completely new ways, as well as explore new forms of individuality (ibid).

This move from a more defensive approach where a passive audience consume mass media texts that serve the interest of the dominant ideology (mainly associated with the Frankfurt School and the Critical Awareness tradition), to another one where a more active audience participate in the negotiation of meanings they find in mass media texts (mainly associated with Cultural Studies and the Creative Participation tradition), forms the basis for a key difference between these two approaches to young people's media culture and preferences. However, as we shall see in the last segment of this chapter, this difference is much more nuanced than it seems, as both traditions draw roughly on the same theoretical premises.

3.4 The educational approach to media texts

Both the Critical Awareness and the Creative Participation traditions have been grounded in educational theories that could be described as 'progressive', as opposed to a more traditional form of teaching. Broadly speaking, traditional education could be described as more conservative, where the teacher maintains a vertical relationship with their students based on hierarchy and authority. The curriculum is usually strictly structured and subject-based, and students are expected to passively receive and memorize information provided by the teacher. On the other hand, progressive education would be the one where the relationship between teachers and students is more informal, horizontal and child-centred. The curriculum has a solid pedagogical structure, but it is also open to alternative educational interventions and values a more holistic approach to learning. Students work in project-based, problem-solving activities that promote collaboration and critical thinking (Freire, 1998; Robinson, 2011; Thomas, 2013)

For the CA tradition, the work of Paulo Freire is particularly significant as the Brazilian educator was one of the founders of what is known today as *critical pedagogy*. Following the tradition of critical theory developed by the Frankfurt School, Freire proposed a form of education based on students' immediate needs, offering conditions for self-reflection and critical thinking (Soares, 2010). He uses the term *conscientization* to describe people's understanding of their own place in the world, i.e., their rights, their culture, and their power. This would allow them to overcome ignorance and actively resist oppressive power and social injustice (Giroux, 2010). In his works Freire emphasizes the harmful effects of what he called 'banking education' (knowledge is deposited into students' heads) in traditional schools, which, according to him, had the purpose of maintaining the privileges of dominant classes (Freire, 1972). Likewise, the educator saw the mass media as anti-democratic institutions that, just like schools using the 'banking education', would promote alienation and passivity of the ordinary people. Citing Freire and his concept of 'antidialogical mythicizing', which refers to the importance of alienation and passivity for the maintenance of control and subjugation of the masses, Kellner and Share (2019: 12) observes: "this is achieved through hegemonic myths that are taught in schools, repeated in the media, and naturalized through the dominant society's worldview, such as the need to conform to authority to achieve success". In this dynamic, ordinary people would be treated by the media as 'object-like

individuals' without the necessary critical skills to free themselves from oppression and transform the world around them (Freire, 1972).

Following a Freirean approach to knowledge, the CA tradition understands that students' own culture and views about the world are always valued; however, it is important to understand how these cultural references are brought into the classroom. As Masterman (1985: 30) observes: "Despite the necessity of problematizing the out-of-school media pleasures of both students and teachers alike, if media education is ever seen as a mechanism which educational institutions recuperate students' media tastes, relaying them back to students via the sensibility of the teacher, then it will become the site of considerable student resistance". There are two key points in this statement. The first one is the concept of *problematization,* which assumes that student's culture should be problematized, i.e., it should be deeply scrutinized and reflected upon, rather than simply celebrated. Here is implicit the idea that children consume media content without having the correct tools to understand it appropriately, and thus their popular culture references and tastes are simply a reflection of a system of values, beliefs and ideologies disseminated by the media industry. The second important point is about the role of the teacher in this *dialogic* relation with students. According to this view, the teacher should never put himself as an expert, but rather as someone who is facilitating learning, helping students to find their own answers and reach their own conclusions, rather than imposing a pre-determined content, which would lead to students' submission to teacher's authority (Freire, 1978). In terms of media education, the teacher's task would be to develop students' ability to critically engage with the subject being studied, and then provide them with the appropriate analytic tools to deconstruct media messages (Masterman, 1985).

However, what are the tools that students need to engage in analysis of media texts? Here is where critical pedagogy meets structuralism and, more precisely, semiotics. If critical pedagogy provides the Critical Awareness tradition with the concept of *problematization* and its enquiry-based learning approach, it is in structuralism – and post-structuralism – that the CA finds the techniques to analyse media texts and uncover their underlying structures of signification (Buckingham, 2003). The main element here is language, understood as the "medium in which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged" (Hall, 1997: 1). This structuralist emphasis on the constructedness of meaning through different forms

of systems of signification (Eagleton, 1983: 107) is a key element within the CA tradition. For this reason, semiotics stands as the preferable technique for the analysis of media texts in the classroom (Buckingham, 2003). Using semiotics, students would develop the ability to deconstruct media messages, such as film, for instance, looking for meanings that are represented through different symbolic systems and uncovering the hidden ideologies behind them. As Masterman (1985: 206) observes: "media analysis must always attempt to push out beyond the consideration of connotative meanings towards ideological analysis". In this regard Roland Barthes and his collection of essays organized in *Mythologies* were one of the most significant and comprehensive semiotic work on popular culture and had a big impact on the analysis of media texts. The book offers important insights about how ordinary people come to accept ideological representations as if they were natural, seeking to expose the mechanisms behind this process. The idea of *myth*, which was also largely used by Claude Levis-Strauss in different contexts and with different purposes, has some similarities with the idea of *discourse* for Foucault or *ideology* for Althusser. Myth for Barthes (1993) is a form of presenting something, such as a set of values and ideas, for instance, as if it were natural, when in fact its meaning is socially constructed. As Barthes (ibid: 134) explains: "since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message". A myth, rather than describing the world the way it is, presents only a version of the world according to the intention of the person or group of people who created it.

The concept of *myth*, just like the concept of *ideology*, in central for the Critical Awareness tradition. Following a progressive approach to media education, they help students to problematize media texts and reveal the real meanings behind them, exposing their ideological bias. The semiotic work, in this sense, becomes a way of developing critical awareness and avoiding manipulation.

For the Creative Participation tradition, this critical aspect of media literacy education is also very important, progressive teaching practices are highly valued, and semiotics hold an important place in the analysis of media texts. However, as we will see in the next segment, there are some important distinctions in how these concepts and tools should be used with young people.

3.5 From Protection to Participation

The Creative Participation tradition also celebrates the progressive education movement. Ideas such as the more horizontal relationship between teachers and students and the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning have always been present in the literature linked to the CP (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994; Buckingham, 2003; Cappello, 2010). The tradition, like the CA, also draws on Cultural Studies theories and practices to develop its pedagogy in terms of how culture shapes the world, how people's lives are organized around cultural artefacts, and how the media uses symbolic systems to communicate. However, when it comes to how this more progressive form of teaching should be delivered in the classroom and what kind of techniques should be used when working with media texts, some differences emerge from the analyses of those two media literacy traditions.

In relation to the role of the media teacher in the classroom, Masterman (1985: 24) argues that media education should not "produce in pupils the ability to reproduce faithfully ideas, critical insights or information supplied by the teacher, nor should it involve simply encouraging students' own critical insights within classroom". According to him, the primary objective of media education is critical autonomy, i.e., students should be able to learn a kind of toolkit with semiotic techniques that allow them to analyse media messages and understand how meanings are created. The teacher, in this case, should seek to develop in students "self-confidence" and "critical maturity" so that they can critically and safely approach any media text (ibid: 25).

As a counterargument to this approach, David Buckingham (2003) argues that, first of all, it is not always clear what it means to be critical. He points to the danger of being arrogant and authoritarian in this view, in a sense that the ones who define themselves as critical would be assuming that those who disagree with them are simply ignorant or foolish (Buckingham, 2003: 107). According to him, advocates of the CA approach impose "a narrative of education as a form of political liberation" and "claim to speak on behalf of the oppressed and manipulated students" (Buckingham, 2003: 108). This is one of the key critiques that the CP tradition makes about the CA rationale for teaching and learning: based on their

own beliefs and principles, media educators would assume that they know students' needs and, ultimately, what is best for them. Following that, media educators would provide the tools for students analyse media message and discover what lies behind the surface, uncovering hidden meanings and twisted representations. According to Buckingham, though, "much of what students are expected to 'discover' in this kind of learning activity is pre-determined, and much of what passes as analysis is simply a sophisticated exercise of guessing what's in the teachers' mind" (Buckingham, 1998: 09).

Another important point in this discussion is about the concept of *problematization*, which, as I mentioned in the previous section, is key to the CA tradition. The CP does not see problematization as a problem in itself; on the contrary, it recognizes the importance of the concept of *defamiliarization of common sense*, taking different points of view when analysing cultural texts and media messages. However, for the CP tradition the main issues arise when media educators use problematization of students' media practices as a starting point for their learning activity, because in doing so they are implying that students are simply passive victims of media manipulation. In this process, students' experiences as media consumers and the pleasures involved in them end up being marginalized and disclaimed (Buckingham, 2003). Even though the intention behind this problematization is to "empower and emancipate students" (Masterman 1985: 12), this approach can lead to a form of protectionism based on prejudice, where students need to be protected from the evil media. According to Buckingham (2003), it is important to celebrate what students already know about the media, rather than assuming that this is merely invalid or ideological. Rather than simply rationally analysing the media to find problems and judge its limitations, the model he proposes is one that engages students to critically reflect on the complexity of the media as both consumers and producers, taking into consideration their subjectivity and understanding the pleasures, tastes and values involved in this processes (ibid: 110). In this sense, students' popular culture should not be brought into the classroom to be scrutinized and criticized as a form of less valuable cultural expression, because this could simply reinforce social norms and cultural hierarchies. Instead, it should be understood as a legitimate expression of student's tastes and pleasures, and students themselves should be instigated to reflect upon those tastes and pleasures with the assistance of the teacher (ibid: 119).

The Creative Participation tradition draws attention to the fact that media texts can be interpreted in different ways by different people depending on many factors, especially the ones related to meaning-making practices and cultural differences. Meaning is not something fixed, and the meaning of a message is not simply there to be discovered; it is actually dependent on a person's own cultural repertoire (Barthes, 1967). As Stuart Hall points out: "meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be made to mean" (Hall, 2009: 121). Again, here the CA objective and structured analysis of the media based on a set of analytical tools to uncover the "truth" underlying the messages needs to give some room for students' subjectivity, since different people experience the same media message in different ways. For the CP tradition, these differences should be the starting point for classroom discussions, because students' subjective interpretations will result in different articulations of meaning when faced with the representation of an idea. According to David Buckingham (2003: 114), "critical analysis cannot be regarded as a neutral or objective procedure; on the contrary, it is often a site of struggle, in which debate about textual meaning reflects broader relationships of power between the participants". For this reason, according to the CP tradition media education should encourage students to reflect on their everyday experiences with the media and understand how social and cultural factors influence the way meanings are constructed and interpreted by the members of a society.

Finally, the Creative Participation tradition claims that production should be a central component of media literacy education (Sefton-Green, 1999; Buckingham, 2003; McDougall, 2006; Burn and Durran, 2007). This is a view that was challenged not only by Len Masterman, but also by other authors who wrote about media literacy during the 1980's (e.g. Fergunson, 1981; Alvarado, Gutch, and Wollen, 1987). The Critical Analysis tradition would argue that the production of media texts was just a form of uncritical and naïve reproduction of dominant practices (Masterman, 1985), whereby students would simply learn some technical skills to imitate media texts without learning anything about the media (Ferguson, 1981). As Cappello (2010: 2) observes: "the privileging of critical analysis has led to a radical depreciation of practical activity as politically incorrect and pedagogically worthless. Animated by a general Frankfurtian suspicion of the deceptive pleasures of popular culture, media educators have long believed that any kind of media production in the classroom was a form of 'technicism', of 'cultural

reproduction', of 'deference and conformity' to dominant practices". The CP tradition, on the other hand, understands that media production involves not only critical thinking, but also creativity, storytelling through different modes of communication, and cultural expression (Burn and Durran, 2007; Burnett and Merchant, 2018). Seeing production as simply an uncritical and purely technical activity would undermine all the creative and communicative potential of such activities.

Production is key for the Creative Participation tradition because it is viewed as a social, cultural, creative and critical practice. It is cultural because it involves the cultural practices in which students engage in their everyday lives; it is social because it is a collaborative practice that uses social resources and promotes social learning; it is creative because it involves playful activities where participants have to use their imagination to create meaning and express themselves in different ways; and it is also critical because it allows students to learn media techniques and reflect on their experience as producers of content (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007). In this sense, the idea that media production would be a useless technical activity to foster uncritical reproduction and imitation of media texts would be very misleading. As David Buckingham (2003: 141) argues: "the aim of media education, then, is not merely to enable children to 'read' – or make sense of – media texts, or to enable them to 'write' their own. It must also enable them to reflect systematically on the process of reading and writing, to understand and to analyse their own experience as readers and writers". This form of critical reading, as Burn and Durran (2007: 14) make explicit, is the kind of critical practice that "allows for pleasure, for contingency, for negotiation of meanings in social groups and in classrooms, for diversity of taste and experience. It does not seek to police meaning or taste, but rather to open them to debate".

Progressive educational approaches were embraced by both traditions, valuing practical, student-centred and project-based activities with a more horizontal relationship between teachers and students. However, the CA and the CP disagree in some aspects, such as in how to deal with young people's media experiences and subjectivity; the role of the teacher in leading students to become critical consumers and producers of media texts; and the importance of media production for the learning experience. What I seek to demonstrate in the final segment is that it is

possible to find a balance between all the concepts and ideas covered by the two traditions in order to achieve a common goal for Media Literacy.

3.6 Discussion

The Critical Analysis tradition has historically developed from critical theory, critical pedagogy and cultural studies, which are analytical and investigative disciplines. Its main objective has been to understand how media texts affect and influence their audience, and develop mechanisms and tools to enable people to interpret media messages and understand how the media industry operates. The CP tradition, on the other hand, emerges in a moment when the "socially constitutive role of cultural processes and systems of signification" (Steinmetz, 1999: 2) is increasingly gaining attention among academics of various fields. For example, the distinction between high and popular culture is becoming less and less meaningful in the view of many scholars; the way people understand cultural production is being relativized. It is a moment where Raymond Williams's (1958) definition of culture as 'a way of life' is being once again celebrated, and people are looking at the industrialized mass culture with less prejudice than in previous years, trying to understand popular expression as something authentic and worthy of attention (Buckingham, 2003). In the educational field, progressive ideas from Piaget and Vygotsky about the importance of playful hands-on activities for the development of children gain more and more importance among educators. Furthermore, the technology revolution, with the advent of more affordable digital devices, is opening the opportunity for the proliferation of practical activities that promote play, collaboration and production.

In this sense, I understand that the Creative Participation tradition is not a movement that emerged in parallel as a form of contestation to this more analytical approach to media literacy, but it actually developed from it. Without denying the importance of the critical aspect of media education, the CP proposes a more comprehensive view of what it means to be media literate. The traditions agree on many points in relation to media studies, such as on how powerful and influential the media industries are; on the structural character of media texts; and on the importance of understanding symbolic systems in order to make sense of the mediated reality around us. Both traditions claim that one of the most important

ideas behind media literacy education is that students, especially the young ones, have to be active consumers of media texts, as opposed to the idea of a 'passive audience'. They also agree with the claim that students should be able to 'critically engage' with the media in order to make informed choices about what they consume. Moreover, the formations of their theoretical frameworks share many historical academic roots, such as cultural and social studies, semiotics, structuralism and constructivism. In this context, these two traditions establish their main structural differences and begin what has been one of the most fruitful debates on how the media should be taught in the classroom. For the CA tradition, the emphasis will be on the empowerment and emancipation of students, freeing them from the ideological traps of the media industries and allowing them to make informed judgements about the media. For the CP, the emphasis will be on the social and cultural aspects of media texts, their systems of representation and creative practices, enabling students to become active participants in the media culture.

These differences in the goals of each tradition emerge mainly from the way they understand how students should approach media texts, and the role of the educator in this process. The CA sees students' popular culture as industrialized mass products (Zanker, 2007), and not as authentic culture. Students' cultural references would be 'contaminated' by the dominant ideologies embedded in them. That is why those references should be problematized in the classroom and not celebrated. The CP, on the other hand, sees students' popular culture as legitimate references of their tastes and pleasures, regardless of the imbedded ideology that they may contain, and for this reason they should be acknowledged and used as cultural resources to develop students' creativity and critical thinking. I see this debate more in terms of learning stages than in terms of how we should approach students' culture. In early stages of the learning process, the celebration and acknowledgement of students' culture is very important for the learning development. When we bring children's out of school references inside the classroom, we turn the learning activity into a practice where students can recognize themselves in those forms of cultural representations, which will lead to a more joyful and participative learning experience (Soares, 2010). However, I also understand that it is important to make clear for students that their cultural references are only a small part of the culture that is available for them. Beyond the

industrialized media products there are many other forms of cultural manifestation and they are also important for the understanding of the society as whole. Students also need to learn to engage critically in discussions about power, knowledge and representations in the media, and to reflect on their own experience as consumers and producers of media content. In this sense, problematization is definitely a key element in cultural and media studies, and it can be very useful for discussions in the classroom. However, it could be argued that problematization should be a second step in the learning process of media education, brought in after pupils have some basic understanding of how the media works, its language and socio-cultural aspects, and not as a first step to study media.

The CA movement has also traditionally questioned the usefulness and validity of practical work in media education (Hobbs, 1998; Buckingham, 2003; Cappello, 2016). Even though this view has softened and become more moderate over the past years due to the increasingly easy access to digital media technologies, both inside and outside the school, many media educators are still wary of how productive the use of such tools may be for the learning activity. The argument is that students will not automatically acquire critical abilities and begin to understand all the complexities involved in the analysis of media texts simply by producing media products themselves. Moreover, some practical activities using some sort of media technology are done in a way that is purely technical, i.e., neither the teacher nor the students have a proper understanding of how to use these tools so as to have a real impact on the learning activity and encourage fruitful critical discussions among the participants. I agree with both arguments and in my own experience as a media educator, I have seen some activities where the only goal is to teach students how to operate software and acquire technical skills. However, I also understand that production can be a key element in media education if the activity is well structured and if the teacher understands the affordances and potentialities of the technology they are working with. Following a constructivist approach, for instance, hands-on activities using digital media where students can create media artefacts in their own way are very effective forms of learning (Burn and Durran, 2007). With the implementation of a proper framework in terms of goals to be achieved and media elements to be worked on during the activity, hands-on activities are a useful way of building knowledge and critically understanding how media messages are constructed.

Finally, the role of the teacher has been changing over the past decades and nowadays it has become common sense among leading educators around the world that the traditional form of teaching is outdated and must be replaced by a more democratic and horizontal relationship between pupils and tutors (Robinson, 1999; Palmer, 2001; Soares, 2001; Richardson, 2012). Current studies in the area of education suggest that the teacher should be more like a facilitator, someone who is *with* the students in the process of learning, stimulating them to achieve their own conclusions rather than simply providing them with a pre-packed content. Both media education traditions agree with this new form of teaching; however, they still have their differences. The CA tradition follows a critical view of education, applying what has been known since the 1960's as *critical pedagogy*, following the works of Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich, Neil Postman and more recently Henry Giroux. This form of teaching is about preparing students to critically analyse the reality around them, problematizing every aspect of their cultural and social foundations in order to have clear understanding of their place in the society and the potentialities of their actions (Soares, 2011). In this sense, I understand that critical pedagogy is an effective tool to emancipate and empower students, especially those ones living in less well-off social, economic and cultural conditions.

However, it is important to acknowledge the dangers of educators who intend to use critical pedagogy simply to impose their own ideas and speak on behalf of those children, 'revealing' to them the 'reality' that lies underneath the surface of the oppressive capitalist society. Masterman acknowledges that when discussing the differences between dialogue – in a Freirean sense – and discussion. "Discussion, whilst far preferable to teacher dominated discourses, and having some potential to transform consciousness, often falls short of this. As it is most limited, dominated and controlled by the teacher, it can be merely a manipulative mechanism for enabling her to pass on information already in her possession, a scarcely disguised form of banking education" (Masterman, (1985: 34). For Freire (1972), dialogue means to share the power among all participants of the learning process, which is the best way to achieve dialectical and critical thinking without being 'proselytized' by the teacher. In this sense, the role of critical pedagogy for media education should not be to 'reveal the truth' about the media, but actually to show students that we live in a world made of stories, and media stories are socially and culturally constructed following certain patters of representation and language. The idea is to

create in students the appreciation for the doubt rather than for the absolute truth; the curiosity of investigating and discovering new facts rather than the convictions of one solid and concrete truth.

As of the CP tradition, its constructivist character emphasizing the importance of hands-on activities for the development of student's understanding about the media is usually much appreciated among media educators; however, at times it is not very clear how this understanding will emerge from such experiences. The role of the teacher in this case would be to guide students to achieve certain skills necessary for a basic understanding of the task they have set out to complete, and from that point they would be encouraged to discover new knowledge by themselves. Again, critics would argue that it is not always clear how students will arrive at their own conclusions by themselves. As a result, in some cases, these media education activities are drawing on cognitive theories of learning in order to provide more solid scaffolding to the whole education process.

This debate is far from settled, and it is very difficult to divide a field as complex as the Media Literacy one into only two big groups; it is definitely more nuanced than that. For instance, associating playful media literacy activities for self-expression with a form of 'uncritical media education' can be misleading, as the critical element may still be present in a more subtle and indirect way. Burnett and Merchant (2018: 91), for example, while discussing literacy practices using playful activities with new media in the classroom argue that "it is important to facilitate a critical dimension to children's media production". David Buckingham, whose work has been used in this project to support the CP ideas, launched in 2019 a book called *The Media Education Manifesto* where he claims that "[media education] is centrally concerned with developing critical understanding" (Buckingham, 2019: 16). Similarly, the association of any form of critical approach to media literacy with a protectionism approach to media education can also be inaccurate. Share and Kellner (2019), for example, make a clear distinction between Critical Media Literacy and a "traditionalist protectionist approach". Citing Postman (1985), they claim that the latter will attempt to "inoculate young people against the effects of media addiction and manipulation by cultivating a taste for book literacy, high culture (…), and by denigrating all forms of media and computer culture". Critical Media Literacy, on the other hand, will teach students "to be critical of media representations and ideologies, *while also stressing the importance of learning to*

use the media as modes of self-expression and social activism" (Share and Kellner, 2019: 5-6, my italics).

These are just a few examples of nuanced dialogues between the CA and the CP traditions, and any attempt to frame them as completely separate and disconnected body of concepts and practices will miss the opportunity to see how they actually converge in many points. At the same time, it is also important to take into consideration different times and contexts when analysing media literacy tendencies. When digital media devices were becoming increasingly available to young people, allowing them to become producers of media content, media educators were more inclined to talk about the benefits of digital media for self-expression and criticality. Over the past years, with the dangers posed by online privacy issues, fake news and disinformation, media educators have been more inclined to talk about the many ways in which media education can help young people to protect themselves and avoid manipulation. In this sense, there is scope for looking at media literacy education from many different perspectives. At times it is argued that scholars from cultural studies and the arts tend to privilege the creative and cultural side of media literacy, whereas scholars from social science and critical theory tend to emphasize aspects related to critical thinking and media effects (Livingstone, Van Couvering and Thumin, 2008; Martens, 2010). I think there is a middle path between those two Media Literacy traditions, where, as Livingstone and Haddon (2009: 25) argue: "risks and opportunities must be addressed together". The traditions are more complementary to each other than competitive, and in chapter 5 I take concepts and ideas from both of them in order to construct the Media Literacy model.

Finally, it is important to consider that the emergence of new digital media provided young people with the opportunity to create media artefacts and express themselves in unique ways. This new technology has also created many learning opportunities and has affected the way many educators understand what it means to be literate (Kress, 2003). With digital media increasingly taking part in young people's lives, it is no longer possible to ignore the importance of their everyday experiences, tastes, preferences and cultural references in relation to the media, especially new media (Potter and McDougall, 2017; Burnett and Merchant, 2018). At the same time, the digital media environment increasingly requires people to be critical in order to avoid disinformation, fight bigotry and hate speech, protect their privacy,

and engage with the social, cultural and political sphere (Share and Kellner, 2019). In the next chapter I will examine these ideas in the third area within the media literacy field: New Literacies.

Chapter 4

New Literacies

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the third area of studies within the Media Literacy field: New Literacies. A complement for both the Critical Awareness and the Creative Participation traditions, this area is grounded in the idea that, as the way people communicate is changing due to the emergence of the internet and the new digital media technologies, the very concept of literacy is also changing and becoming more complex (Cope and Kalantsis, 2000; Lemke, 2002; Kress, 2003; Knobel and Lankshear, 2006, Coiro et al., 2008). If we understand literacy in its more traditional form – the ability to read and write alphabetically written words – we can no longer rely only on this ability to interpret media messages and information in general, as now words are increasingly being combined with other modes of communication to produce meaning (Cope and Kalantsis, 2000). In this sense, the word 'literacies' in new literacies suggests "a shift in thinking about the ways that people make meaning with language" (Rowsell and Walsh, 2011: 55). We can also take the more comprehensive approach to literacy introduced in chapter 2; that is, the skills, knowledge and social practices involved in making sense of the world and communicating meanings. In this case, we not only need to consider this 'semiotic move' to reading multimodal texts (Kress, 2003), but also how the internet and the new digital technologies have affected the way we socially and culturally engage with mediated communication to both interpret and produce meanings. In this sense, "new literacies are identified with epochal change in technologies and associated changes in social and cultural ways of doing things, ways of being, ways of viewing the world" (Coiro et al., 2008: 7).

New literacies can be discussed through various topics. The first one addressed in this chapter is *information* and how 'information literacy', a subject that had traditionally been part of librarian studies, is now an important topic within the media literacy field. The use of social media and search engines, for instance,

require people to develop certain skills so that they can safely and effectively navigate online, accessing, evaluating and using the information they encounter. I will include in the information literacy field other topics that are also related with the way people deal with information online, such as the role of digital platforms and how people consume online news. Still on the information topic, I will briefly discuss the cognitive approach to media literacy (Potter, 2004) to understand the many ways in which we process information and how they might affect the way we understand media messages. The next topic, Multimodality, analyses the changing nature of meaning making with the use of different modes of communication in digital media. I will argue that this multimodal communication requires a new understanding about how the media messages are constructed and communicated, which has a close relation to the new ways that the concept of literacy is being framed. Finally, on the topic of education, I discuss new literacies from a learning point of view, analysing how literacy is becoming more dynamic and increasingly dependent on the everyday socio-cultural practices around the uses of digital media.

4.2 The Information

One of the key elements in New Literacies is information. After the emergence of the internet and the digital technologies, the amount of information that can be accessed by ordinary people through different online platforms has increased exponentially. This new situation, which led some scholars to claim that we live in an information age (Castells, 1996; Gleick, 2012), has radically changed the way we deal with information, and prompted researchers from different fields to understand what the implications of these changes for education are.

As I discussed in chapter 2, digital technologies and the internet are increasingly ubiquitous in the lives of young people, which means that a massive amount of information is just a mouse click or a screen touch away from them (Kuiper and Volman, 2008). Children and teenagers use digital devices and the web for multiple reasons, such as watching videos, communicating with friends, playing games, researching information, learning about a specific topic, and so on (Global Kids Online, 2019). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have also increasingly been used in schools and other educational settings across the globe, opening up opportunities for the development of new pedagogies and learning

activities (European Commission, 2019), which have at their core *the use of information*. Because of this centrality of ICTs and digital devices, it is important to understand how young people behave when they are online and how they make use of the internet as an information resource.

4.2.1 INFORMATION LITERACY

The access and use of new ICTs open many opportunities for people in general, but they also pose many challenges for their users. To deal with these challenges, it is important to understand what are the knowledge and skills necessary for this task. The term "literacy" in Information Literacy refers precisely to the knowledge, skills and practices that people should develop in order to access, evaluate, synthetize and use the information they encounter (Livingstone et al, 2008; Wilson et al., 2011). Historically speaking, Information Literacy has been linked to librarian studies and to computer skills necessary to find information efficiently and it was, for the most part, dissociated from Media Literacy. In 1989, the American Library Association (1989) stated that "to be information literate an individual must recognize what information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed. Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning because they always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand". Even though this definition was produced when the internet and the new media technologies were not still available to the general public, it is fair to say that it can still be valid today. What has changed, obviously, is the context around the search and use of information, and the process involved in becoming information literate. Moreover, since the internet became widespread and digital media became available to increasingly more people, concepts associated with Information Literacy have come closer to the ones associated with Media Literacy (Livingstone et al, 2008). Some scholars actually go even further to say that the fields have become almost undistinguishable (Leaning, 2014; Brayton and Casey, 2019). After all, how is it possible to discuss media without taking into account how people access and use information, especially in online environments such as social media and search engines? UNESCO (2011), for instance, has merged the two terms into Media and Information Literacy (MIL), and many of its policies, reports and

learning resources bring concepts of both Media and Information Literacy together as a single area of study. For the purpose of this work, Information Literacy will be treated as a core set of knowledge, skills and practices within the Media Literacy field.

In educational terms, information literacy has been tightly connected with the development and spread of ICT in education, and for many years it was – and still is – "taught as a set of skills that must be attained" (Brayton and Casey, 2019: 119). It has also been framed within a socio-constructivist and inquiry-based learning approach to learning (Breen and Fallon, 2005; Banchi and Bell, 2008; Kuiper and Volman, 2008), wherein the process of searching for information is seen not as an end in itself, but actually an instrument for answering questions and solving problems. There are many approaches to information literacy following this inquiry-based and socio-constructivist approach, and one of the earliest and most popular models that has been widely used in primary and secondary education is known as Big6. Developed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz (2000) and divided into six steps, it promotes a systematic process to access, find, evaluate and use information for specific tasks. The model serves as a good framework for understanding how information literacy practices have been applied in education, especially in subjects involving ICT and, more recently, computer science.

It begins with *task definition*, which involves defining what kind of information is needed and for what purpose. This is a basic premise in Information Literacy, which states that before the search starts, one has to know very clearly what they are searching for, or at least understand the context around the search in order to define a strategy for the task. According to Kuiper and Volman (2008: 247), children usually prefer browsing rather than searching through keywords, which suggests that if they do not have a solid and structured research question, they will struggle to find the information they need. Besides, following a socio-constructivist approach to education, many scholars (Kulikowich and Lawless, 1996; Kuiper and Volman, 2008; Lawless and Schrader, 2008; Young, 2008) claim that prior knowledge about the topic being researched makes the task much easier and even more enjoyable, and students tend to be more focused when exploring it.

The second and third elements are *information seeking strategies*, where students check all sources available and select the best ones; and *location and access*, which involves going to the sources and finding information within it. Those two steps are connected with the way students navigate in the web, and what their patterns in navigation are. It also involves checking the reliability of the sources following defined criteria, which will be further explored later in this chapter. Lawless and Schrader (2008: 269), making an analogy between the physical navigation and the virtual one, claim that "effective navigation through virtual environments requires users to know where they are, where they need to go, how to get there, and when they have arrived".

The fourth and the fifth elements in this discussion are the *use of information*, which is the ability to collect the relevant information users need in order to complete their task; and *synthesis*, which is the ability to organize and present information appropriately. Those steps involve assessing the quality, consistency, usefulness and relevance of the information obtained, recognizing cultural and social contexts around it and interpreting the information accordingly (Bundy, 2004). It also involves organizing the content in a way that supports the purpose of the task, comparing different sources and understanding how prior knowledge of the subject influences the way information was selected and used (Breen and Fallon, 2005). The presentation of the information is also important so that the data can be properly communicated and interpreted by the receiver.

Finally, the last element in this model of information literacy is *evaluation*, which involves reflecting on the task as a whole and assessing how effective it was. The idea here is to go through the process of identifying, locating, assessing and using information, understanding the main challenges and obstacles, and what kind of changes are necessary to improve the searching process.

This model of Information Literacy gives a first idea about how challenging it is to define and apply best practices to deal with information in the digital age, and it also shows how Information Literacy and Media Literacy are connected, especially in relation to the new media. There is a massive amount of information online, and the more information available, the more challenging it is to filter and find a specific information, and the more difficult it is to turn this information into knowledge

(Kuiper and Volman, 2008). In this sense, it seems clear that the fact that people have access to large amounts of information does not necessarily mean that they have more knowledge or a better understanding of the world around them and, for this reason, issues of knowledge and inquiry have become especially important.

Still on the topic of Information Literacy connected to Media Literacy practices, there are two other topics that present opportunities and challenges for this information age. The first one, *digital platforms*, deals with the way some technology companies use users' data and shape their online experience based on the use of algorithms. The second one, *news*, explores how the news media operates nowadays, and the threat that disinformation and fake news pose to the society as whole.

4.2.2 DIGITAL PLATFORMS

The digital platforms play a very important role in Information Literacy. In terms of search engines, for instance, Google is currently the main search engine used by internet users to find information on the web, with a market share of around 90% at the end of 2019 (STATISTA, 2019). For this reason, it has become very important for young people to learn how to use all the tools available on the platform, such as search operators (punctuation and symbols that facilitate the research), context sensitive tools (a search on a subject about Brazilian politics will most likely generate more accurate results on google.com.br than on google.com) and image filters (one can filter images by time, size or usage rights, for instance). In terms of source's reliability, there have also emerged different ways of investigating the truthfulness of a website, such as *whois.net* and *archive.net*, where users can confirm the authenticity of a website by checking details of its registration and past content updates. The reverse image search allows users to upload a picture – or paste an URL – and find other sources where this image was used. This can be used to find the original source of the image, for instance, or find out if the image was doctored and manipulated.

Other two important elements of digital platforms that can be analysed together are the use of private data and the work of algorithms. It is well documented that search engines, such as Google, video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube, and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, use people's personal data and

algorithms in order to personalize users' experience (European Commission, 2017; LSE Truth, Trust and Technology Commission, 2019). Google, for instance, claims that by using users' information from previous searches combined with the work of algorithms that identify users' dispositions, inclinations and styles, it can improve everyone's experience on the platform by displaying results that are more aligned with users' preferences. Social media platforms work in a similar way. On Facebook, users' information in relation to how they behave on the platform are stored and used to generate an online experience that is tailored to the users' preferences and needs (Somaiya, 2014; Granados, 2016). Even though tech companies claim that these features were developed to improve people's experience on the platform, there are many challenges that need to be dealt with. First, the information about how these platforms work is not clearly communicated to their users, and most people who use them do not know how they actually work (Tufekci, 2015). Second, the fact that the information delivered by these platforms is tailored to create a personal and exclusive experience to each user create some problems, such as what has been known as filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). The idea around filter bubbles is that, because the algorithms will work to provide users with information that align with their personal tastes and preferences, people will end up having a very narrow experience online, one that only shows them a small part of all the possibilities that are out there. This can be particularly troublesome in some situations, such as in political arguments, for instance. If one prefers left-wing politics, for example, they will mostly get information about left-wing politicians and ideas, which, in the long run, can result in radical polarization, since they will not have access to ideas contrary to what they believe, which is important for a more balanced view of worlds' affairs. Therefore, instead of offering diverse and multiple points of view to the users, the platforms may end up restricting people's experience and depriving them from a more plural, assorted and even democratic online experience.

The digital platforms have also brought to the surface many other issues that are not necessarily new, but that have become more noticeable in recent years, and some of them can even cause serious harm to both people and institutions. For this reason, these issues have increasingly become topics addressed in media and information literacy research and practices. This includes questions related to data protection, for instance, where young people are giving away large amount of personal data to

tech companies through their personal devices and, in many cases, it is not clear how this data is being collected, stored, manipulated and protected (Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014; Morgan, 2018). The large amount of information online has also brought about questions around copyrights, both for companies and ordinary people, so it became a pressing issue for everyone to understand best practices involving the use of other people's material and information (De Abreu, 2011). More specifically related to social media platforms, bullying and hate speech are also contemporary issues related to how young people engage with online content and participate in the digital media culture, and thus they have increasingly gained space in researches on media literacy (Hobbs, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011). All these issues have long been part of people's everyday lives in some way, but now they have become more widespread due to the great potential that digital platforms have to quickly replicate these practices and keep users' anonymity.

4.2.3 NEWS

In recent years, the term *news literacy* has also emerged within the context of Media Literacy Education, and it can be associated with this current process of dealing with online information in digital platforms. The analysis of news in the press is not something new in Media Education; on the contrary, the basic understanding of journalistic practices and how the news media industry works have always been an important part of what it means to be media literate. Media literacy practices in the classroom have long involved students analysing print media to understand how messages are constructed and examining different sections and formats within newspapers and magazines to discuss storytelling practices. TV and radio news programs have also been used to teach young people about the work of journalists or the influence of news media in the society (Palmer et al., 1994; Buckingham, 1998; Fleming, 2014).

The analysis and understanding of news media have changed in recent years due to the distinctiveness of the internet and the new digital technologies. Whereas before the power to produce and distribute news was in the hands of few powerful organizations, nowadays virtually anyone with a fair internet connection can become a news outlet. This raises many questions in relation to the quality and integrity of the news being produced and spread online. Disinformation, i.e., "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group,

organization or country" (Ireton and Posetti, 2018), commonly associated with the expression 'fake news' – or false information – have become one of the most pressing issues within the Media Literacy field. It is not always easy to distinguish between false and true information, and recent studies have shown that most young people struggle with this task (Kahne and Bowyer, 2016; Wineburg et al., 2016; Herrero-Diz et al., 2019). Meanwhile, fake news creators are increasingly getting better at fabricating facts that never happened. There are currently many software, some of them free and easily found on the web, which can be used to edit videos and pictures in just few minutes. 'Deepfakes', which are very sophisticated programs that use artificial intelligent to manipulate images, sound and videos in order to create situations or events that never happened, are becoming increasingly available to the general public and there is a growing concern over the harms they can cause (Hall, 2018).

In terms of accountability, questions have been raised in relation to the responsibility of social media platforms and search engines in the spread of disinformation in the web. Whereas there is strong evidence that media literate people are more prepared to fight disinformation (McDougall et. al., 2018; Murrock et. al., 2018;), many scholars agree that it is not fair to rely only on media literacy to tackle this problem; tech companies such as Google, Twitter, Youtube and Facebook also have to take their responsibility and protect their users from the harm caused by the spread of fake news (Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014). For instance, in recent years, there have been a few examples of populist governments around the world who have used digital platforms to spread propaganda and disinformation to the public, and in some cases, those actions have had a huge impact in elections all over the world (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Avelar, 2019). The understanding of how tech companies play an important role in the production and spread of disinformation and what their responsibilities are in this process is an important part of Media Literacy. Besides, the very nature of the business model of these digital platforms also raises concerns about how they might affect the way people consume news online. Many news outlets use social media platforms to promote their business, for instance. In some cases, their income depends on the number of clicks they get, which, some critics will claim, suggests that they will be more concerned with drawing people's attention to the news they are providing than with the quality

of the news per se, a practice commonly known as *clickbait* and highly condemned as dishonest and deceitful (Frampton, 2015).

Finally, the fact that increasingly more people are using the internet and digital media to communicate, work and get their daily news has drawn attention not only to the way digital platforms work, but also to the way people's minds function when they are navigating the web, absorbing information, exchanging ideas with other people, and consuming news. James Potter (2004) work on the cognitive approach to Media Literacy, which was published when both search engines and social media were in the early stages of development, has been important to discuss how people absorb, filter and interpret media messages. He argues that, in an environment with too much information coming from all directions in different formats and modes of communication, people end up processing it automatically, that is, not fully aware of all the information they are taking in, and there are many negative consequences associated with this situation. As Potter (ibid: 10) observes: "the information that gets into our minds unconsciously through automatic processing is more likely to lead to faulty interpretations than information that is consciously processed". The basic idea here, which is also endorsed by Richard Mayer (2008: 363) in his work about multimedia learning, is that people cannot process too much information at the same time in a conscious state of mind, so the fact that some of them take in a lot of information in a short period means that they might not be able to correctly filter and interpret this information.

Still on the subject of how our mental states influence the way we behave online and consume news and information, people's psychological structures also play an important role. One of the most popular of these psychological features is what has been known as *confirmation bias*, which is basically the inclination that one has to accept more easily information that confirms their previous beliefs (Kahne and Bowyer, 2016). To complicate things further, recent studies suggest that people usually "evaluate arguments that align with their views as stronger and more accurate than opposing arguments", and when confronted with information that contradicts their prior viewpoint, people "often become even more favourable to their prior beliefs" (ibid: 6). This is an important feature to take into account when discussing information literacy and the fight against disinformation, for instance, and also polarization, which has been a common trend in social media platforms,

especially when involving politics. In an environment where algorithms dictate what kind of information people will get based on their own preferences and prior experiences, Media Literacy scholars have increasingly paid attention to these psychological features in order to understand how people behave online, and to figure out what kind of transformations and regulations digital platforms need.

In this first segment, I discussed the most recent topics related to Information Literacy and sought to include within this area many different subjects that have the *access*, *use, analysis and interpretation of information* embedded in their core practice. Media literacy, news literacy and information literacy have increasingly become interchangeable in many aspects, as well as other areas that discuss the practices around the use of information in digital media in the society. In this sense, I am treating information literacy as an essential set of knowledge, skills and practices within the Media Literacy field, and expanding it to encompass topics that deal with how people and organizations deal with information in the digital age. The next fragment will explore how the communication landscape has changed in recent years in terms meaning-making resources, and how these changes have affected the way young people communicate.

4.3 Multimodal Communication

Multimodality, or multimodal communication, or multimodal literacy, refers to the idea that the way people communicate has increasingly been done through a combination of various modes of communication, such as text, image, moving-image, sound, colour and gesture (Cope and Kalantsis, 2000; Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2011; Krause, 2015). Modes are socially shaped material resources for making meaning (Kress, 2003: 3) and they work like languages or *systems of representation* (Hall, 1997), in a sense that they are used to represent ideas, thoughts and concepts. The animal *lion*, for instance, can be represented by the word lion, by an image of a lion, by a video of a lion, by someone impersonating a lion, by the sound of the roar of a lion, or even by a combination of all these different modes together. Ultimately, modes are the 'material stuff' of semiotic resources. As Rowsell and Walsh (2011: 55) observes: "Modes are regularized sets of resources for meaning making. A visual, a sound, a word, a movement, animation, spatial dimensions are

resources brought together or in isolation to achieve an effect in texts. Such effects are read and composed in different ways compared with linguistic text features. Semiotic resources are things, artefacts, practices used during meaning making that complete the task in a competent, apt way".

Just like Information Literacy and its correlated areas, Multimodality has become an important part of Media Literacy due to the technological revolution and the way ICTs have changed how people communicate. As Gunther Kress (2003: 1) observes, it is important now to pay attention to "the broad move from the now centuries-long domination of writing to the new dominance of image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen". In the book writing was by far the main mode of communication, occasionally combined with image, drawings and colours to produce meaning. On the screen, the possibilities for combination are more comprehensive, since it is also possible to include moving-image and sound, for instance. Furthermore, books are organized following the logic of writing, whereas screens are organized following the logic of image. In the book people read words in sequence, so it follows the logic of time and sequence; on the screen, the logic of space prevail as all the information is there to be seen at the same time, so spatial organization is more important than sequence in time (Ibid: 20).

This move from the book to the screen was central to the emergence of Multimodality as an important area of study within Media Literacy. Since digital media allows people to communicate using different modes, it is necessary to understand what are the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to communicate and actively participate in this new media environment. One of the first theoretical approaches to this question is known as *Multiliteracies*, and it was developed in 1994 by ten scholars who formed what was then called the New London Group. These scholars argued that the notion of *design* was fundamental to understanding how people make meaning using new digital media and how on-screen practices have changed the way people communicate (New London Group, 1996). Design here means organizing and giving shape to ideas and thoughts of the designer using the semiotic resources available to them. Instead of simply writing words in a sequence, the screen allows for varied arrangements of modes, which can be designed in various ways. "The notion of 'design' recognises the large

number and proliferation of resources and that meaning-making is about choosing and assembling resources according to individual desire and ideological position as well as perceptions of audience and context" (Archer, 2014: 10).

The idea of design in communication is inseparable from *semiotics,* the study of signs and meaning-making systems. This is because with digital media, people engage in communicative practices whereby they both interpret and create meanings using symbolic representation, and the tools that make this work possible are semiotic tools (Burn and Durran, 2007: 17). In theories of Multimodality, *social semiotics* has been particularly important and has provided the theoretical framework for many concepts and studies in the field, whereby meaning making is seen as a social practice shaped by the social and cultural conditions around it (Halliday, 1985; Kress, 2003). Meaning, in this sense, is not something fixed, but more like a social process whereby the semiotic resources (visual, audio, spatial etc.) are connected to the meaning-making purposes they serve within social, cultural and historical contexts (Halliday, 1985). Therefore, social semiotics serves here as a framework to help scholars create a kind of metalanguage (Unsworth, 2008, Bezemer and Kress, 2016) not only to describe meaning-making resources in terms of its modal structure (the colour red in traffic lights means stop, for instance), but also take into account social aspects that create and give support to those resources.

In terms of Media Literacy Education, this creates a digital media environment whereby it becomes necessary to learn how to analyse the signs and symbols present in different modes of communication, and understand the social contexts around their use in order to make sense of multimodal texts. Images, for instance, represent the world in various ways – they can work as visual narratives or simply as a diagram. They offer the possibility of interaction with the viewer, positioning them in different ways, and they also have a compositional characteristic, indicating which elements are more important in terms of size and position (Kress and van Leeuwen's, 1996, cited in Burn and Durran, 2007). Colours convey meanings through association of ideas, and can even trigger emotional responses in viewers. In many cultures black is associated with death, for instance, and red with love or passion. Sounds also carry information and convey meaning, either in isolation or in combination with other modes (Jekosch, 2005).

All these different modes convey meaning, and they do so in different ways. This is because modes have different *affordances*, that is, different potentials for representation and communication (Kress, 2003). Affordance is a key concept in Multimodality because it shows that each mode represents ideas and conveys meaning in different ways. Some things can be represented and described more clearly through writing, others through image or sound, and so on. If modes have different ways of expressing and representing an idea, concept, or thought, it follows that the combination of different modes produce different results. Taking writing and image as an example, it is not only important to understand how each of them in isolation have different affordances to represent an idea, but also the many ways in which they can be combined to produce meanings within a certain social and cultural context. As Benzemer and Kress (2016: 9-10) put it: "The sign is always shaped by the environment in which it is made, and its place in that environment. To make signs, sign-makers choose from a range of modes that are available in their environment. Each of the modes has distinct and different meaning potentials and therefore potentials for signs with different social effects".

The more recent introduction of theories and practices of ICT in schools have had a useful effect in showing the increasing use of images, moving-image and sound in digital media, raising the awareness of scholars working with digital media about the need to integrate those different modes in a meaningful way (Dalton and Proctor, 2008). Media educators are beginning to ask questions such as: how do we teach students to read the new forms of texts? How do we create multimodal texts designed for educational purposes? How do we support teachers so as they are prepared to teach with, about and through these multimodal texts? How can we design multimodal learning environments where every single semiotic resource at the teacher's disposal is used as an effective meaning-making tool for the creation of knowledge (Bezemer and Kress, 2016)?

Since the 1990's some studies have been carried out to understand how young people engage with multimodal texts. In fields such as ICT in Education, Computer Science and Multimedia, the main concern has been with the modal structure of new texts and how they affect students' comprehension and learning. Plass et al. (1998, cited in Dalton and Proctor, 2008: 310), investigating how students learn a second language, came to the conclusion that "children remember better word

translations" and demonstrate "better vocabulary learning and comprehension when presented both visual and verbal annotations", suggesting the benefits of multimedia texts for learning. Mayer (1997, 2001, cited in Dalton and Proctor, 2008: 314), researching about multimedia practices and how they may improve students' knowledge building, claimed that animation and other multimedia yields very positive learning results, suggesting that meaningful learning takes place when connections are made between writing and image to form an integrated knowledge model. In a different study with young students, Mayer (2008: 360) concluded that participants "perform better on a problem-solving transfer test when they study a scientific explanation consisting of words and pictures (i.e., illustrations and text, or animation and narration) than with words alone". Hull and Nelson (2005, cited in Young, 2008: 335), researching on digital stories in a multimodal project combining image, video, music and voice narration, found that "the meanings produced and the perception of the students involved in the activity via multimodal compositions were unique and different". Gee (2003), researching on video games for education, claimed that the combination of images and texts communicate things that neither of the modes does separately.

In fields with a strong influence of Cultural Studies, New Literacy Studies and Social Semiotics, the researchers have also been concerned with the modal structure of texts, but always taking into consideration the social and cultural practices involved in the production of multimodal texts. Burn and Durran (2007), for instance, have presented an interesting account on how students combine text, image and drawing in comic strip to create stories about superheroes, which is a useful tool to discuss how they represent their own identities. Perry (2010), researching on how film, games and cartoon help develop understanding of narrative, suggests that, for some children, creating stories using a range of modes in different media forms help them to have a better understanding of the narrative compared to when they are telling the same story using only writing, especially if they are given the opportunity to express themselves using their own cultural references. Simpson and Walsh (2017, cited in Burnett and Merchant, 2018: 40-41), researching on children creating a radio program using iPads, explored how the understanding of multimodal design is important not only at the textual level, but also at the *contextual* level. This involves taking into account the space where

the activity is taking place, the cultural and technological resources available, and the interactions between the participants.

All these approaches to Multimodality and Social Semiotics emphasize the importance of understanding all the elements involved in the meaning-making process, and applying this understanding in the context of new digital media. They have many important implications across the media literacy field, particularly in studies seeking to understand how young people communicate through a range of modes in different media platforms, and in the design of learning environments. Students nowadays have access to many different media forms, different modes and different semiotic resources to both interpret and produce content, and this has to be taken into account in the development of learning activities and pedagogies. The approaches discussed in this segment are useful to explore pedagogical practices that use multimodal texts, and also reflect on the role of teacher as a learning facilitator in this new digital environment.

4.4 Discussion

In chapter 3, I discussed the two main traditions in Media Literacy, which I termed Critical Awareness and Creative Participation traditions, and sought to show how they are complementary to each other, equally contributing to a complex and multi-layered field of studies. Following that, New Literacies is not a field of studies that replace or challenge the two traditions; on the contrary, it actually expands their main concepts and ideas to another level, one in which it is necessary to incorporate the internet and the digital world, and the consequences that their emergence have had for media, communications and culture.

New Literacies is about understanding communicational processes connected to social practices in an increasingly mediated world. In the realm of information, this includes learning a set of knowledge and skills and engaging in social practices to deal with information in the digital world, such as the ability to carry out an online research, evaluate and understand news in varied forms, engage in meaningful conversations in social media platforms, and make the most of learning opportunities. It also involves engaging in critical analysis to understand how information and media have been used to represent ideas and sustain discourses,

and reflect on the emancipatory potential of the use of information beyond traditional narratives and models, especially for those in underprivileged situation (Brayton and Casey, 2019; Share and Kellner, 2019). In the realm of language and semiotics, this includes understanding the changing nature of meaning-making practices, and how these practices are connected with our linguistic, social and cultural repertoire. It involves a semiotic approach to texts, whereby writing gives way to the orchestration of different modes of communication (Burnett and Merchant, 2018) and allows for different and new forms of expression.

New Literacies expands traditional ideas of Medial Literacy to encompass new textual practices in screen-based communication, such as photo and video sharing, online gaming, and the use of emoji for communication. In this approach to Media Literacy, scholars enquire about how young people use social media platforms – and are used by them – and the role of technology companies in our society. They also challenge many ideas such as the notion that digital platforms as free spaces for self-expression, claiming that this expression cannot be completely free if it is primarily framed by codes and conventions of media language (Buckingham, 2019: 80) and constrained by algorithms. Ideas around online representation are also discussed to understand how young people make choices about what they want and what they do not want to show about themselves and how this affect both their online and offline behaviours.

In New Literacies, studies of media seem to be increasingly closer to studies of literacy, and one reason for this is that literacy practices have increasingly been influenced and transformed by digital media (Burnett and Merchant, 2018). The move from book to screen, and from linguistics to semiotics (Kress, 2003) have challenged traditional definitions of literacy, and expanded its concept to encompass many emerging practices that involve meaning making in digital spaces. The semiotic environment in which children learn, play and communicate is significantly different from the print-based world that existed before, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to think about literacy and communication in general without taking into account *mediation* through digital devices and platforms. Potter and McDougall (2017: 15), for instance, propose the term 'dynamic literacies' to refer to practices that "stand in contrast to the view of literacy as a static, narrow and autonomous set of codes and conventions". They

analyse different literacies, such as digital literacy, multimodal literacy and media literacy, and ask the question: "are they not in some way *dynamic*? And could we see them as subsets of an overreaching ideological set of 'dynamic literacies' with distinct traditions which, nevertheless, frame a genuine attempt to account for the changes to the ways in which meaning is made in the digital age?" (ibid: 33). This is an insightful approach that touches on the essence of New Literacies as I have explored so far, especially in relation to multimodal communication: new forms of textual practices involving multimodal texts and semiotic resources, combined with sociocultural practices around the use of digital media that value students' lived experiences and cultural references. Furthermore, it suggests that the study of literacy – or literacies – in a mediated world is an interesting way of looking at media literacy itself from a different perspective, and find many similarities between them.

Finally, New Literacies is about significant changes in the educational field. As ICT is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in schools around the world, there will also be an increase in the need for new understandings about how to make the most of these new technologies. This involves not only learning how to technically operate digital devices, which is the realm of ICT in Education, but also how to use them to search for information, communicate and collaborate with peers, and create digital media artifacts using different modes of communication. The following step in educational technology will require an assistance from Multimodality and Semiotics to develop a pedagogical framework for the use of different meaning-making (or semiotic) resources in schools, thus facilitating more efficient teaching, enhanced learning, and informed approaches to assessment (Unsworth, 2008: 398). The role of the teacher is undergoing a fundamental change, from provider of knowledge to designer of learning experiences (Benzemer and Kress, 2016). The educator's task will increasingly be related to designing multimodal learning environments wherein many semiotic resources will be used in order to meet learners needs in terms of engagement, collaboration and interpretation. As Benzemer and Kress (2016: 134) conclude: "The educator will be a designer with great experience, subtle understanding and precise knowledge of semiotic resources, with a principled understanding of the constitution of social environments as learning environments. She/he will be sensitive to the principles of transformative engagement brought by learners, so that with each iteration of newly designed environment, there can be an

increasing approximation of the learner's understanding of the knowledge, apt for approximating and achieving the practices and values of the community of which he/she is becoming a member. The pedagogic change in this is the move away from *transmission* based on the authority of the shaping agent, to *transformative engagement* based on the agency and principles of the learner".

Studies in New Literacies have brought about new concepts and ideas to the Media Literacy field in times when the internet and the new digital media is profoundly transforming the way young people communicate and learn. They bring new theories and practices that complement the more traditional debate between the Critical Awareness and the Creative participation traditions. In the next chapter, I present a media literacy model that aims to summarize the main concepts discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, and also propose a pedagogical structure divided into learning stages. The model will be used as a theoretical framework for the development of the Media Literacy programme, and also for the analysis of the data collected during the research project.

Chapter 5

Media Literacy Model

5.1 Introduction

The understanding of the media literacy field that informs and structures this research project will be presented in this chapter as a Media Literacy Model. This model is grounded in two main pillars that were discussed and analysed in the literature review. The first pillar is the analysis of the two main Media Literacy traditions, which I called the Critical Awareness (CA) and the Creative Practices (CP) traditions. The main point here is to understand how the two traditions can be combined to produce a single body of media literacy concepts and practices to help young people become media literate. Second, the body of research related to Media Literacy that has been put together after the emergence of the internet and new digital media, called New Literacies. This area is concerned with the knowledge, skills and practices involved in the use of digital media for the acquisition of knowledge, understanding of information and use of screen-based communication, such as the ability to make informed choices based on the information users consume online, and use multimodal communication for self-expression and learning.

There is a very interesting dynamic between the many theories and concepts involved in these Media Literacy traditions, and my aim in this chapter is to organize this body of work in a rational and structured learning framework for media education.

5.2 Media Literacy Model

The aim of this model is to provide a summary of the main concepts and theories discussed in this project in a more structured way. It will be used, during my field work, to visualize these concepts and theories when I am investigating how learning

practices using digital technologies in schools can promote media literacy for students. Drawing on the analysis of the literature that I presented in the previous chapters and adding my own perspective to it, I have designed a theoretical model of Media Literacy that takes into consideration different knowledge, skills and practices that are expected to promote media literacy in young people. This model is the fundamental version of my theoretical understanding of the field, and it will be used as a framework to guide my research and data analysis.

The model is structured in 'stages' to facilitate the presentation of different media literacy knowledge and skills that, according my analysis of the literature, are important for young people to become media literate. I understand that the first 5 stages contain the basic media literacy knowledge and skills, without which it becomes very difficult to achieve the three Social Functions in stage 6. However, that does not mean that the learning process in media literacy will or should necessarily take place in the sequence presented here, one after the other with clear boundaries between them. Those stages are all interconnected, and it is important to take this into consideration.

The image below shows the Media Literacy model and its different learning stages. Each of these stages will be discussed in the next segments.
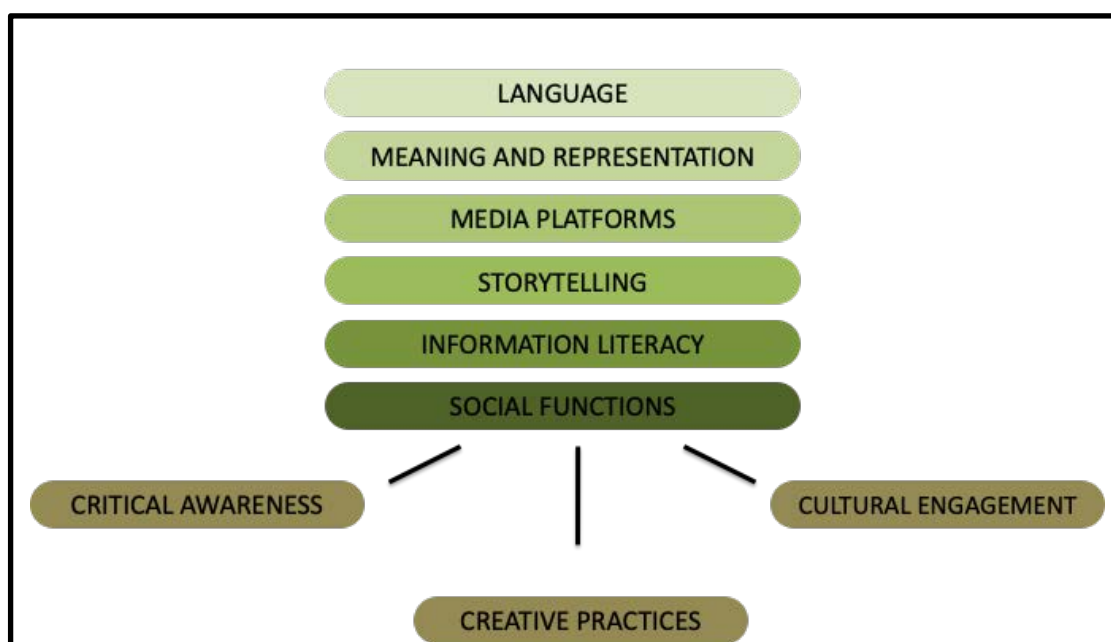
Figure 5.1 – Media Literacy Model

5.2.1 LANGUAGE

It has been argued that one of the features that mostly clearly separates us from other animals is our ability to create a symbolic world and represent it through language (Harari, 2015). Following this idea, it would not even be possible to conceive a human culture without language, because a cultural environment as complex as ours could not have developed without social learning, and social learning depends on a 'vehicle' to transport meaning across the members of a group, and this vehicle is what we call language (Pagel, 2012). Some authors go even beyond, suggesting that consciousness would not have emerged in human minds if languages had not evolved, because they are crucial for the development of autobiographical memory – a kind of narrative of people's lives, which is present in human minds and forms the basis for consciousness (Damasio, 2010).

There have been debates where authors from multiple fields have enquired whether languages are merely tools for expressing our thoughts, or they actually shape our thoughts and perceptions. Some authors such as Jean Piaget (1923/2002) and Steven Pinker (2002) have argued that thoughts come before language, because in their view the formation of thoughts is a process involving an organization of sensory motor schemes to create abstract concepts in our minds that are not dependent on language structures. Others, like Vygotsky (1986), argue that thought and language are interdependent processes. For him, thoughts are a kind of internalized language, so in this case language would have a strong influence on how we think, and on the development of our imagination. In the same way, according to Ferdinand de Saussure (quoted in Storey, 2012: 115) "the language we speak certainly does not simply reflect the material reality of the world; rather, by providing a conceptual map with which to impose a certain order on what we see and experience, the language we speak plays a significant role in shaping what constitutes the reality of the material world".

Boroditsky (2009: para. 28) has conducted a series of researches suggesting that language is not only central to our experience of being human, but also that "the languages we speak profoundly shape the way we think, the way we see the world, the way we live our lives". According to her studies, speakers of different languages create different conceptual maps of the world according to the language

they speak. Some studies, for instance, show that English and Mandarin speakers have a different notion of time because of the differences in the structure of the languages they speak (Lai and Boroditsky, 2013). Other studies, like the one about the Guugu Yimithirr people in Australia, show that the fact that their language lacks words for relative space, such as left and right, and instead have only words for the 4 cardinal directions, make them very good at keeping track of where they are, even in places where they have never been to. There is also evidence that languages influence our perceptions and the way we think about others, shaping our brains and our personality (Scudellari, 2016). Commenting on the nature of consciousness, Vygotsky (1986: 150) argued that "thought and language, which reflect reality in a way different from that of perception, are the key to the nature of human consciousness. Words play a central part not only in the development of thought but in the historical growth of consciousness as a whole. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness". Drawing on the same idea from Vygotsky, Bruner (cited in Lupart, 1991: 178) also recognized "the importance of language for the transmission of new forms of consciousness across generations and circumstances", giving support to the idea that the exposure to new and diverse forms of language, especially in a collective context, alters the way the mind works.

Even though there is still a strong debate around this subject, for the purpose of this project I will argue that language organizes and shapes our sense of reality, and the way we access, interact and understand the world around us is totally dependent on the language(s) we speak. Different languages produce different 'mappings' of our reality and provide us with different ways of accessing and understanding the world around us. For this reason, *language* is the first foundational pillar of media literacy, because one cannot fully make sense of mediated communication without understanding how language structures and shapes the way we interpret the world and express ourselves. The first stage to becoming media literate is to understand that languages are vehicles for creating and conveying meaning, and different languages will do so in different ways.

5.2.2 MEANING AND REPRESENTATION

The way we access, interpret and understand the world around us depends on our ability to *read* this world through our senses. It depends on our awareness of all the

different symbols, colours, shapes, sounds and movements that compose our reality and how they convey meaning in different ways. For Media Literacy, this means to understand how these meanings are produced and conveyed. According to Stuart Hall (1997: 1), "language is the privileged medium in which we make sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged". The term 'language' here is used in a broad and inclusive way, not only in terms of the written and the spoken systems, but also other forms of language, such as images, music, clothes, gestures etc. That is, the term is used to refer to anything that can create and convey meaning in some way. In fact, the word *language* here will be replaced by *semiotic resource* (Kress, 2003: 2), which works as a *system of representation* (Hall, 1997: 3), designating a word, an object, a sign or a practice that is used to stand for or *represent* a concept, a thought or a feeling. In this sense, meaning is produced and conveyed through *symbolic representation*, which is how semiotic resources operate. Ultimately, what we experience as reality is this network of meanings and symbolic representations (Lacan, 1989).

According to this view, things in themselves do not have any meaning outside of the realm of representation (Hall, 1997: 5). A chair only becomes a chair once we recognize it as such and share the same meaning of the chair, otherwise it would be just an object shaped in a certain way for a certain purpose. It is necessary to think about the world as a web of interrelated meanings (Heidegger, cited in Weiberger, 2016), and understand meaning as something that is both socially constructed (Hodge and Kress, 1988) and dialogical (Bakhtin, 1982), rather than something fixed that is simply found out there. Once this is acknowledged, it becomes easier to understand how we give meaning to people, objects and practices through semiotic resources, and how they operate as systems of representation.

In this model, semiotic resources are understood to be shaped by social and cultural factors (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Therefore, meaning is understood not as something fixed and stable, but more like a process that is totally dependent on social and cultural contexts (Bakhtin, cited in Lewis, 2016; Benzemer and Kress, 2016). This makes it easier to understand that the media construct their messages through different forms of representation; meaning, instead of being fixed, is always negotiated between the parts involved in the communicational process (Aufderheide, 1997: 80). Hence, after understanding how languages shape our understanding of the world working as vehicles to convey meaning, the second

stage to become media literate is to expand this understanding of how languages work to encompass semiotics – and social semiotics – which is the field that study meaning-making resources and how signs and symbols are used to create and communicate meanings.

5.2.3 MEDIA PLATFORMS

Following McLuhan (1995), this model assumes that media platforms are like languages, with their own particular structure, vocabulary and grammar, allowing us to see and experience the world in different ways. For this reason, we must be concerned not only with the content of the messages, but also with how each medium creates different perceptions of reality. This has to do, first, with the fact that digital media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, are not simply media for delivery of content; they are cultural forms that shape that content and offer means of cultural and social representation (Buckingham, 2019: 14). It also has to do with media *affordances* discussed in chapter 4; that is, the different potentials of each mode and each medium for meaning making. This is based on the multiliteracy perspective (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) and on Multimodality theory (Kress, 2003) that emerged in response to the challenges of the new multimodal forms of digital media. Meaning has increasingly been made with the combination of different modes – text, image, sounds etc. – and this requires people to understand the different characteristics of each mode, and also understand how these modes can be combined to produce different meanings. With the advent of digital media, screens are increasingly replacing prints, and this has a significant impact on the way meaning is being produced and exchanged, as the screen provides completely different possibilities of arrangements compared to the print media (ibid, 2003).

Websites are a good example of this. On the same page, one can find text, image, moving image, colour, sound, drawings, and flashing lights. All these different modes are there for a reason, they mean something, and they are combined in a certain way for a specific purpose. It is no longer possible to rely on the traditional ability to read printed texts in order to fully understand what is going on in there. It is now necessary much more understanding about visual elements, movements and sounds to 'read' the screen. The third stage of becoming media literate is to understand that every single medium has different characteristics and affordances,

different ways of delivering information and engaging users, and for this reason it is important to understand the underlying structure of each medium and learn how to navigate through different combinations and arrangements of modes of communication in different digital platforms.

5.2.4 STORYTELLING

Human culture is made of stories. As far as we are concerned, we are the only animal capable of creating a symbolic world. This symbolic world, or world of ideas, is detached from nature in a sense that it is not necessarily linked to natural features, and consists of fictional stories created by us through the work of imagination. These stories help our species to coexist as human society, giving meaning to our actions and organizing our daily lives (Pagel, 2012). We may take the idea of justice, for example. Justice does not exist in nature; we create stories and *narratives* about what we believe to be fair and just in our society and spread them around so that everyone can believe in the same principles and live in harmony. This is validated by the fact that what was believed to be fair and just a few centuries ago is not the same as we understand now, and it will probably change again over the next centuries. I do not want to propose here that nature is not important or that absolutely everything is socially or culturally constructed. My point, following the argument of an *imagined order* developed by Professor Yurval Harari (2012), is that our natural condition as animals has gradually been supplanted by cultural features that belong to the symbolic world, and those 'constructed ideas' that make up our reality are transmitted from people to people through stories. We tell stories about everything: the policies that organize our societies; the social and cultural practices that shape our world view and affect the way we behave; the faiths that govern our beliefs; the concepts, theories and values that determine our way of life; and so on.

Analysing how stories shape our lives, Doecke and Parr (2009: 66) claimed that "narratives in all their diversity and multiplicity make up the fabric of our lives; they are constitutive moments in the formation of our identities and our sense of community affiliation". Through stories, we continually construct and reconstruct ourselves; ultimately, we are the stories we create (Bruner, 1991). Those stories, however, are not fixed or static; they are actually more like a fluid process, always

in transformation. They can be thought as forms of *discourses* in a Foucauldian sense, as they are dependent on people to give them meaning and purpose, and they are also connected with social manifestations and questions of power through language and practices (Foucault quoted in Rabinow, 1991). In this human symbolic world, stories are constructed and shaped by culture; they only make sense in relation to a particular social group, a particular place and a particular historical time.

The key ideas here are relativity, context and construction. In this human world of stories, we are at the same time audience and producers of these stories. For Media Literacy, this means understanding how stories are created and transmitted through mediated communication. In order to become media literate, we need to understand the nature of these stories, how they are created, their social and historical contexts, their narratives, the interests behind them, their relativity in relation to other stories, and how they are constructed. Besides, it is important not only to learn how to understand those stories through interpretation and contextualization, but also learn how to create, manipulate and communicate them, because we are also active participants creating and manipulating information and delivering them to people all the time through some sort of mediated communication.

5.2.5 INFORMATION LITERACY

With the rise of mass media throughout the 20th century and the following emergence of the internet and digital media technologies in the beginning of the 21st century, the barriers to the access of information have been substantially reduced. With personal devices connected to the World Wide Web, people have access to more information than never before. On the one hand, this means that now the access to information is becoming more democratic. Even though there is still a significant gap between those who have and those who do not have access to digital devices and the internet, the number of people participating in the digital culture increases day by day (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). On the other hand, people are struggling to keep up with all this information coming from all directions in various formats. Big technology and media companies are aggressively competing for people's attention, and this has changed not only the way massages are delivered, but also the qualitative nature of its content. In 2004 Potter (2004: 19-

20) argued that when exposed to large amount of information, we tend to protect ourselves by following "the default model of information processing where our minds are on automatic pilot", filtering only the information that we consider to have some value for us and avoiding all the rest. The problem is that, in this state of atomicity, we also become much more open and at risk of allowing the media to condition us with their content, since we are not fully aware of how these messages have been constructed. This argument was put together sixteen years ago, when social media, search engines and streaming services where just at their early stages of development, so we can assume that this situation has only become more dramatic in 2020.

Another aspect of this new information age has to do with how young people make use of the internet as an information resource, and what are the new knowledge and skills necessary for them to make the most of this experience. This is the realm of Information Literacy, a field of studies discussed in Chapter 4 that is concerned with how people engage with information they encounter; how they make sense of this information and transform it into knowledge; and how they are affected by their information consumption habits (Livingstone et al, 2008; Wilson et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2011). Information literacy has increasingly been part of Media Literacy studies (Leaning, 2014; Brayton and Casey, 2019) and it is an essential set of knowledge, skills and practices to have a healthier, safer and more productive digital experience, and also to create the foundations for the understanding of more complex issues related to media studies, such as the constructedness of media messages and the problems associated with the spread of disinformation.

Therefore, to become media literate it is important to be aware, first, of how media messages are processed by our cognitive abilities, so that we can have a more critical relationship with the massive flow of information that we encounter in everyday life. Second, it is important to understand what are the best practices involved in searching, accessing, filtering, storing, manipulating and interpreting the flood of information that we receive from various different forms of media.

5.2.6 SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

The five initial stages of the model comprise what I regard as the basic knowledge necessary to understand how meaning is create and communicated in the symbolic world through mediated communication. This knowledge is expected to lead to higher functions of skills and practices with mediated communication, which I termed 'social functions'. Social functions are the expected outcomes of media education in terms of critical thinking, creativity, cultural engagement and transformative practices.

5.2.6.1 *Critical awareness*

Critical Awareness means, first, the acknowledgement that the media industry can have negative impact on individuals and society. It involves the ability to critically evaluate any form of media content in order to make informed choices, fully understanding how media messages may affect people's lives. It also involves understanding that in capitalist societies, where profit is the engine of every industry, the media industry creates representations of the reality, very often through standardization and stereotyping, that are mostly organized for easy consumption, which can limit individual consciousness and their capacity to have meaningful experiences (Adorno, 1979). The media industry also has the power to frame issues, select information and bound debates according to their own interest and the interest of privileged groups who support them (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 298). It can promote certain ways of thinking, behaving and speaking (Foucault, cited in Rabinow, 1991), which may lead to the illusion that there is only one way of thinking and behaving (Marcuse, 1961), restricting people's access to a more comprehensive experience of their social and cultural environment.

Young people are not passive consumers of media; there is always a negotiation between the media influence and students' own interests and tastes (Buckingham, 2003). However, we can think of 'levels of passivity', in a sense that the more students understand how the media operates, the better they will be prepared to become less passive – and more active – consumers of media texts. Critical awareness involves what Paulo Freire (1972) called *conscientização*, that is, a profound and radical awareness of their place in the world to fight oppression and promote revolutionary change in the society. For media education, this means that students must fight for their right to have a voice in the classroom, contesting ideological manipulation and submission to authoritative pedagogical practices that

produce conformity and normalization. Students should be empowered to use media technologies for their own benefit and the benefit of their communities (Freire, 2002; Soares, 2011), promoting opportunities for self-expression, participatory democracy and social activism (Kellner and Share, 2019).

Critical awareness means looking at media messages from many different perspectives, asking questions about how a topic is being portrayed or represented, examining the role of technology, challenging the neutrality of its content, assessing sources of information, scrutinizing cultural and social constructs of meaning, and reflecting on how media texts shape patterns of thought and behaviour in issues involving, class, gender, race and sexuality.

5.2.6.2 *Cultural engagement*

Media Literacy is fundamentally about young people's everyday cultural practices in which they participate (Luke, 1998; Buckingham, 2003, Burn and Durran, 2007; Sayad, 2011; Soares, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 3, since the late 1980's there has been a movement in Media Literacy Education that acknowledges the importance of taking students' different tastes and pleasures derived from popular culture into account and promoting the appreciation of popular forms of cultural expressions. Following Paulo Freire (1972) and Raymond Williams (1989) take on culture, this means to see popular culture as an essential part of the learner's experience, without which no learning practice can be complete. According to Freire (1998), the learning practice starts with the experience that students bring to the classroom based on their cultural references and everyday social practices, a position also shared by Vygotsky (1986), who claimed that the learning process is totally dependent on the learners' cultural background and cannot be disconnected from it. This approach leads to a better relationship between teachers and learners, promoting engagement, awareness of their place in the world, and creative practices in the classroom. In terms of communication, the use of semiotic resources is also largely dependent on people's cultural repertoire (Barthes, 1993), and media content is interpreted based on the audience's cultural references (Fiske, 1989).

In Media Literacy Education, there is a wide range of cultural topics that can be explored, such as representation, identity, ideology, gender, race, sexuality and the

arts. Teaching and learning practices involving the use of media in the classroom can help students to be aware of how the culture in which they are immersed shapes their experience in society. Students can challenge and question issues related to politics of power and knowledge, and discuss how cultural narratives impose certain ways of thinking (Kellner, 1995). They can also articulate meanings through alternative interpretations whereby they appropriate cultural forms in the mass media and turn them into new stories, taking control of them and giving them a new meaning (Burn and Durran, 2007).

In this context, media literacy is important for creating a space where students' cultural references are a crucial part of the learning process, and also for promoting debates around the varies forms of cultural expression. In this space, both high and popular culture can coexist and be part of a more holistic learning experience whereby cultural forms represented in the media are at the same time celebrated and scrutinized.

5.2.6.3 *Creative and Transformative Practices*

Young people have long ceased to be only consumers of media content to become producers, thanks to the emergence of the internet and the increasingly easier access to digital media technologies. This promotes a more participatory culture whereby creative and transformative practices are taking place in different places and contexts. Children at home are experiencing family social practices using a variety of digital devices for entertainment, learning, communication, cultural exchange and more, and they bring these digital experiences to the school's environment (Marsh, 2006; Livingstone, 2019). These children are part of a digital movement that, in some way, is creating a new global media environment that is being shaped not only by big technology corporations, but also by the more participatory action of young users who want to have an active role in the way the media – especially the new media – is being shaped and controlled (Jenkins, 2006).

The term that underpins the rationale for creative and transformative practices is production, which should be an essential part of Media Literacy Education. Practical activities involving the use of media offer a very engaging, creative and effective way of learning (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007; Potter and McDougall, 2017). These practices may include the production of blogs,

magazines, films, videogames, music, comic strips and digital animation where young people can remake media texts or create new ones, developing in the process many technical abilities as well as working through concepts of representation, identity, power and other topics related to media and cultural studies. Besides, digital media practices allow people to "have a better understanding about media technologies, the grammars they use and the contexts in which they are deployed" (Burn and Durran, 2006: 275), which can impact how young people understand the world and how their reality is represented.

In terms of creativity, imagination is a central component of media production. Actually, of any creative production. It involves learning and exploring different possibilities of expression, using the cultural and social repertoire to connect ideas and "bring to mind things that are not present to our senses" (Robinson, 1999: 141), producing something that has meaning and value within a certain context. Imagination is a mental practice that has a lot to do with young people's universe, especially when it comes to play. Vygotsky (1978) explored how play is important for the development of children's imagination and creativity. According to him, creativity involves working with the symbolic constructions that children make of the reality around them, creating scenarios, characters and objects that only exist in their minds, especially when they are playing. A piece of cardboard can become a car, and a wooden stick can become a gun, for instance. This symbolic substitution is a work of imagination, which is central to the development of creativity. In digital media, children also work with these symbolic representations when they are creating a movie, designing a webpage or producing a digital animation. They use the semiotic resources available in the digital media to represent ideas, and by playing with these tools they can put their imaginative thoughts to work, testing different forms of representation and producing new and distinctive ways of seeing their own reality (Burn and Durran, 2007: 61).

Creative practices with digital media may have transformative impact on the way young people express themselves and act upon the world (Soares, 2011). Creative media practices combined with critical thinking can be used for social activism (Kellner and Share, 2019), which is something that has become increasingly popular in social media platforms. Creativity has a transformative dimension in a sense that it enables individuals to escape standardization and normalization to embrace new and unique ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings. In the

digital world, with many different modes of communication available, young people can use their creativity to experience different forms of representing their reality and find their own voice.

5.3 Conclusion

This media literacy model presents a set of concepts and ideas structured in different learning stages. The sequence of the stages attempts to show a learning process that moves from more basic understandings of communication and meaning making practices to more complex ones. From the understanding of how meaning is created and conveyed through systems of representation, to the functionalities of different media and the complexities of stories that make up our symbolic world, it attempts to cover the most fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to understand how mediated communication works both in theory and in practice. In the social functions, it proposes the use this basic set of knowledge and skills to explore the many possibilities that media education offers in terms of critical skills, cultural engagement and creative practices.

The objective is to make sense of the multiple theories and perspectives of media literacy discussed in the literature review and organize this array of ideas in a way that is intelligible from a pedagogical point of view. The model was used as a theoretical framework to inform the learning process involved in the media literacy programme applied to participants of the research. It was also used as a conceptual guide for the analysis of the data collected during the field work.

Chapter 6

Media Literacy Programme

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the media literacy programme that I designed to be used in this research project. First, the reader is introduced to a brief description of the main references that have influenced the educational approach of the programme. Next, the pedagogic model based on the Bridge21 approach to teaching and learning is explained. Finally, the five workshops are presented and described in detail.

6.2 Main educational references

The pedagogical approach of this Media Literacy Programme is inspired by the Educommunication movement that emerged in Latin America in the early 1990's. According to the movement, education and communication are two utterly connected fields and, for this reason, it is not be possible to think about educational theories and practices without taking communication and media into consideration (Soares, 2011). The term educommunication, or educomunicación (in Spanish), or educomunicação (in Portuguese), an acronym made up from the words *education* and *communication*, has always been closely related to media literacy or media education, designating communication and media practices in education that have an impact on the formation of children and teenagers. In Latin America, Jesús Martín-Barbero, one of the main figures in the field, defined Educommunication as "an educational process that allows students to take ownership of the media in a creative way, integrating their voice with the communicative ecosystem within the school and ultimately improving the management of the school environment with their participation" (Volpi and Palazzo, 2010: 7). It proposes a pedagogy that goes beyond the technical understanding of the media to embrace communication as a fundamental pedagogical component of the educational process as a whole (Kaplun, 1999).

Educommunication theory aligns with Paulo Freire's dialogical, constructivist and progressive way of understanding how education works in practice, promoting a more horizontal relationship between teachers and students where everyone has a voice and every participant is an active and co-responsible agent in the learning process (Soares, 2011). According to Freire, dialogue is a vital element of education. As he put it: "Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (Freire, 1972: 62). The expression 'name the world' here is understood as a way of changing, transforming the world. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972), Freire claimed that dialogue was an act of mutual learning and collaboration that promote in students a critical understanding of the contradictions and inconsistencies of their reality and help them take action and change this reality. In this sense, Freire's idea of *praxis*, that is, reflection followed by action, is a central point in educommunicative practices.

The inspiration from Educommunication to design this Media Literacy Programme comes from its origins associated with a tradition of social movements across Latin America, popular education, and a struggle for class emancipation and freedom of expression. It comes from its radical approach to change education through communication and media practices in order to give voice to young people who may have never had a chance to express themselves and be heard. It comes from the idea that practices involving dialogue, collaboration and young people's participation can increase opportunities for expression in every part of the educational process and transform the learning experience.

As an educator, I have been influenced by Dewey's (1938) progressive and transformative approach to education, emphasizing the development of the human potential through exploration and experimentation, always in connection with the environment. I used Paulo Freire's ideas on critical pedagogy to create a learning experience where students' knowledge, values and cultural references are always taken into consideration, using a problem-posing pedagogy that emphasizes a dialogical relationship between students and teachers.

The Media Literacy programme follows a social constructivist approach to learning, putting students in the centre of the educational process whilst bringing attention to the collaborative nature of learning within specific cultural and social contexts. It

follows Jerome Bruner's (1960) idea that the teacher should not be simply delivering content, but instead facilitating the learning process together with students, with emphasis on the social nature of learning. In Lev Vygotsky's (1986) work, it finds the theoretical rationale for the playful and fun nature of the learning activities, helping children to use their imagination to understand how symbolic representations work and create meanings.

Finally, the pedagogical framework of this media literacy programme owes a great deal to the years of experience that I have had with the Bridge21 educational model in Trinity College Dublin. The format of all workshops has been designed following its activity model, which will be explained in the next segment.

6.3 The pedagogical model

Bridge21 is an educational programme based in Trinity College Dublin that offers a project-based, technology-mediated and cross-curricular model for teaching and learning. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I have been involved with Bridge21 since November 2013, and the media literacy programme designed for this research has used its pedagogical model as a reference.

The Bridge21 pedagogic model (Bridge21, 2016) follows Seymour Papert's vision that production and hands-on practices are key for activities involving technology in the classroom to engage students in a more effective way. His constructionism theory is an important reference for the enquiry-based learning involving real situations where students learn by making. According to the Bridge21 model, the learning space should be organized in a way where students, always working in teams to foster collaboration and peer learning, could freely move and interact with each other, supporting the collaborative nature of education. This space should be a technology-mediated environment where teachers would act as facilitators of learning, helping students to achieve their goals.

Bridge21 inquiry-based learning rationale proposes that the learning activity begins with a question or problem, and solving/understanding/discussing this question or problem becomes the project of the day. Students are prompted to think about many different solutions for the problem (divergent thinking), investigate and research the topic being discussed, and then come up with a plan to resolve it (convergent thinking). The next step is the practical hands-on activity with the use of the technology available, which can be the production of a movie, a news programme, an animation or a podcast. The last stage involves the presentation of the project to the whole class and reflection on the activity of the day.
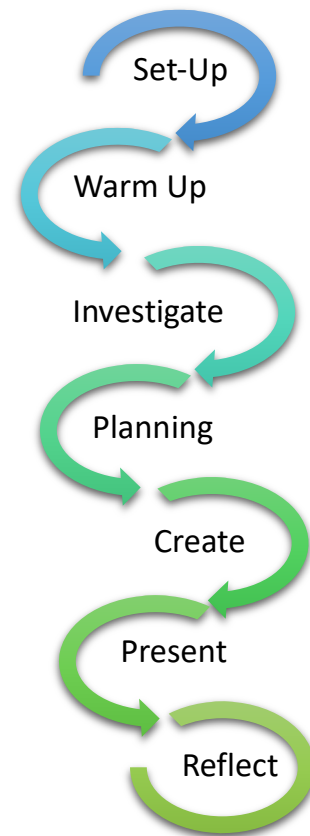
Figure 6.1 - Bridge21 activity model (Bridge21, 2016)

The media literacy programme was designed having this pedagogic approach as a model. The learning space in the three participating schools was organized so that students could work in groups and walk freely around the class. I took the role of a facilitator, guiding students throughout the learning activity so that they could complete their tasks. Every workshop had a topic of the day, and students had to discuss ideas around this topic, research information about it, plan their project of the day – which always involved the production of a digital media artefact –, present the results to the class and reflect on the experience.

In the next segment, the five workshops of the media literacy programme are outlined in detail. The teaching plans used by the researcher to deliver the workshops served as a reference for the way the workshops are explained here, so that the reader can follow step-by-step how each session unfolded.

6.4 The media literacy workshops

Based on the Bridge21 approach, and also on the idea that media literacy education can be taught across the curriculum as an element of many different subjects, and not as a separate topic (Buckingham, 2003: 89), the media literacy programme was conceived so as to address topics that could be explored in other curriculum subjects, such as English, History, Geography and Sciences. In relation to the media literacy topics specifically, the media literacy model discussed in chapter 5 provided the conceptual framework for the development of the content for each workshop, and the programme addressed themes related to journalism, photography, film studies, semiotics, advertising and information literacy.

In terms of resources, students had access to iPads provided by the researcher (two iPads per group of 3 or 4 students), and the schools were responsible for providing the learning space, wi-fi connection and a projector (more information about the learning experience in each school is provided in chapter 8).

6.4.1 DAY 1 – 'TESTING WORKSHOP'

The objective of the first activity is to introduce the program to students and evaluate how they will carry out their task using digital media with very little guidance. This will enable the researcher to see how they work in groups, share responsibilities, plan the activity, research the topic and create the digital artefact on their own.

Introduction

Students are introduced to the activity of the day. The facilitator explains that they will first answer a questionnaire about media and communication studies. They have 15 minutes for this task. Next, students are introduced to the media program and the 5 workshops that they will attend, each of them covering a different topic.

The facilitator selects students to form groups of 3 to 4 participants. Students choose a team leader, and teacher explains the role of the team leader to the group.

Brainstorm and Discussion

Students are asked to brainstorm ideas that come to their minds when they think

about the word "media" – literally anything that comes to their minds. After that, teacher asks each group to say some of these ideas, and they are written down on a white board. Each group then is asked to pick one word (which could be a concept, an idea, a media company, a media topic etc.) and create a digital media artefact about that word. Teacher assigns each group with the task of producing one of the following artefacts: Digital Magazine (using Book Creator), Photo Story (using Pixlr) or Movie (using iMovie).
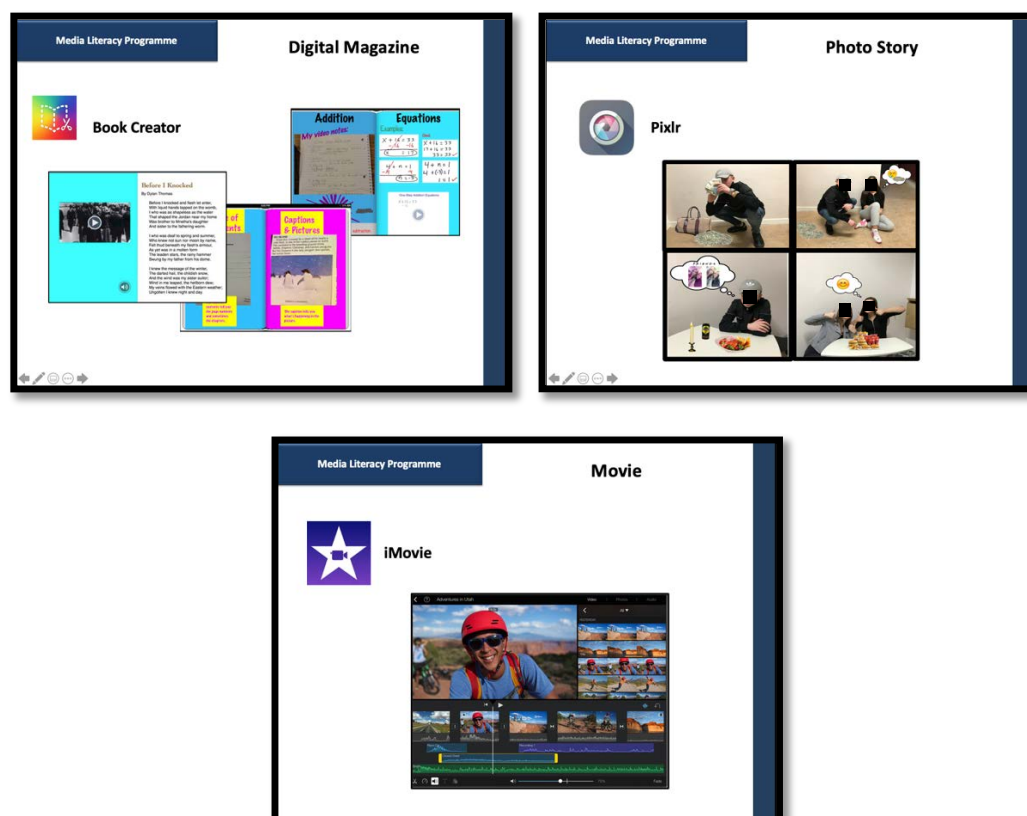
Figure 6.2 – Slides showing the three application that were going to be used throughout the media literacy programme.

Practical Activity

Students do some research about the topic they have chosen and plan the artefact that they will create. They are told that they should explore the apps features and learn for themselves how to use the apps, but they could also go online and search for tutorials.

The role of the facilitator in this activity is to assist student if they need any help or they are struggling to carry out the task, but the main idea is that the facilitator

distance himself from the students and mainly observe them working.

Students create a digital artifact based on the theme they chose and the media they were assigned to. After that, they present the artefact to the class. The facilitator asks some questions during the presentation in order to promote reflection about the activity as a whole.

Focus group

After the activity, one student from each group participates in a focus group discussion.

6.4.2 DAY 2 – DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Learning outcomes

On completion of this learning activity it is expected that students will be able to:

- identify the many different forms of languages and modes of communication involved in human communication;
- understand how languages create meaning through representation;
- apply different semiotic resources and modes of communication to convey information;
- create a digital magazine.

Introduction

Students are divided into groups of 3 or 4. Each group has to choose a name and a team leader, who will be responsible for liaising with the facilitator and members of other groups during practical activities.

Info Literacy Tip

The facilitator asks students to discuss in their groups the sentence "reporters should always deliver the best obtainable version of truth", quoted by the journalist Carl Bernstein. As a guideline for the discussion, students are provoked into thinking about the main differences between information and knowledge. There are actually

many different ways of describing and comparing those two concepts, even in mathematical terms, and this should be mentioned to students to avoid any future misunderstanding. However, here what we want is simply to instigate students to think about the difference between the information that they encounter every day, especially on the internet, and the actual interpretation, understanding and use of that information, which could be described as knowledge. After they come up with some ideas the facilitator presents some examples, such as:

- A word in Japanese is information, but if you do not know the language you will not be able to understand it;
- A skull drawn on a bottle is information, but if you don't know the meaning of that you might drink the liquid and have problems.
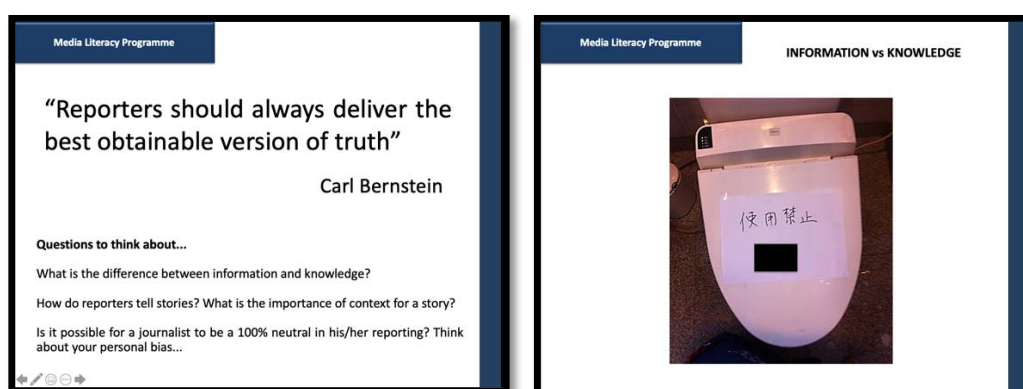
Figure 6.3 – Slides used to discuss the difference between information and knowledge.

After a quick discussion, the facilitator asks students: What is the primary goal of the news media? To provide information or knowledge?

The idea is for students to realize that the news media provides us with information, and it is our job to filter, interpret, understand, and critically analyze that information so that we can make sense of the news.

Brainstorm and discussion

Students are asked to come up with as many ideas as possible about the organization of a welcome party for refugees that are moving to Ireland. The main goal of the party, apart from giving them a very warm welcome, is to show the refugees many

aspects of Irish culture and convince them that it is a great country to live in. As only few refugees speak English, students must limit their use of written and spoken language in order to present their ideas.

The facilitator walks around the class instigating students into thinking about many different forms of expression. Responses are put up on the screen divided by types of language: written, spoken, body language, symbolic language, photography, film, music etc. However, this is not explicit to students. They see the different responses divided into many groups, but they do not know that those groups represent different categories of language.

Discussion

Students are asked about the differences between those forms of communicating their message. The idea is to help them conclude that every time we want to communicate something, we need a 'vehicle' to transport information from one place to the other, and this vehicle is language. The facilitator will then ask students about forms of language they already know, and he should expect them to mention the 3 most popular ones: written, spoken and body languages.

Semiotics and Multimodality

The facilitator provokes students into thinking about other forms of language, asking them to explain how we can create and communicate meaning. Using the many groups of languages that were put up on the screen, the facilitator asks a few questions such as: Why is photography a form of language? Does music convey information? Do colours have meaning? The idea is to help students conclude that when we need to communicate something – an idea, a concept, a thought etc. – we need some element to stand for or REPRESENT what we want to say. This element can be words in the case of written and spoken languages; physical gesture in case of body languages; and many other things, such as image in the case of photography, sound in the case of music and so on. The goal of this part of the class is to help students understand that there are various ways of communicating meaning, and that all these ways can be said to be languages or, at least, to 'work as languages'.
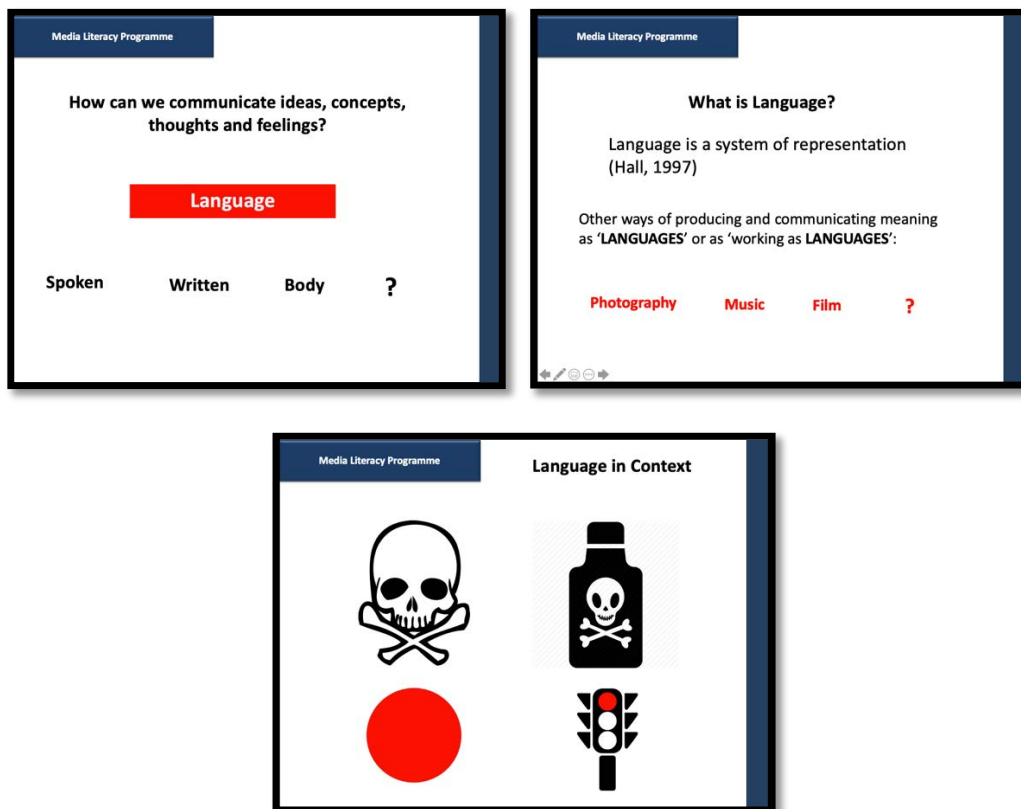
Figure 6.4 – Slides used to explain the many different forms of language.

The next step is to use this idea of language to introduce the concepts of semiotic resource and modes of communication.
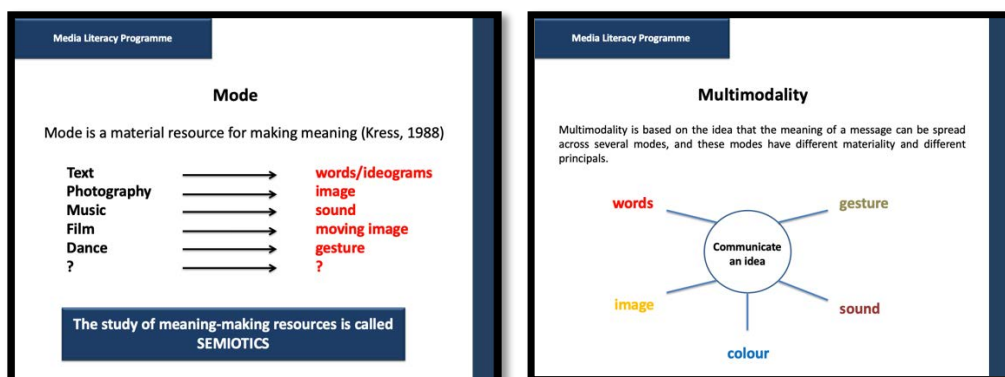
Figure 6.5 – Slides used to introduce the concepts of semiotics resource and modes of communication.

Students are then shown a picture of a webpage and asked to tell all the different forms of languages – or modes – that they can see on the screen. At this stage they will be able to easily recognize text, photos, videos, colours, graphics, drawings and so on, and understand that all those different modes of express some form of meaning.
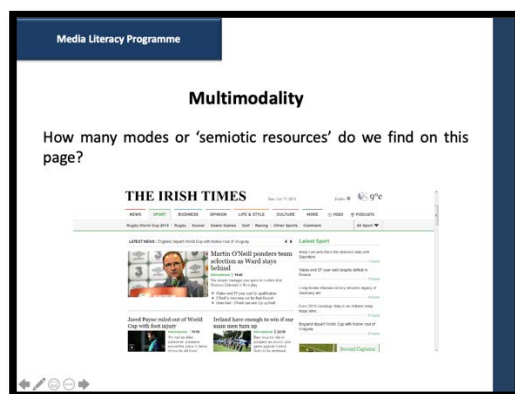
Figure 6.6 – Slide used to show a website with different modes of communication.

Practical activity

Students are told that the topic of the day will be 'Refugee Crisis' (History, Geography). The task is to create a digital magazine using Book Creator. Each group has to create a kind of 'online magazine' using as many modes of communication as possible. The activity starts with a group discussion about the task followed by online research on the theme. Each group has two iPads at their disposal. The facilitator gives a brief introduction about how to use Book Creator and will be available to help students in case they need some technical assistance.
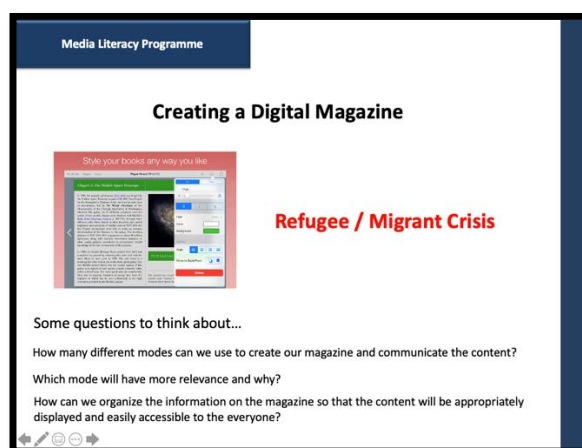
Figure 6.7 – Slide used to explain the activity of the day.

During the activity, the researcher facilitates discussion suggesting students to think about historical reasons, geographic issues, the politics involved, media repercussion and effects etc. The facilitator also asks students to take notes of their sources of information.

Presentation and reflection

Students present their work describing how they carried out their research and explaining their choices in terms of the modes they used to convey information. It is important to instigate students into thinking about why they chose certain languages in detriment of others, how they organized the information on the screen and if they managed to communicate their ideas appropriately.

Focus group

After the activity, one student from each group will participate in a focus group discussion.

6.4.3 DAY 3 – PHOTO STORY

Learning outcomes

On completion of this learning activity it is expected that students will be able to:

- understand photographic terms such as *cropping, composition, and manipulation*;
- discuss the differences between the real and the representation of the real;
- understand how photography can be useful to create meaning and express ideas;
- reflect on the uses of photos by people and by the media;
- understand that photographs can be easily manipulated and convey false information;
- create stories using an editing software.

Info Literacy Tip – the world of information

The facilitator starts a discussion about the difference between 'controversial information', 'false information' and 'bullshit' (the latter inspired by Harry Frankfurt's book *On Bullshit,* 2005). The facilitator shows a few examples of news that are controversial or fake, involving topics such as climate change, US election

and Brexit. He also discusses the idea around *bullshit*, which means saying something without care, without knowing whether it is true or false just for the purpose of achieving a specific goal – even if this goal is just to go through a small talk with someone.

Students are asked to reflect on their own experience as social media users and how careful they are with the information they consume and share. They are also introduced to three tools to avoid being manipulated by false information.
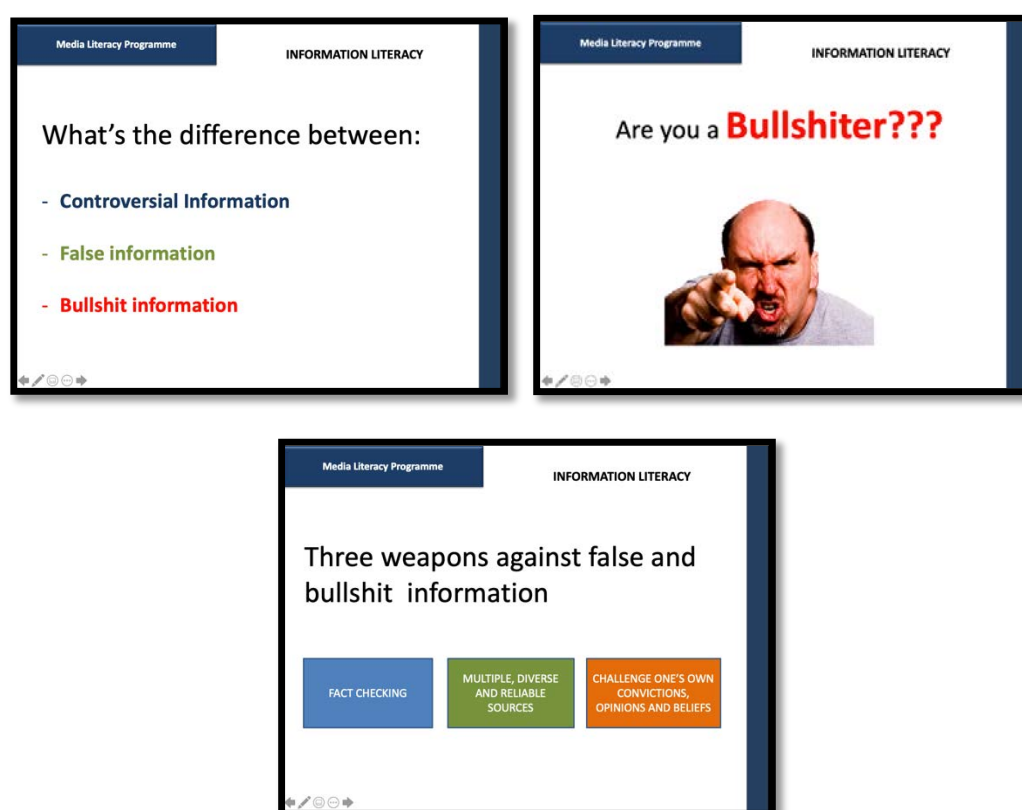
Figure 6.8 – Slide used to discuss the three different types of information and some tools to avoid false information.

<u>Brainstorm</u>

Students are asked about the 3 main forms of images or pictures that we know – drawings, paintings and photographs. In their groups, they come up with ideas about the main differences among them. The facilitator walks around helping students to consider questions such as: how are they produced? What do they represent? Which one is more real and why? Which one has more artistic value? Which one conveys information more appropriately?

Figure 6.9 – Slides used to introduce the discussion about different types of images.

Discussion

The facilitator then shows a photograph of the students that was taken the day before without them realizing it. The picture depicts students sitting in their groups carrying out some activity. Students are asked to tell what elements they see in the picture – people, chairs, tables, walls, colours etc., and provoked into thinking how reality is represented in that picture. The facilitator then presents the same photo again, but this time with different filters, crops and arrangements.

At this point students are confronted with the concept of manipulation, and are asked to give some thoughts on the topic. Most people associate manipulation with something bad, but it is important to mention that it can also be for a good reason – especially when it refers to aesthetics, not information.

Students are then presented to some pictures that were manipulated in different ways – altering aspects of the photo, such as colour; using photos to diminish or exalt a person; and using different angles to show or hide information.
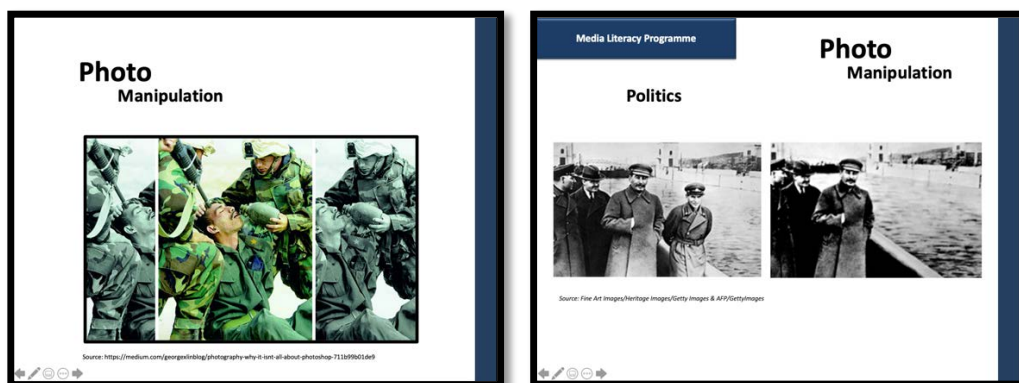
Figure 6.10 – Slides used to show how pictures can be manipulated to change their original meaning.

One famous example is the picture of O. J. Simpson that was simultaneously published by both Newsweek and Time magazines, and it turned out that Time had manipulated the picture to make it darker. Discussion in the groups follows having a few questions as a guideline: What techniques were used? What was the intension? What was the context behind those pictures? What are the real consequences of such manipulations? In what circumstances would those manipulations be acceptable?

Figure 6.11 – Slide with O. J. Simpson on the covers of both Time and Newsweek magazines.

Practical activity

The topic of the day is 'Food and Environment' (Geography, Science). The activity starts with a group discussion about the task followed by online research on the theme. Each group creates a story through a photo montage. Students are told to use between 6-9 pictures, which they can take or download from the internet, and then use Pixlr to create this montage. The facilitator explains briefly how to use the app and its main tools.

Students then plan their task, do an online research to collect information about the topic, and create the photo story. Students are told to manipulate the pictures the way they want (changing colors/brightness/contrast; including elements from other pictures; cutting/trimming/resizing; etc.)

Presentation and reflection

Students present their photo story and explain what kind of editing they applied to

the picture, the reason for that, and how meaning was created through the manipulation of pictures. Young people nowadays are exposed to a great deal of photographs when they are online and they usually have their own understanding about photo manipulation, so this exercise is a good opportunity to discuss their choices when manipulating photos.

<u>Focus group</u>

After the activity, one student from each group will participate in a focus group discussion.

6.4.4 DAY 4 – MOVIE

<u>Learning outcomes</u>

On completion of this learning activity it is expected that students will be able to:

- understand that media stories are constructed and there are many different ways of telling the same story;
- reflect on how different meanings are created and different ideas are represented using different editing techniques;
- create a movie using the iPad an editing software.

<u>Brainstorm</u>

The facilitator asks students to come up with ideas about how film is created and what kind of techniques filmmakers use in order to create a story. After about ten minutes, each group start giving some answers and the facilitator filters the most appropriate ones and put them up on the screen. Discussion follows.

<u>Storytelling</u>

The facilitator puts on the screen a few ideas and ask the groups to write down a short story using all these ideas. The first sentence of the story should be "Mary and Paul were getting married…" and the last one should be "…and everybody died".
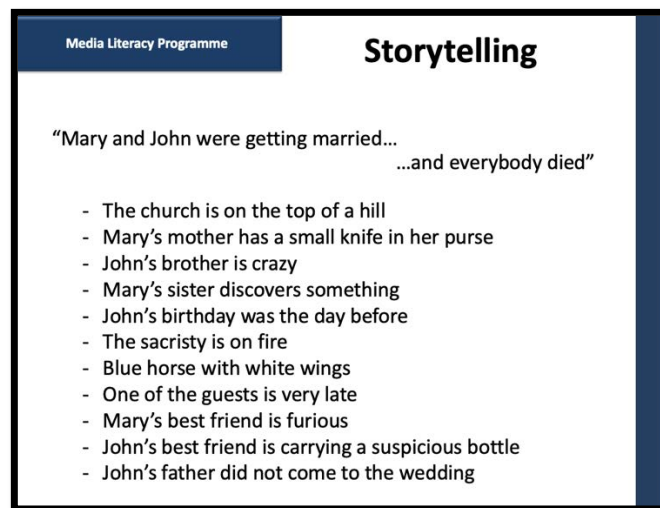
Figure 6.12 – Slide with all the ideas that should be included in the story.

Students can include other elements and characters in the story, as long as it does not become too long and complicated. After each group writes it down on a piece of paper, each team leader reads it out to the rest of the class.

The idea here is to notice that, even though all the groups knew the start and the end of the story and had the same elements to construct the narrative, each of them did it in different ways. This means that there are many different ways of telling a story, and the role of an editor is to choose how the story will be told.

Playing with cards

The facilitator then hands out to each group 30 cards with frames from the movie "The birds", from Alfred Hitchcock, and asks students to put them together in the correct order. The shots are from the scene where a gas station is being attacked by the birds. Even if one of the students has already seen this film, it is very unlikely that they will remember the exact sequence, so it is expected that each group will put the shots together in a different way.

Each group puts up the sequence on a board and describe their scene to the rest of the class. Everyone probably gets to the same point, i.e., that the scene describes the gas station is being attacked by the birds, there is an explosion and customers at a café are watching everything from the window. However, each group will tell the same story in slightly different ways, and that is the whole point of this exercise. The facilitator then explains that the same story can be told in many different ways,

and the way we choose to tell it convey different meanings.
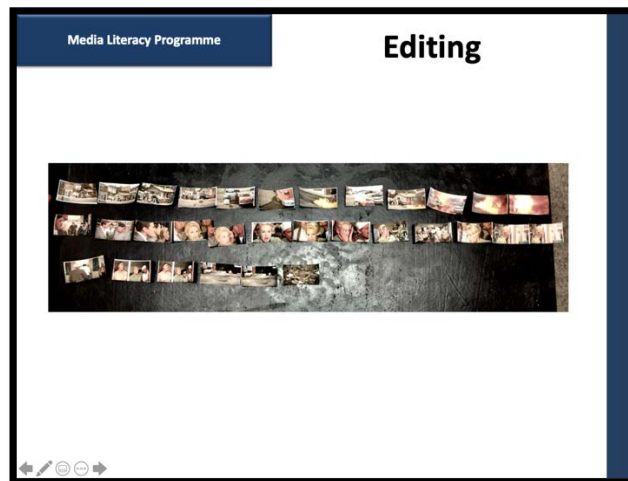
Figure 6.13 – Slide with the cards organized in a sequence by a group of students.

The facilitator explains the importance of editing in film, pointing out the importance of 'choosing' when making decisions about how to tell a story using moving image. The facilitator talks about how important it is to plan and storyboard a film before shooting it.

Practical activity

The topic of the day is "Shakespeare's Legacy" (English, History, Drama). The facilitator explains that students will have to create a short video using iMovie. The activity starts with a group discussion about the task followed by an online research on the theme. Students can create a movie about Shakespeare or about one of his plays.
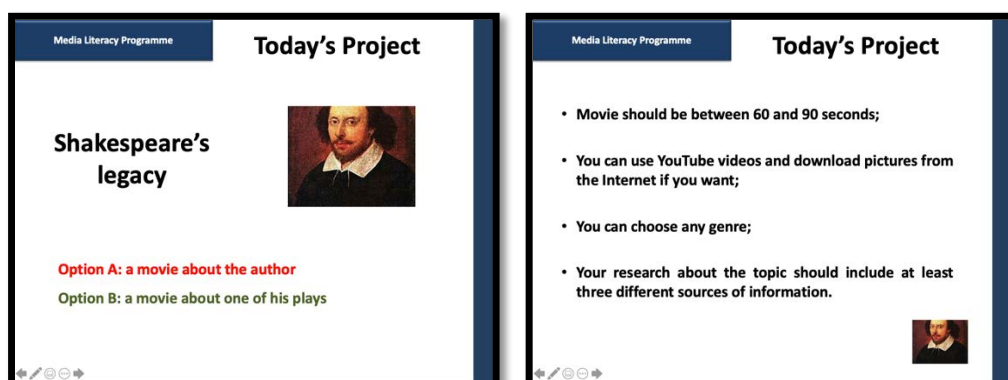
Figure 6.14 – Slides with the activity of the day.

Students will then storyboard their movie, shoot and edit. They can choose among many genres, such as drama, horror, documentary etc., and they will be asked to provide their source of information.

Presentation and reflection

Students present their film and explain how they created it. The reflection involves a discussion about what the meaning of the story is; what message the group wanted to convey; how they combined clips and music in order to achieve their goal; and what their reflection is in terms of the power of editing.

Focus group

After the activity, one student from each group will participate in a focus group discussion.

6.4.5 DAY 5 – ADVERTISING

Learning outcomes

On completion of this learning activity it is expected that students will be able to:

- understand the written and visual methods most ads utilize;
- identify common advertising techniques of persuasion;
- apply critical thinking skills to ads;
- create their own advertisement using an editing software

Warm Up

The facilitator asks students to talk briefly about advertising – What is advertising? What is the difference between advertising and propaganda? What are the pros and cons of advertising? How advertisements influence our decisions? What are your favourite ads and why?

This warm-up introduces the topic to students.

Discussion

The facilitator hands out print ads and ask students to discuss within their groups the following questions:

- who owns this ad?
- who is the target?
- what is the ad trying to sell?
- what kind of techniques is the ad using to persuade you?
- what is the main message the ad is trying to convey?
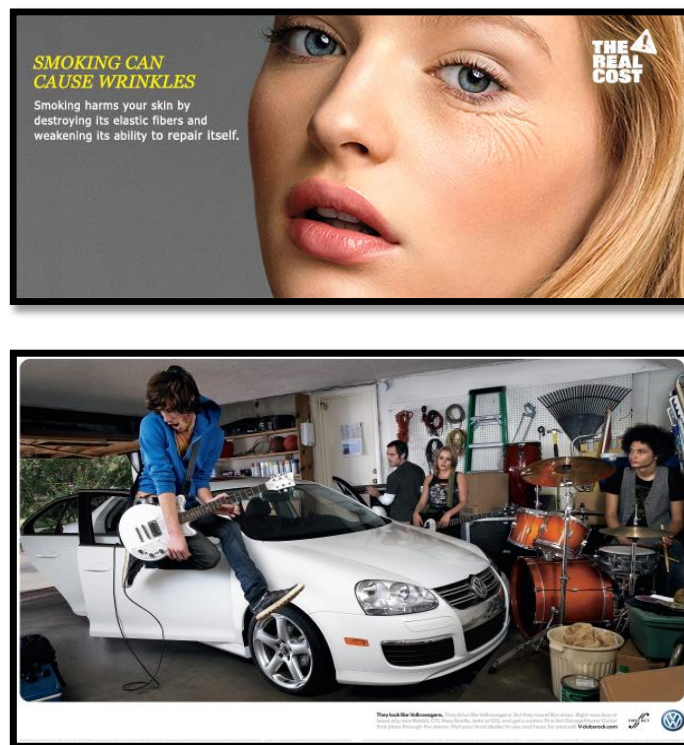
Figure 6.15 – Two examples of ads shown to students.

This is a good way to make students think about ads with a more critical view. The facilitator then introduces students to the 3 categories of persuasive methods used in advertising: Pathos (emotion), Logos (logic) and Ethos (credibility). Students watch three TV adverts and they have to guess which of the three techniques were used in the ads. Discussion follows about why those techniques are important and how they influence people.
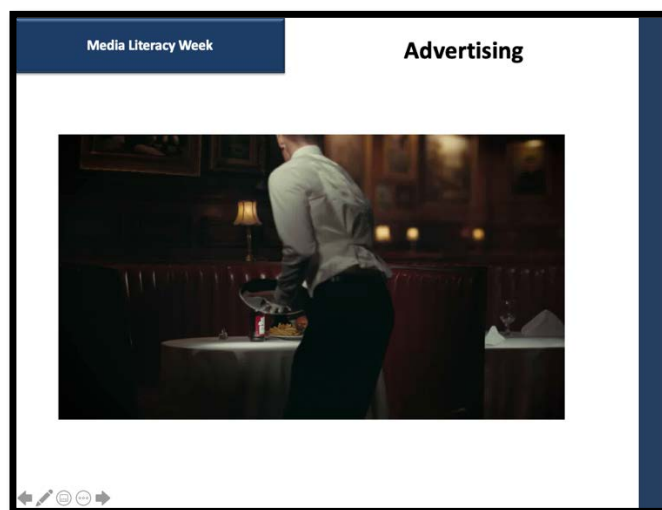
Figure 6.16 – Slide with a TV ad from Budweiser that was analysed by students.

Practical activity

The topic of the day is "Global Warming" (Sciences, Geography, History). The activity starts with a group discussion about the task followed by online research on the theme. Students are told they live in the year 2048, and they have to create a product/service to fix a problem related to global warming. Then they have to produce a TV ad to sell this product/service, and it can be about anything related to the topic (ice caps melting, flooding, threat to animals etc.). They are asked to use some of the advertisement techniques that were discussed during the workshops. For this task they use iPads to shoot the video and iMovie to edit it.

Presentation and reflection

Students present their ads and explain their choices in terms of the product/service being sold, the target and the techniques they used.

Focus group

After the activity, one student from each group will participate in a focus group.

Chapter 7

Research Design

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the methodological approach that was taken to investigate the research questions. It begins by reminding the reader of the research objective, its questions and the role of the media literacy model that will be used as a theoretical framework for the data analysis. Next, it discusses the case study methodology to investigate the research questions, and why this research project uses a qualitative approach, providing definitions and a justification. Finally, the reader is introduced to the methods used to collect, analyse and present the qualitative data.

7.2 Research Objective

The objective of this research project is to investigate how the use of digital media technologies in the classroom can help promote media literacy in students. The investigation follows the rationale of the Media Literacy model that was developed by the researcher based on the analysis of the literature review. Through a series of digital media workshops especially designed for this project and applied in three different schools in Dublin, this project aims to understand the potential that the use of ICTs in the classroom have to promote a set of knowledge, skills and practices related to the different stages of the model. The research results, following analysis and discussion of the data, will be used to suggest strategies for the implementation of media literacy programs in the Irish second-level education and elsewhere.

7.3 Research Questions

This research project centres on the main question: *to what extent can the use of digital media technologies in the classroom help promote media literacy in students?* The objective is to investigate, through a media literacy programme

delivered to students, how ICTs can be used in educational settings to address topics related to media literacy, and how students respond to that experience.

In order to explore the research approach in all its qualitative and intrinsic nature, a few sub-questions are also necessary to address the various components and stages of the media literacy model.

7.3.1 Research Sub-questions.

- ***To what extent is the production of digital media artefacts a key component of media literacy education***? The first sub-question relates to the fact that students can use digital media in the classroom to create many different types of digital artefacts. Media production has been considered an important component of media literacy education (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2007), and this sub-question aims to address this issue.

- ***How the production of digital media artefacts helps promote creativity, cultural engagement and critical awareness in students?*** The second sub-question, still with an emphasis on media production, seeks to investigate how the production of media artefacts can help students develop the three social functions presented in the media literacy model: critical awareness, cultural engagement and creative practices.

- ***To what extent do semiotic resources and multimodal communication facilitate students' ability to communicate ideas, explore their own cultural references and perform critical analysis?*** During the media literacy programme, students had the opportunity to use different semiotic resources and modes of communication to create stories, convey messages and express their ideas. This sub-question aims to explore in what ways participants made use of physical, material and digital resources to create meaning and communicate.

- ***How the use of digital media for study and research develop in students awareness about false, manipulated and biased information?*** Disinformation has become a major challenge in media education, especially after the emergence and spread of search engines and social media platforms. This sub-question addresses

this important issue, seeking to evaluate to what extent the use of ICTs help students perform online research taking into account best practices to avoid being deceived and manipulated.

7.4 The Conceptual Framework

Following the objective of this research project and questions that will be used to investigate how digital media technologies can help promote media literacy in students, it is paramount to understand what media literacy is. This is important because, when analysing the data, the researcher must be able to find clues which indicates that some knowledge, skills and practices related to media literacy have taken place during the field research.

In chapter 2, I provided some definitions from well-established scholars in the field, and also proposed this project's own definition, which is the *set of knowledge, skills and practices that allows people to make sense of the world and act upon it through mediated communication*. This is a definition that follows a broader understanding of the concept of literacy as a socially and culturally situated meaning-making practice, and it places this practice in the context of mediated communication. In chapters 3 and 4, I explored the main theories and concepts in the field in order to understand the many facets of media literacy, from critical skills to creativity to multimodal communication. This analysis enabled the development of the Media Literacy model, which is a summary of the main concepts and theories organized in learning stages in a more structured way. The Media Literacy model is used in this research as a conceptual framework to guide the data analysis.

7.5 The Research Approach

The chosen research approach for this project is the case study. The case study is an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009: 43) that allows the investigator "to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of contemporary phenomenon within real-life events", and to make sense of complex situations (Yin, 2009: 4). The emphasis is on process and understanding (Merriam, 1998), it is appropriate for contextual situations and it is recommended for studies that ask *how* and *why* questions (Yin, 2009). Case studies have been divided into

different categories depending on the purpose of the research, and also depending on their types and functions (employed to describe or evaluate a social phenomenon, for instance). Case studies may be defined, for instance, as exploratory, explanatory or descriptive (Yin, 2009); historical organizational, observational or life histories (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007); intrinsic, instrumental or collective (Stake, 1995). Any attempt to strictly place the present project into only one of these categories may restrict the understanding or even call into question the aims and possible outcomes of the study. However, it is still useful to look at these categorizations and discuss how they may facilitate the understanding of the research project.

This project has an *exploratory* (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) nature, in a sense that it aims to deeply explore a specific media literacy education program without trying to test one particular hypothesis or provide ultimate solutions to existing problems. The study also has what Yin (2009) defines as an *explanatory* nature, as it aims to understand *how* and *why* certain events in the learning process of media literacy education take place by closely examining the data in order to find links and explain meanings and processes found in the data set.

Stake (2005) also proposes that a case study can be either *intrinsic* or *instrumental*. By *intrinsic* he means a study that is undertaken because "the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case", and "not because it represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem". The main objective is not "to come to understand some abstract construct", and the purpose is not theory building. On the other hand, *instrumental* studies are undertaken "in order to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of secondary interest and plays a supportive role, as the researcher is interested in understanding something else, external to the case" (ibid: 445).

This dualism is problematic as it establishes some boundaries that are not as concrete as they might seem to be. This research project has characteristics of both types of case studies described above. It has an intrinsic – which is close related to what Merriam (2009: 45) calls *particularistic* – nature because the researcher wishes to better understand the particular case that was conceived and designed for the purpose of the project, and one of the outcomes of the study is to evaluate how

digital media can help promote media literacy in this specific setting, following a particular educational model under specific circumstances. However, this project can also be defined as *instrumental*, as there is also an interest in understanding abstract elements and meanings in the learning process that are external to the case, in a sense that it is expected that it gives important indications of how digital media can be used to promote media literacy in different educational settings under similar rules and circumstances. Finally, the present project also has a *collective* – also defined as cross-case, multicase, or comparative (Merriam, 2009: 49) - nature as three case studies will be included in the project (please refer to *Research Methods* on page 137 for more information).

The theoretical lens through which the case study is investigated is grounded in the media literacy model developed by the researcher and presented in the previous chapter. Its holistic character derives from the combination of different theories of media and communication studies, and it widens the scope of the qualitative research in terms of the variety of meanings to be found and interpreted.

7.5.1 MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAMME

In order to explore how digital media technologies can help promote media literacy in students, a Media Literacy programme was designed. The programme was composed of five different workshops, each of them covering a different topic related to Media Literacy Education, following a socio-constructivist and project-based approach to education. Below there is a summary of each workshop, and the full programme and the pedagogical approach can be found on chapter 6.

DAY 1 - *'Testing Workshop'*
The objective of the first workshop was to observe how students would participate in a media literacy class and create a digital artefact with minimal guidance from the facilitator. The topic of the day was 'media' and students could choose among many media topics to create their artefact. Each group was assigned with one of the applications available, so they could create a digital magazine using Book Creator, a Photo Story using Pixler or a movie using iMovie.

DAY 2 – *Digital Magazine*

The topic on day 2 was 'the refugee crisis". In the first part of the class, students discussed with the researcher how people create meaning using language, semiotics resources and different modes of communication. For the practical activity, they had to create a digital magazine using the application *Book Creator*.

DAY 3 – *Photo Story*

The topic on day 2 was 'food and the environment'. Students discussed the manipulation of information, with a focus on images, and how they influence the creation and interpretation of messages. For the practical activity, particpants created a photo story using the application *Pixlr*.

DAY 4 – *Movie*

On day 4 the topic was 'Shakespeare'. In the first part of the workshop, students discussed ideas around how stories are constructed, and how editing is important for the meaning-making process. In the practical activity they created a short movie using the application *iMovie*.

DAY 5 - *Advertising*

Finally, on the last day the topic was 'global warming'. Students were shown a few examples of advertisements and performed a basic analysis to understand the techniques used in each of the ads. For the main project, they created an ad selling a product/service to solve a problem related to global warming in the year of 2047.

7.5.2 RESEARCH PARTICPANTS

The study adopted 'purposeful sampling', which is a non-probability technique whereby the researcher decides among the general population who is going to participate in the project (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this case, even though I did not directly choose each individual participant for the project, I selected the three participating schools in Dublin based on their differences in terms of social class, religious ethos, cultural background and gender, so that some diversity among participants would be ensured. Purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998: 77). It is a method used in qualitative research for the selection of information-rich cases

(Patton, 2002), and it is effective because it allows an in-depth examination of a specific topic. The number of participating schools was decided based on the time frame available for the delivery of the workshops, and the amount and diversity of data to be collected and analysed.

The chosen year of study was the Transition Year (TY), which is the first year of the Senior Cycle in the Irish education system. As explained in chapter 2, TY offers a great deal of flexibility for both students and teachers, and during this year students have the chance to learn many subjects that are not part of the national curriculum. For this reason, it poses an outstanding opportunity for the implementation of new learning practices, such as the ones related to media literacy education.

A total of 81 Transition Year (TY) students took part in the project. Even though the number of participants in qualitative research tends to be small (Merriam, 1998), this provides the opportunity for the collection and analysis of rich and detailed information about the phenomenon being study. Below there is a summary of each participating school, and more details is provided in the introductory chapter of the data analysis (chapter 8). The workshops took place within the school settings. This had the advantage that the researcher was able to observe the participants "in their own territory and interact with them in their own language, on their own terms" (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 9). All students were taking the Transition Year program in their school and the schools were responsible for selecting the ones that participated in the research. The researcher requested that students were not selected based on specific interest – like in media studies, for instance – so all three schools selected an entire Transition Year class to participate – in case of school B, two TY classes participated (more details below). The fact that there is a diverse group of students – and not only students interested in communications or media studies – brings a more realistic factor to the research, as this diversity of interest reflects the reality in schools.

SCHOOL A
Number of students participating: 26.

The school A is a mixed-gender school from the northeast side of Dublin. Most students come from middle-class families and, in comparison with the other schools, they are the ones with the most advantaged socio-economic background. The workshops took place once a week over 5 consecutive weeks. They started at 8h30 and finished around 12h40, with two 15 minutes breaks in between. In 2017, school A had over 100 TY students divided into five classes. The TY coordinator chose one of these classes with 26 students to participate in the research. The criteria used to choose this specific group was the availability of students according to the TY timetable.

SCHOOL B

Number of students participating: 19

The school B is a DEIS girls-only Catholic school from the North of Dublin, with a stronger conservative and religious ethos compared to the other schools. DEIS stands for 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity for Schools', which is a government strategy to address educational needs of students from disadvantaged communities. In 2017 school B had 40 TY students divided into two classes, and one of these classes was chosen to participate in the research. The criteria used to choose this specific group was the availability of students according to the TY timetable. The workshops took place over 5 days in one week. The classes started at 8h55 and ran until 13h15, with two breaks in between – one of 30 minutes, and another one of 15 minutes.

SCHOOL C

Number of students participating: 36

School C is a DEIS boys-only Catholic secondary school in the west of Dublin. It also has a religious ethos based on the Christian Brothers' tradition, however it is not as conservative and strict as school B. In 2017, the school offered a Transition Year (TY) program to 36 students, divided into two groups, and all of them participated in the Media Literacy program. The workshops took place twice a week (with two different groups) over 5 consecutive weeks. The first group had the workshops every Tuesday, from 9h to 13h, with two 15-minutes breaks in between. The second group had the workshops every Friday, from 11h to 15h30, with two breaks, one of 45 and one of 15 minutes.

7.5.3 RESOURCES

This research project investigates how media literacy activities can be carried out in schools using the following resources:

- Tablets
- Wi-fi internet connection
- Projector and screen

The decision to use tablets reflects the fact that schools all over Ireland are increasingly using tablets in the classroom, as discussed in Chapter 2. The workshops could have been designed for the use of desktop computers or even laptops, but it is understood that this could be considered a step backward from current tendencies in the Irish education system. Even though the tablet poses some limitations in terms of online resources that will be further discussed in the next chapters, it eliminates the need for digital cameras and voice recorders, for instance, as students can carry out all the tasks using only one device.

Wi-fi internet connection and projectors are also available in most schools in the country as discussed in Chapter 2, so the idea was to use resources that are already available in schools, instead of planning activities that would require different software and devices.

7.6 Research Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are important for the development of studies in the Media Literacy field. For many years quantitative studies have provided very valuable data about young people's preferences, opinions, behaviours, uses and understandings in relation to media products (Lapp et al., 2012, Hobbes, 2014; Maksl et al., 2015; Kahne and Bowyer, 2016; Marsh et al., 2017). Large scale surveys have been applied in many countries (UNESCO, 2012) and the results have been successfully used to monitor children's safety and participation in online environments. Similarly, qualitative studies in Media Literacy have been carried out across the globe providing some important in-depth analysis on processes of media education within specific educational settings

(Hobbs and Tuzel, 2017, Burn and Durran, 2007; Buckingham, 1998, 2003; Kress, 2003; Marsh et al., 2017; Burnet and Merchant, 2018).

Academic debates about the uses of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research have long involved the discussion about different methods and techniques to collect and analyse data, and also taking on board philosophical, epistemological and ontological points of view. According to Travers (2001), many scholars advocate that social science should be treated like natural science, and for this reason quantitative methods should be preferred to qualitative ones, as the former are usually regarded as more 'scientific'. According to this view, social researchers should be concerned "with large-scale macro processes or phenomena", rather than "dealing with local or micro social settings, which make only a limited contribution to our understanding of the society as a whole" (ibid.: 7). Another very common idea held by some scholars is that quantitative studies objectively report reality, whereas qualitative ones are influenced by the researcher's political values and, for this reason, are biased (Silverman, 2000). On the other hand, advocates of qualitative research claim that there are significant phenomena and processes of social, cultural or behavioural nature that cannot be measured quantitatively (Travers, 2001). Moreover, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out, qualitative research provides researchers with a systematic process for analysing complex data and interpreting different meanings from the data set.

This research project follows an epistemological and philosophical view of qualitative investigation that understands that it is not possible to study the social world in the same way that we study the natural world (Mertens, 2005). It is important to acknowledge this otherwise quantitative researchers may ignore key meanings that are brought to social life, and neglect the "social and cultural constructions of the 'variables' which quantitative data seeks to correlate" (Silverman, 2000: 59). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009: 5). This project seeks to explore and understand meanings, practices and processes that are brought to the social life in a learning environment. For this reason, the object of study is seen as an essentially subjective and socially constructed phenomenon. The epistemological position on the interpretive approach is that knowledge of reality can be achieved

through social and cultural constructions such as documents, artefacts, and shared practices. Accordingly, in this investigation meanings are interpreted in specific, organized and intentionally designed educational contexts.

7.6.1 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection was conducted as follows:

Method triangulation: the use of multiple methods to collect information increases the researcher's capacity for a more comprehensive analysis of the data and reduces dependence on interpretations of single events (Cohen et al., 2000). In this form of analysis, different methods working in triangulation can validate each other (Mason, 1996) and the methodology's reliability can be significantly improved (Silverman, 2000).

The methods used in the project are:

Field Observation: notation of naturally occurring events and naturally occurring conversations during the learning activities.

Classroom observation provides researchers with the opportunity to experience and "gather 'live' data from 'live' situations", understanding the context and nuances of the learning experience, and also discovering things that participants "might not freely talk about in interview situations" (Cohen et al., 2000: 305). It is important that the researcher must learn *how* and *what* to observe in the field. Patton (2002: 260, 261) points out that a good and systematic observer must pay close attention to their surroundings, write descriptively, carry out a well-organized recording of the field notes, and use rigorous methods to validate observation. In relation to *what* must be observed, Merriam (1998: 98) proposes six elements that are very likely to be present in any setting: the physical setting; the participants; activities and interactions, conversation; subtle factors; and the researcher's own behaviour.

The field observation was guided by an open-ended diary – with researcher as a participant observer – and it recorded both verbal and non-verbal behaviours and reactions of students during the workshops. As a researcher I was able to see how students interacted with each other during the lesson, and their responses during the

learning process. As the workshops were designed to give students lots of freedom of speech, they were constantly talking to each other and with the teacher/researcher as well. Field notes included both notes taken during and immediately after the observations.

During students' presentation of their digital artefacts, students were asked to explain their work to the class. Each presentation lasted for approximately five minutes, and during this time the researcher – and, occasionally, other students – engaged with the participants in an open conversation about topics related to their work and to the activity of the day. For this practice, the researcher decided to record the whole conversation using a digital recorder, instead of just taking notes.

Focus groups: discussion with students after each workshop for about fifteen minutes, recorded with a digital recorder. A constructivist perspective underlies this data collection procedure, since the data obtained is socially constructed (Merriam, 2009). Information collected through focus group is very rich and comprehensive because participants "hear each other's responses and can make additional comments beyond their own original responses" (Patton, 2002: 386). Besides, while young people may find one-to-one interviews intimidating, focus groups are considered appropriate for children and teenagers as they offer a more safe and friendly environment where students can share their beliefs and thoughts (Madriz, 2000). The researcher used a semi-structured questionnaire with some questions as guidance (please refer to appendix G) but also allowed the conversation to flow freely in order to record opinions and ideas that naturally emerged.

Artifact Collection: Collection of the digital artifacts produced by the students. The objective was to understand how students' work could reveal clues about the meaning-making process underlying their choices in terms of semiotic resources and modes of communication; the creative process during the production; the potentials and limitations of the digital device being used; and the cultural repertoire used as a source of information and analysis.

The value of these artifacts is that they are representations of forms of meaning making (Jewitt, 2008), and they represent the materialization of the learning process, providing very important data that might not be collected using different

methods. Besides, digital artefacts such as film, photography, and digital magazines also provide the opportunity for the researcher to discover meanings using analytic tools grounded in semiotics and multimodality theories (Benzemer and Kress, 2016).

Questionnaire: Two questionnaires with both open- and closed-ended questions were given to participants, one before and one after the media literacy programme. The pre-research survey had the objective to understand some of student's practices and behaviours in the use of media, especially digital media, and also evaluate participant's perceptions and opinions in relation to topics related to media studies in general. The post-research survey had the objective to collect students' observations in relation to the media literacy programme, and also to observe if there was any significant change in their perceptions and opinions over the course of the programme.

The questionnaires had both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach refers exclusively to the measure of students' choices for a given question with multiple alternatives. For instance, students were asked about their preferences in terms of social media platforms for both entertainment and news consumption, and the answers were calculated and displayed in terms of percentage in relation to the whole class – or, in certain cases, in relation to the three schools together (please refer to appendices D and E). The qualitative approach refers to some open questions that students answered connected to the multiple-choice questions. For instance, students were asked to choose from 1 to 5 – strongly disagree to strongly agree – for a given question, and then they were asked to explain their choices in their own words. These descriptive answers were included in the qualitative data analysis as they offered important clues on students' perceptions about the media literacy programme, the topics addressed during the activities and their use of and engagement with media devices and platforms.

Because this research project takes a qualitative approach, the quantitative data collected from the questionaries were only used to inform the reader about students' previous experiences with and perceptions about the media in general, and also as a supporting tool to suggest tendencies in changes in students' opinions and behaviours during the media literacy programme. The objective of this research is

not to measure knowledge acquisition and the methods applied cannot confirm whether or not knowledge attainment has taken place. For this kind of quantitative measurement, it would be more appropriate to have a larger *representative* sample of students, and not an *exploratory* sample for small-scale studies (Denscombe, 2014: 32), which is the case of this research project. Furthermore, different analytical methods of investigation would have to be applied as well (ibid). Nevertheless, it is understood that some of the quantitative data collected can contribute to the qualitative analysis that will be presented in the next chapters.

7.6.2 DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are a simultaneous and interactive activity "that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings" (Merriam, 2009: 165). In order to make sense of the data, the researcher must consolidate, reduce and interpret what the "people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" (Merriam, 1998: 178).

The data was coded and analysed using an inductive process, that is, a process whereby "research findings emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data" (Thomas, 2003: 5), without the limitations that exists in deductive data analysis such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research. As Thomas (2003: 1) explains, the main purposes of the inductive process are, firstly, "to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format". Secondly, "to establish clear links between the research questions and the findings derived from the raw data". Finally, "to develop a model about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the data".

The interviews from the focus groups and the conversations with students during the presentation of their artefacts were transcribed shortly after the workshops. The notes taken during field observation were typed into a word document in a more structured way and divided by date, school and workshop. Students' answers from the open-ended questions of the questionnaires were organized in a word document. Students' answers from the closed-ended questions of the questionnaires were calculated and organized in charts. Each digital artefact was analysed following a semiotics approach to textual analyses and the researcher's interpretation was

organized in a word document divided by different topics related to the production of the artefact (please refer to appendices H, I, J, K, L and M).

In order to make sense of the huge amount of raw data in a comprehensive, transparent and logical way, the analysis followed the process of data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The phase of data reduction was used to edit, summarize and arrange the data into more easily manageable components, looking for patterns and themes so as to organize the raw data into coherent, meaningful categories. All the documents described above (except the charts) were printed out and the researcher used coloured markers to identify the first themes that emerged from the data. These themes found in the texts were related to the research questions, and also to the conceptual framework provided by the media literacy model. Specific extracts were highlighted in the transcripts with different colours according to each theme.

The phase of data display involved the mapping of themes on a table that provided a visual illustration of how these themes related to each other. A display is "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (ibid, 1994: 11). This helped to identify the key major themes emerging from data pool, which were meaning-making practices, critical awareness and cultural/creative practices. Finally, the phase of conclusion drawing/verification sought to assess the data in terms of their implications for the research questions, revisiting the data a few times to verify the conclusions being drawn. As Miles and Huberman (1994: 11) observe: "the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability' - that is, their validity".

7.7 Ethical Considerations

The three case studies involved young people as participants, and for this reason an especial attention was given to ethical considerations. As a researcher I had to apply for a Garda Vetting through Dublin City University, which is a police certificate that gave me permission to deliver workshops in secondary schools in the country. I also had to request an ethical approval for the study to the DCU Research Ethics Committee (please refer to appendix C), which included filling out an extensive

form with all the details about my field research, and also the submission of an approval letter from the Board of Management of each of the participating schools.

All participants were given a Plan Language Statement outlining the purpose of the study, the research methods to be used during the investigation, and details about the ethical requirements and the protection of students' anonymity. All participants and their parents/guardians also had to sign an informed consent (please refer to appendices A and B). Students were informed that their participation was totally voluntary, and they could withdraw from the research at any point.

The data collected during the field research was safely stored in accordance with DCU's Data Protection Protocol.

Chapter 8

Introduction to the data analysis – the teaching and learning experience

8.1 Introduction

This introduction to the data analysis gives the reader an overview of the Media Literacy program that was delivered to Transition Year students as part of the research project. I spent time in schools observing and talking with students and this experience allowed me to collect a range of qualitative data about the learning experience as a whole. Students also answered a survey both before and after the ML programme. Their answers provided some key insights about some of their behaviours and preferences as media consumers, and also about how they evaluated the main aspects of the workshops in which they participated.

The purpose of this introduction is to help the reader better understand the circumstances and conditions in which the Media Literacy program took place, especially in terms of the context and environment of each school; the behaviours, practices and perceptions of students in relation to the use of digital media technologies; and the researcher's experience both as investigator and facilitator of the learning activity. As the outline of the teaching and learning experience unfolds, some selected themes will be introduced and briefly discussed here, to be presented and analysed in more details in the next chapters.

First, the three participating schools are introduced so as to facilitate the understanding of the different environments in which the ML programme took place, and how this may have influenced the data collection. Next, a brief description of the Transition Year programme will provide some useful information about how the way this year is structured may affect students' behaviour and the learning experience as a whole. The learning activity will then be introduced and discussed in more detail, highlighting some of the main aspects behind its theoretical rationale and describing both the content and the format of the five workshops, and the participation of students in them. Finally, an outline of both the researcher's role as a participant observer and the focus group with students will

inform the reader about some benefits and challenges of the research methods employed in this study.

8.2 The case studies

The following three chapters will provide the analysis of the data gathered in three separate case studies carried out by the researcher, as explained in the Methodology chapter (chapter 7). In order to guarantee the plurality and richness of the data, the field research was conducted in three schools with different social, economic, structural and gender characteristics. The schools will be referred to as School A, B and C, so that their anonymity is ensured.

8.2.1 SCHOOL A

Number of students participating: 26

The school A is a mixed-gender school from the northeast side of Dublin. It has a well-structured Transition Year (TY) program that offers a variety of courses, disciplines and activities to its more than 100 TY students. According to the TY coordinator, most students in the school live in the area, and the majority of them come from middle-class families. In comparison with the other two schools, it is fair to say that students of school A are the ones with the most advantaged socio-economic background. Students in school A are very comfortable using iPad in learning activities as they all have access to a tablet in the school.

In school A, the schedule for the Media Literacy Program was composed of five workshops over the course of five consecutive Thursdays. The workshops started at 8h30 and finished around 12h40, with two 15 minutes breaks in between.

The school has a very good structure in terms of learning spaces, resources and technology. The workshops took place in a classroom with a few large round tables that accommodated four or five students working in teams. The room was very spacious and allowed both the researcher and students to walk freely around the space. Students were also allowed to use other parts of the premises for their projects, such as corridors, classes, the main hall and the outside area. In terms of technology, there was a digital whiteboard, a laptop, a projector and a very good Wi-Fi internet connection. Over the course of the five weeks there was no major

problem in terms of structure and resources that hindered the progression of the activities.

In terms of students' experiences with the media, the vast majority of them (96%) use snapchat, whilst only 48% said they have a Facebook account. This figure confirms the latest tendency of young people deleting their Facebook accounts (Anderson and Jiang, 2008). Most students (72%) are also on Instagram, and the same amount uses YouTube on a regular basis.

Another tendency (Newman et al., 2019) found in the survey with students is that most of them use social media as their main source for news, whereas only 16% responded they get their news mainly from TV programs. Social media is also their favourite platform for entertainment (72%), with websites coming second (16%) and TV in third (12%).

In school A students had a very close relationship with digital media technologies. All but one student (96%) had already created a video using an editing software; 80% of them had created a website or a blog. These figures decrease when it comes to less popular or less accessible software/applications, such as Photoshop or Gimp to manipulate pictures – 60% had never done that – or using an audio editing software to create an audio artefact – 72% had never used this kind of software/application.

Figure 8.1 - In percentage, social media platforms used by students in school A on a regular basis.

Figure 8.2 – In percentage, the main source of news and entertainment for students in School A.

8.2.2 SCHOOL B

Number of students participating: 19

The school B is a girls Catholic school in the North of Dublin. It has a more religious and conservative ethos compared to the other two schools, and this is reflected on the daily learning activities. The school offers a Transition Year program to around 40 TY students, divided into two groups, and one of these groups was chosen by the school's coordinator to participate in the research.

School B is a DEIS school, which means that it holds a status of a school for children and young people that live in areas at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion. Students in the school do not have access to iPads for their learning activities, but there is a computer room where they occasionally go for specific activities.

The media literacy program in school B was delivered over the course of five consecutive days, from Monday to Friday. The classes started at 8h55 and ran until 13h15, with two breaks in between – one of 30 minutes, and another one of 15 minutes.

The workshops took place in the library, which was a very spacious place furnished with a few large tables for group work. For their practical activities, students were allowed to walk freely around the school, including the external area. In terms of technology, there was a computer, a projector and a fair Wi-Fi internet connection

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available for the researcher. During the weeks there were only a few issues involving technology, such as poor internet signal, but they had no major impact on the progression of the activities.

Just like students in the school A, in school B the vast majority of students (89%) use Snapchat to communicate with their friends. Most participants are also on Instagram (72.2%) and on Facebook (66.7%), and only 16.7% of them use Twitter and WhatsApp on a regular basis. Social media is the main source of news (66.7%) for students, followed by websites (16.7%) and magazine/newspaper (11.1%). In terms of entertainment, social media is also the preferred media platform for most of students (61.1%), followed by TV (27.8%) and websites (5.6%).

In terms of students' experiences with digital media technologies, 58.8% of them had never created a video using an editing software; 52.9% had never manipulated a photograph using a software such as Photoshop or Gimp; 70.6% had never created an audio artefact; and the vast majority of them (94.1%) had never created a website or a blog.
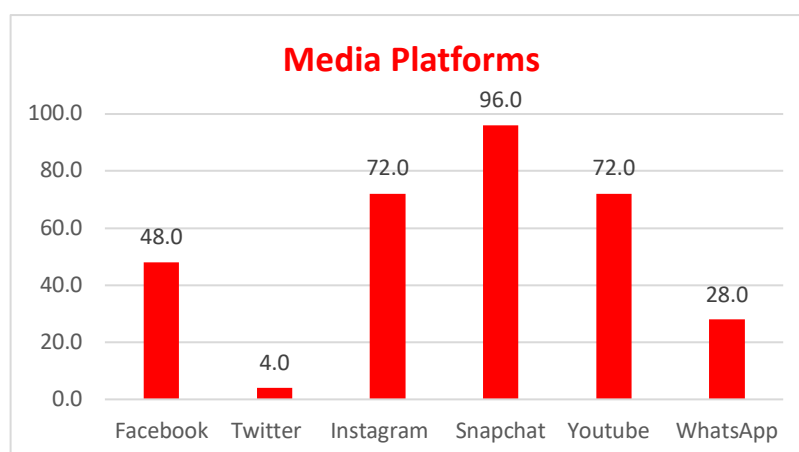

Figure 8.3 - In percentage, social media platforms used by students in school B on a regular basis.
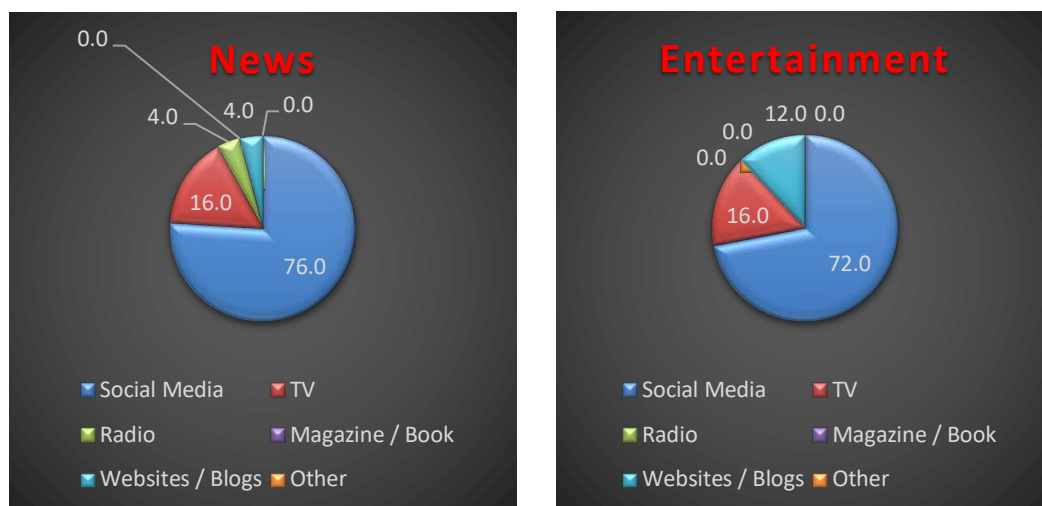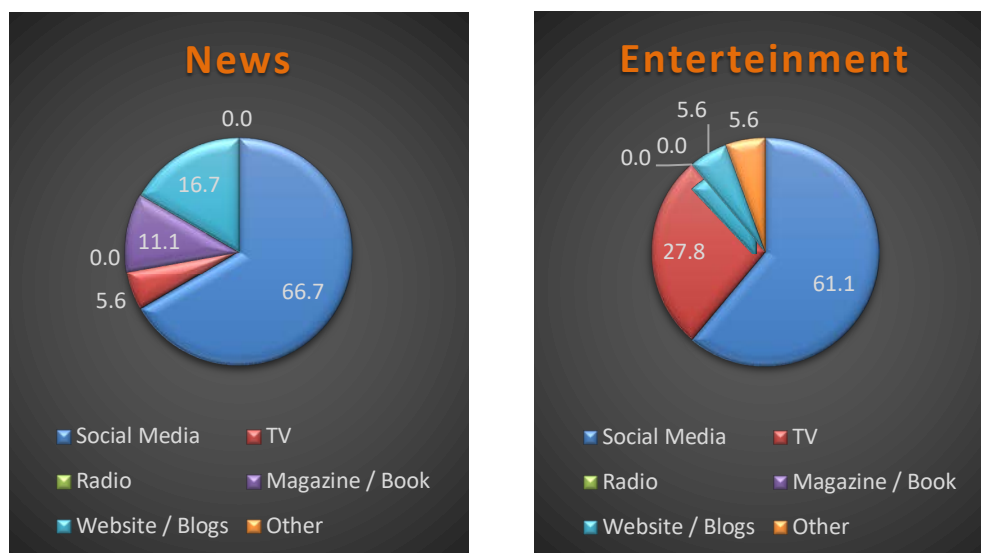
Figure 8.4 – In percentage, the main source of news and entertainment for students in School B.

8.2.3 SCHOOL C

Number of students participating: 36

School C is a boys Catholic secondary school in the west of Dublin. Even though it has a religious ethos based on the Christian Brothers' tradition, it is not as conservative and strict as school B. In the term of 2017/2018, the school offered a Transition Year (TY) program to 36 students, and all of them participated in the Media Literacy program.

Just like the school B, school C is also a DEIS school. Students in the school don't have access to iPads for their learning activities, but the TY room has plenty of computers that students use regularly, both for learning and leisure.

The media literacy program was delivered over the course of 5 consecutive weeks. Due to the number of students participating, the boys were divided into two groups of 18. The first group had the workshops every Tuesday, from 9h to 13h, with two 15-minutes breaks in between; the second group had the workshops every Friday, from 11h to 15h30, with two breaks, one of 45 and one of 15 minutes.

The workshops took place in two different rooms. One of them was the TY room, a medium-sized classroom with a few squared tables that can be arranged in a way so as students can work in teams. In terms of technology, the TY room had computers, a projector but no Wi-Fi internet connection. For this reason, this room

was used only for the first and the last part of the workshop – discussion of the theory and projects' presentation, respectively. For the rest of the activity, both researcher and students had to move to another room in order to have access to internet. The second room was called "all purpose room" - a very big area with many tables and one blackboard – but no projector. In this room students had to get the internet signal from another room next door, which was not always an easy task, but it was the only way to have Wi-Fi internet connection in the school. Because the room was not exactly a classroom, but rather a place used for many different activities and purposes, the workshops ware sometimes interrupted by other students or members of the staff who would go in there for various reasons.

In school C most students (82.9%) are on Snapchat, and almost the same amount (80%) use YouTube on a regular basis. 62.9% of them are on Facebook and 57.1% on Instagram. Only 8.6% use Twitter and one fifth of students use WhatsApp. Social media is the main source of news for 68.6% of students, the lowest rate among the three schools; TV comes in second, with 22.9%. Other platforms have 5.7% or less. Social media is also the main source of entertainment for 62.9% of students, whereas 25.7% prefer websites such as Netflix. Only 8.6% said they prefer TV for entertainment.

Most boys in school C had a close relationship with computers and mobile devices, but they had never created a movie (60%), an audio artefact (77.1%) or a blog/website (82.9%).
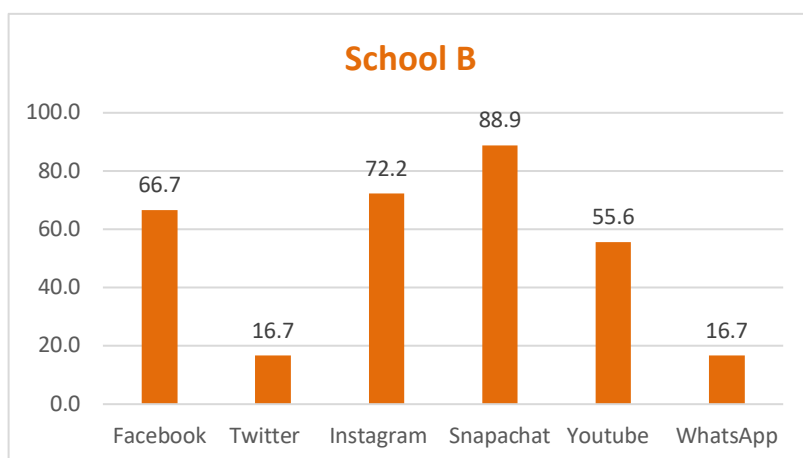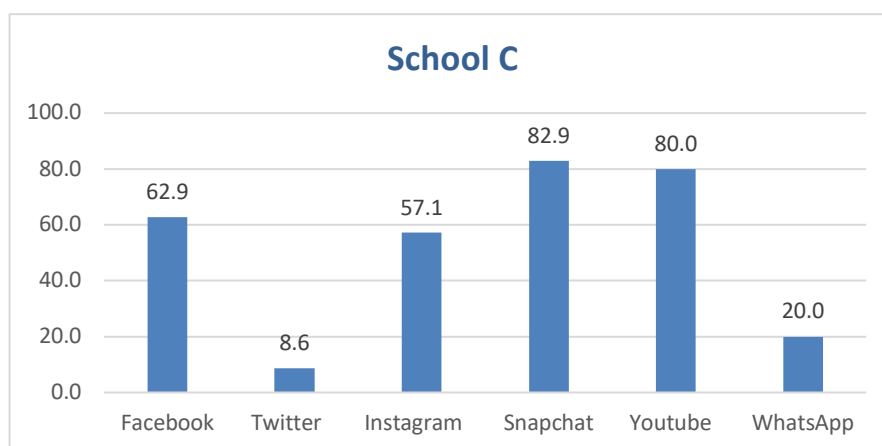

Figure 8.5 - In percentage, social media platforms used by students in school C on a regular basis.
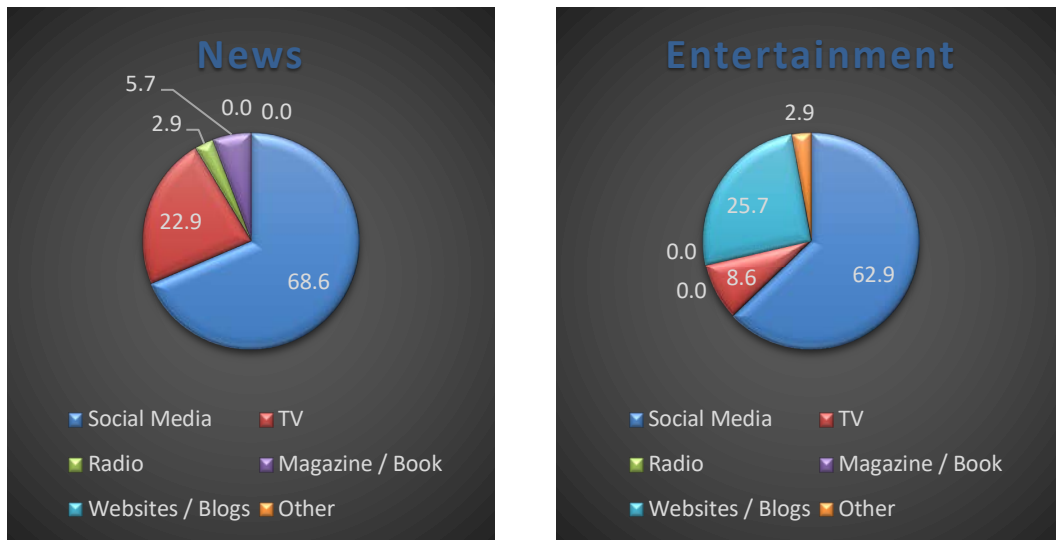
Figures 8.6 – In percentage, the main source of news and entertainment for students in School C.

8.3 The transition year program

Transition Year programs vary from school to school, but usually they consist of a mix between disciplines from the curriculum, such as Maths, English and Science, and extra-curricular activities such as sports competitions, working experience and journalism workshops. As explained in Chapter 2, this openness to new disciplines and activities that are not formally part of the school curriculum is an opportunity for the implementation and development of media literacy courses in secondary schools.

During the weeks spent in the three schools, it became clear that students are very open to new and different courses. The fact that they are in a year where there is more flexibility in their schedule, no pressure from exams and the possibility to engage in an eclectic range of activities creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

The transition Year program also poses some challenges to the research. The first one is the fact that TY coordinators want – correctly – to make the most of this year in order to provide students with the maximum possible number of quality activities. This means that the TY timetable has a kind of loose structure, in a sense that activities are organized and rescheduled according to what is regarded as the

optimal option for students. This may become a problem when one wants to develop an activity that needs to be delivered at specific dates and times during a more rigid timeframe, such as was the case with the Media Literacy program. For instance, in School A some students were absent during one workshop because they had to play a rugby match that had been reschedule for that specific date. In another day, two students had to leave earlier because they were going to carry out some interviews for a school project. In school C, all students were attending another learning activity outside the school during the five weeks, so every Media Literacy workshop had 2 or 3 missing students – but a student never missed more than one workshop because of that.

Another problem encountered with TY students is actually one that also – paradoxically – is responsible for the fact that students tend to enjoy the activities in this year: it is hard to make students understand the importance of the Media Literacy program and why they should take it seriously. TY students tend to see extra-curricular activities, especially the ones involving new technologies, as play and fun. Play and fun are definitely an important part of the Media Literacy program – this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 11 – however it took a lot of energy from the researcher to make sure that students could also make sense of the critical and learning aspects of the practice.

8.4 The learning activity

8.4.1 WORKING IN TEAMS

The initial idea for the groups' formation, following the Bridge21 model (Lawlor et. al, 2018), was that I would randomly select students and form the groups. This is based on the idea that in real life people normally do not get to choose who they work with, so it is a way of showing to students that they have to learn how to work with people they are not friends with and, occasionally, even with people they do not really get on very well with. In school A this model was applied from the start and it worked well, even though some students made the point of saying that if they had chosen their own groups they would have enjoyed the activity better.

In schools B and C the situation was very different. After I initially selected the students and formed the groups, it was very clear that in certain groups students

were not getting on well from the start, and participants decided to talk with me and ask for some changes in order to ensure minimum conditions of work. In school B some girls asked to talk with me and explained that the work could be severely undermined if some changes were not made. One girl was actually in tears saying that she would not come the next day if she did not change groups. In school C some boys said they would not be able to fully participate at all if they did not move to a different group. In face of this situation, I decided that it would be no problem to make these changes, especially because the 'randomly selected groups' factor was not an intrinsic and fundamental component of the Media Literacy program.

The groups in every school had between 3 and 4 students per group, depending on the size of the class and the number of participants attending the session. This means that in school A there were 6 groups, in school B 5 groups and in school C 4 groups per session – 8 in total. As mentioned before, in school C there was always 2 or 3 students missing in every session due to other commitments outside of the school. For this reason, there would be around 15 students participating per session, and sometimes some groups had to be rearranged in order to meet the minimum number of three per group. Students had to choose a team leader for the whole program, and that was mostly done very quickly and without any problem.

There are considerable differences between groups of three and four. The main one is related to the commitment of each participant during the activities. In every group it was possible to notice that at least one student – sometimes two or, more rarely, even three – would lead the action. In groups of 3, even if one or two students were leading the action, the three of them tended to work together and have a good engagement during the activity. In groups of 4, it was more common to see one and more rarely two students left aside, not too much engaged in the activity. Speaking with these students, most of them would deny not to be participating as much as the other students, however some of them were very honest and straightforward about that. Some would say they were simply not too much interested in the activity, and others that they would rather work on their own. But this was a small minority indeed. During focus groups, students were asked whether or not they like to work in groups, and the vast majority replied that yes.

Observing the groups of 4 more closely it became clear that there were two main reasons for some students not to participate as much as the other members. The first one is due to relations of power within the groups. Some students would impose

their will on others and take control of the activities, determining what was to be done. In this cases the 'least forceful' students would just accept what others were doing, and by doing so they would only participate in certain moments of the activity, but rarely in any planning or decision making, for example. This situation would eventually lead to these students being left aside, and the researcher would have to talk to the group to make sure everyone was having a role in the activity. The second reason is because some students simply did not want to participate too much, enjoying a situation where the others were doing the work while they were mainly observing. In this case the researcher was also required to occasionally intervene in order to guarantee that everyone was working together.

8.4.2 TEAM LEADER MEETINGS

I would meet with each group's leader two to three times during the practical work, depending on how students were progressing. These meetings turned out to be very important for the smooth running of the activity. When there are many students engaged in hands-on activities, spread all over the room – and sometimes outside of it – it becomes challenging to give instructions to all of them at the same time and make sure that their work is progressing well. For this reason, the team leaders' meeting ensured that at least one member of the group received the information and discussed the group's progress, and then these students would go back to the group and give the instructions they just received. The leaders had the feeling that they were in some way responsible for the success of their team's project, and this guaranteed in most of the cases that the information passed on by the researcher would be received and worked on by all the other students.

8.4.3 IPADS, SMARTPHONES AND APPS.

Every group, whether of 3 or 4 students, were given 2 iPads to work during the activity. The devices were meant to be used for researching information online, taking pictures, recording videos and creating their digital artefacts using the three apps available to them: Book Creator, Pixlr and iMovie. Students were offered help in case they did not know how to use the iPads, but most of them had previously used a tablet and, the ones who had not, learned how to use with their peers.

The idea behind students having 2 iPads per group instead of one iPad per student is that the former option would make the experience more collaborative and less individualistic, since students have to learn how they share their responsibilities during the activity and how each role is important for the completion of the project. So, for instance, while one student was using the iPad to research and another one to learn how to use the apps, the students without the iPad would be planning out the rest of the activity, giving ideas for the digital artefact or helping their peers with some other task. I would walk around the room checking the progress of the activity and making sure everyone was engaged. Besides, even though they could use both iPads for research and capturing photos/videos, they used only one device to create their digital artefact, so during the editing part only one iPad was effectively being used. Again, I would sometimes have to intervene in the activity, making sure that all students were participating in some way or another.

The iPads were only given to students after the first part of the workshop in order to prevent any kind of unnecessary distraction, and the way students interacted with the devices differed in the three schools. In school A, because students were used to using the device in the school – and most of them had a tablet at home as well – they did not show any kind of excitement about the iPads and approached the devices in a more formal way. As soon as they received the devices, they would simply turn them on and start using them to complete the task they were assigned with. In schools B and C, on the other hand, students had never used iPads in school, and most of them did not have access to tablets at home. As soon as they received the devices, they would first want to explore the iPad a little bit, checking a few apps (there were around 20 apps installed in each iPad), play games and so on. It was clear that for those students there was a component of excitement about the technology that was not too much present in school A. This had one good and one bad result for the activity as a whole: the good one is that this excitement with the new technology would more often than not be carried through the activity and help students be motivated about what they were doing. The bad one was that this excitement sometimes would become a reason for distraction in the middle of the activity, or in the last part, for example, when usually only one iPad was being used to edit the artefact. This situation led the researcher to find a balance between keeping students on track, making sure that the work was being done and everyone was participating; and, on the other side, allowing students to have fun with the iPad as this would contribute for their motivation and enthusiasm.

8.4.4 THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Another important aspect of this Media Literacy program that is worth mentioning is the fact that it took place in the schools, and not in a "neutral" space, that is, in premises that were not familiar to the students. As explained in chapter 1, in previous years I had the opportunity to deliver Media programs for TY students in Bridge21, Trinity College Dublin. When students go to Bridge21, everything is new for them: the space, the rules, the people, the teachers/facilitators, even other students. They are in a totally strange territory, they are outsiders, so it takes some time until they explore all the corners of the premises, all the possibilities it offers as a learning space and get used to them. The rules are also different compared to their schools: they have a lot more freedom and feel more independent. Facilitators are seen not as teachers, but as helpers. Fun and play take place all the time, everywhere.

In the school, on the other hand, students are in 'their territory', and the researcher is the outsider. Even though the ML program has a format that is mostly different from what they usually have at school and the rules are more open and free, the school aura is still there: the premises, the furniture, the bell announcing break time, the information coming out of the speaker, the teachers and coordinators that occasionally turn up in the class etc. There is a clear feeling of belonging and even of ownership among students. It is their place, they feel very comfortable, they know the rules. The researcher is the one who is feeling the uneasiness of being new to the place; I was the one who needed to learn how to explore the space and how to get things sorted when they do not go as planned. This created two main challenges for me: the first one has to do with the relation of power involving hierarchy and authority that is very different compared to the one I had experienced in Bridge21. Even though I put myself as a facilitator of the activity, and not as the 'teacher expert', bringing to the experience a more horizontal relationship with students, it is paramount for the success of the program that students understand and respect their place as participants that must follow certain rules and accomplish certain goals set out by the researcher. The fact that students were too comfortable in their own territory with an outsider would sometimes encourage some of them to have inappropriate behaviour and challenge my authority. Those situations arose in

the three participating schools and were dealt with an open, honest, and fruitful conversation between me and students.

A second challenge had to do with the fact that, for students, the school represents the common, ordinary, everyday learning space where they must go, whether or not they would like to. It is the space where they spend a lot of time doing things that they do not like; where they feel the pressure of tests and exams; where they have to follow rules which they very often disagree with. A lot of students find school a boring place to be, regardless of how good or sophisticated the educational methodology is. This creates a situation whereby students need an extra motivation to carry out any activity within the premises so that they feel they are doing something really different from their everyday educational activities. For me, this meant finding a balance between creating a good and friendly atmosphere in the classroom and, on the other hand, making sure students respected my authority and followed the rules.

8.4.5 THE WORKSHOP'S FORMAT

All workshops followed basically the same format (please refer to chapter 6): I would spend the first hour or so giving an introduction to the project of the day, delivering some basic theory on the topic addressed and facilitating group discussions. This first part was clearly the one that most students enjoyed the least. It was the only time during the workshops when they actually had to sit down for a while and listen to me, and also when they had to work in groups to discuss something more abstract, rather than a more hands-on, practical activity. Even though every effort was made to make students interact and participate as much as possible, most participants saw this part as something very similar to what they have in their everyday experiences at school, which was not something really appreciated. Both in informal conversations and during the focus groups, it was common to hear from students that the first part of the workshop was the "less fun", "quite boring" or "not interesting at all". As a student from School B put it: "I liked what we did today (*they had made a movie*), but, like… the part we have to actually do things is fun, I don't like the theory though".

In this first part of the activity, very few students would effectively participate answering questions or making comments. The majority of the participants was

very passive when I tried to interact with them, and even during group discussion there was normally just one or two students who would lead the conversation while the others would just follow along.

The second part of the workshop was devoted to the planning and organization of the practical activity. Based on the task given, students had to do a brainstorm, come up with some ideas and plan out how they would complete their project. Most of the time it would require a few minutes before students actually got to work. I was around facilitating the activity, talking with students and giving guidance when necessary, but students had a lot of freedom to make their decisions and it was mostly up to them to realize how they would motivate themselves as a group, understand what they had to do and go for the action. One of the main challenges for me was time management, and for this reason students were giving some guidance as to how long they should spend with each stage of their project. Even so, students would normally struggle to keep up the pace and finish each stage of their activity in time.

The time management issue was even more evident in the third part of the workshop, where students were actually creating their digital artefact. During this part of the activity, students were allowed to leave the room and explore other spaces in the school, which is something that they really enjoyed doing. The problem is that they would often lose track of time. This had an important impact on the progression of the activity and, as a result, on the quality of digital artefact that they had to create. For this reason, I had to keep pushing and reminding them about the importance of planning the activity very well before setting out to create the digital product.

The final part of the workshop was the presentation of the digital artefacts created by the students. Participants would show their work, explain how they did it and answer a few questions. This part was also recorded by the researcher because some valuable information could be retained from the explanation of students about their own work. These details provided by students would be later used by the researcher in order to improve the analysis of the artefacts.

Not all students felt comfortable presenting in front of the class, and this was something that the researcher had already anticipated. Even though every effort was made to have all members of the group participating, during the presentation usually

only one or two students would be effectively presenting the content of the work and engaging in conversation with me. This, however, turned out not to be a problem, since the main purpose of this part was for me to fully understand how students carried out their work, and their real intentions behind the digital piece they had created.

8.5 The five workshops

The workshops were designed in order to provide a media education experience using topics related to the school's curriculum. This approach is rooted in the idea that media education can be used to develop projects across the curriculum, taking advantage of curriculum subjects combined with students' everyday popular culture references in order to deliver a meaningful media experience (Buckingham, 2003).

Figure 8.7 – In percentage, students' responses to which was the _most_ useful workshop in their opinion, by school.

Figure 8.8 – In percentage, students' responses to which was the <u>least</u> useful workshop in their opinion, by school.
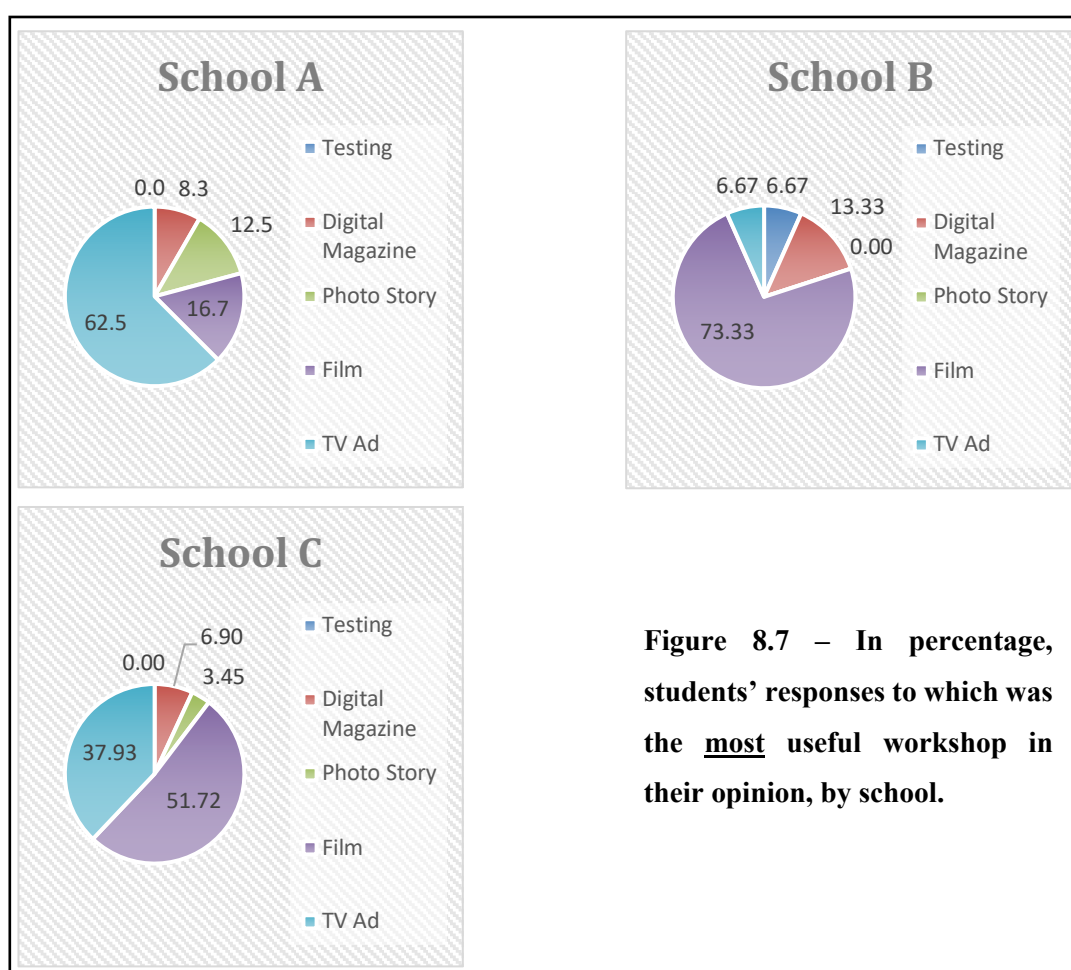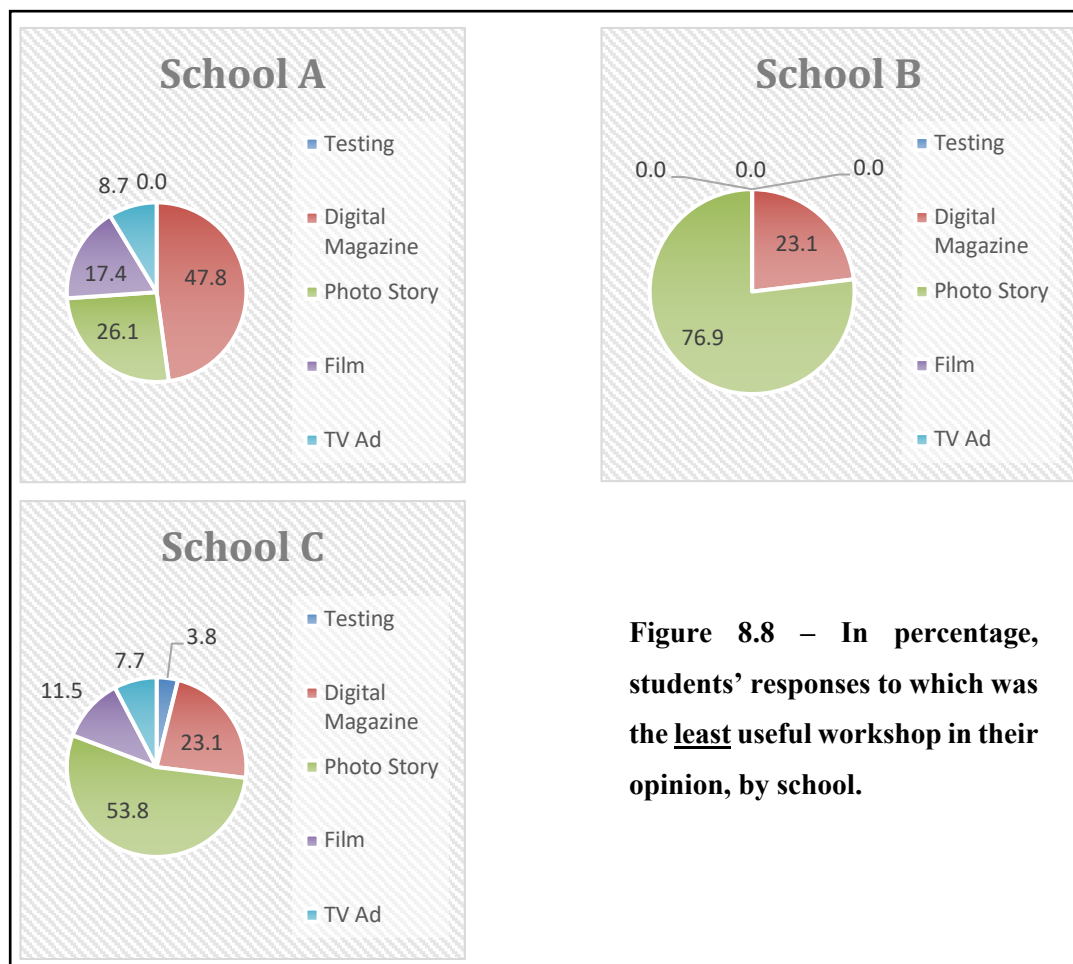
8.5.1 WORKSHOP 1 - '*testing' workshop*

The first workshop was the only one that did not have any specific topic related to the formal curriculum. The general topic for this day was simply *media*. After a brainstorm where students had to come up with many diverse ideas related to the word media – such as 'iPhone', 'social media', 'trends' and 'black lives matter' – each group chose one of these words to be their topic of the day. The topics delivered in the remaining four workshops were respectively 'refugee crisis' for the Digital Magazine; 'global warming' for the Photo Story; 'Shakespeare' for the movie; and 'the world in 2048', for the TV ad.

As much as students enjoyed playing with digital technology in the classroom, they actually saw the topics as something more formal and challenging. Whilst making movies is fun, talking about Shakespeare is not. During both informal conversations and the focus groups it was clear that most students did not find the topics of the workshops very appealing, even though they acknowledged the importance of learning about them. This poses an interesting question: can a fun activity promote

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students' engagement even if they do not appreciate the topic being discussed? Chapter 12 will provide more analysis about that.

In terms of the use of digital technology, the purpose of the first workshop was to check how students would use technology without receiving any theoretical explanation and also without too much guidance. Students were told that they had a challenge to fulfil using the iPads to create a digital product. Different groups received different tasks: create a digital magazine, a photo story or a movie (please refer to chapter 6). It was clear from the start that students who were assigned with the movie project were more excited than the other ones. The reason for this excitement was not clear though; among many possibilities, it could be because students were more comfortable using iMovie as they had had previous experiences using a video editor – and then they were happy because they thought the task would be easier; or simply because making movies was seen as more fun than creating a digital magazine or a photo story. The preference for making movies and the reasons for that would become clearer over the course of the program as the other workshops were delivered, and this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 12.

8.5.2 WORKSHOP 2 - *digital magazine*

The second workshop was devoted to creating a Digital Magazine on the topic 'refugee crisis'. The app used was *Book Creator* and students found extremely easy to learn how to use it. Their task was to research about the topic and then report their findings in the format of a digital magazine, where they could not only use text and images, like in a conventional magazine, but also video and audio.

The topic 'refugee crisis' is a very serious topic involving themes linked to history, geography, biology and human affairs. This was the workshop where students spent the longest time doing the research and collecting information for their final product, as they had to produce the content for the magazine based on the information they found online. Unlike the other workshops, this one did not give too much space for students to use their imagination and creativity to create the content; instead, even though they gave their opinions and showed their own point of view, the practice was more about a formal account on the information they found online about refugee crisis.

The fact that this workshop required students to spend more time doing the research and to be more careful with the information they gathered may explain the fact that this activity was regarded as the least useful by students in school A (48% of students) and the second least useful by students in the other two schools (23% of students in both of them). It is important to mention here that the meaning of the word 'useful' that was present in the question they answered (*which workshop of the Media Literacy Program was the most useful for you, and which one was the least useful? Why?*) assumes a connotation of *appreciation* and *joy* in students' answers; as the qualitative component of the question in the survey shows, participants would justify their choices usually saying that they found workshops useful or not by how much they *liked* or *enjoyed* them.

The fact that students had to spend long time doing the research coupled with the fact that they did not have too much fun creating the artefact reflects their reactions and answers about the workshop. "(The least useful was) *Magazine because it was boring*", replied a student from school C.

Figure 8.9 - Two pages of a digital magazine created by students in school B

8.5.3 WORKSHOP 3 - *photo story*

In the third workshop students had to create a Photo Story on the topic 'food and the environment'. The app used for this task was the photo editor Pixlr, another app that students said was very easy and quick to learn how to use. Food and environment is a very broad topic and students could choose any sub-topic they wanted, such as vegetarianism, for instance, or the impact of pesticides on the environment. It was totally up to them and most groups decided to narrow down the topic in order to make it simpler.

Unlike the previous workshops, this one required students to use a lot of imagination and creativity to create their digital product. They had to use between 5 and 10 photos to tell a story about the chosen topic, which is a much more abstract task compared to developing a report for a digital magazine. This was the task that required the most time from me to explain to students what exactly they had to do. Photo Storytelling is not something that students would grasp very easily; on the contrary, even after the explanation, students required further assistance in order to understand how they could construct their digital product. To tell a story using images – with very little or absolutely no text – is not an easy task, and it is one which students are not really used to. This may explain the reason why most students in school B (77%) and C (54%) said that this was the workshop that they found the least useful of all. In school A 26% of students said the same, coming in second right after the Digital Magazine workshop.

This workshop was not only difficult in terms of the language and modes of communication involved in the construction of the digital project, but it was also an experience which many students did not quite understand what was the purpose of. As a student from school B put it: "*I didn't understand the point of it*". "[I did not like] *the picture story – I found because it was less practical (up and moving). I didn't enjoy it as much*", responded a student from school A.
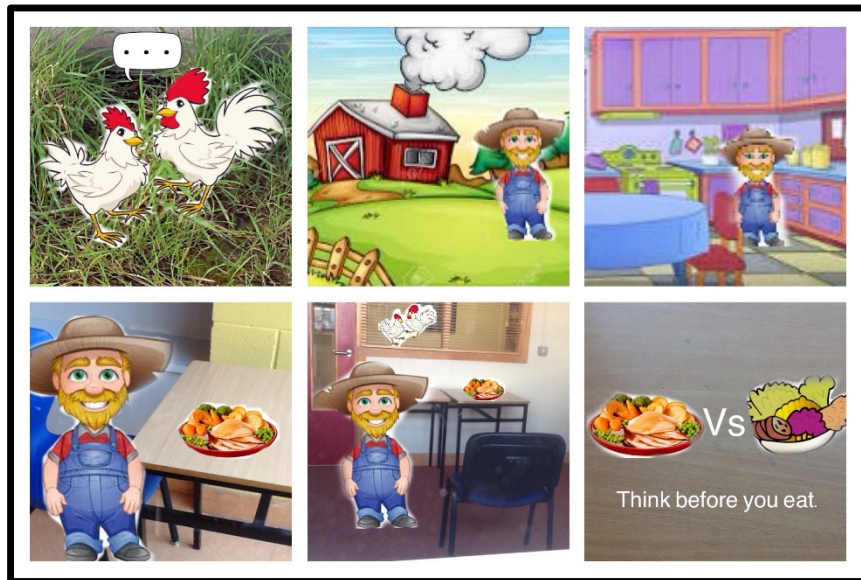
Figure 8.10 – Photo Story where students used a mix of photos taken by them and other images they downloaded from the internet.

8.5.4 WORKSHOP 4 - *movie*

In the fourth workshop students had to create a movie and the topic of the day was Shakespeare. Participants were told that they could either create a digital product about the play writer or about one of his works, and the majority of them chose the latter.

It was clear to see the disappointment of students when they were introduced to the topic of the day. When asked about the reasons for this disappointment, they would mention it was "boring" or "difficult", and also that they already had Shakespeare during Junior Cycle so they were not interested in that. On the other hand, making a movie is definitely something that excited students a lot.

The app iMovie was the most difficult app to learn about among the three used during the ML program. Even students who had already had some experience with video editor software required some assistance from the researcher. This is because iMovie is not as user-friendly, intuitive and straightforward as the other apps; it is a little more complex. The interesting part is that this complexity did not put students off; on the contrary, they were very excited about learning how to use it and exploring all the editing possibilities presented in the app.

Creating a movie involves a lot of tasks, and this means that everyone in the group is involved and engaged in the activity. Some students would be very comfortable

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acting, others would prefer playing a role as director and camera operator, and others would prefer to edit the movie. Students also enjoyed the fact that they could explore other spaces in the school in order to find the perfect setting for the movie.

Here there is an interesting point: a topic that most students do not like, but creating a digital artefact that most of them do like a lot. The result is that the workshop about film was regarded as the most useful one by most students in school B (73%) and C (51%), and it was the second most useful for students in school A (16%). This suggests that when students have fun in a learning activity, even if the topic is not their favourite one, they will still enjoy participating. "[The most useful workshop was] *Film Making – I thought I could express myself more and be creative*", replied a student from school B.
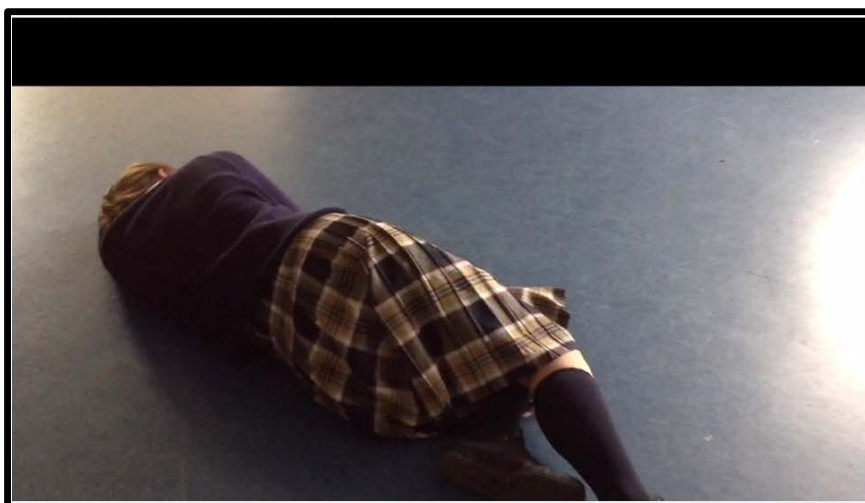
Figure 8.11 – Movie adaptation for the play Romeo and Juliet.

8.5.5 WORKSHOP 5 - *TV AD*

In the final day students had to create a TV ad on the topic "the world in 2048". Basically, students had to find one big issue faced by humanity 30 years from present day, imagine a solution for this problem in the form of a product or a service, and then create a TV ad to sell it. The topic was well received by most students most probably because it was not a closed one: it allowed students to choose among many different options available to them and use their imagination and creativity to explore many different ideas.

The app used for this activity was iMovie, which was again very welcomed by students. However, unlike the movie in the previous workshop where students had a lot of freedom to choose what to do, in this activity the participants had to create the film in the format of a TV ad, which requires certain rules in terms of how they are going to effectively sell their product. For this reason, students had to spend more time planning the activity and coming up with ideas about how they would convince people to buy their product.

Since they had used iMovie in the previous workshops they were much more comfortable this time with the app and required very little assistance from me. They could fully explore the app's features and make the most of it in order to be creative and achieve their goals. Just like the previous workshop, they were very excited about acting, filming and editing the film, and also exploring different settings in the school. Another important element of this workshop is that TV ads are part of students' everyday lives and for them it is interesting to learn more about how ads are made and how they can actually influence people's decisions. "*We see it so much in our daily lives*", a student from school A responded. The TV ad workshop was the favourite one for 62% of students in school A, the second favourite in school C (34% of students) and the third favourite in school B (7% of students). "*I liked the advertising [workshop] because it was fun and I learned about different adverting techniques*", said another student from school A.

Figure 8.12 – A TV Ad created by one of the groups. They are selling a bottle that can turn dirty water into fresh water in a matter of seconds.

8.6 The research

8.6.1 THE PARTICIPANT OBSERVER

One of the main challenges for me was to carry out field observation whilst facilitating the activity on my own. One of the advantages of the Media Literacy program is that its format allowed me a lot of free time to observe students. This is because, apart from the first part of the workshop where theory had to be delivered and students required more direction and attention in their discussions, the rest of the activity was basically students working on their own with timely interventions by me. So, during this time I was able to walk around and take notes of actions and impressions of students' learning experiences.

I took notes of students working in groups, discussing their project and planning out how they would complete their task. During the production of the artefact – taking of pictures and recording of video, for instance – I would follow the groups around paying attention to their conversion and actions, finding nuances in their behaviour. When appropriate, I also engaged in informal conversation with students in order to have a better understanding about how and why they were doing what they were doing.

The notes were registered in a small notebook and after the activity transcribed to a word document in order to guarantee its safety and accuracy. I would also spend some time reading my notes and reflecting about the activity of day in order to include any appropriate comments that could enhance the description of the events.

8.6.2 FOCUS GROUP

The focus group with students took place after the end of each session. I requested one member of each group to participate – a different member every day, when the number of groups in the school allowed – so the number of students varied from 4 to 6, depending on the school. The small number of people turned out to be a good point as it allowed a more intimate conversation and the engagement of all students.

There were two main challenges for the focus group. The first one concerned time. I had to keep a very strict track of time during the workshop in order to have enough

time for the final conversation without rushing students. This sometimes was quite complicated as the final part of the workshop – the presentation of the digital artefacts – would rather often turn into a very fruitful debate among students, which was also a source of information that was being recorded by me. For this reason, I had to occasionally speed up the presentation in order to guarantee enough time for the focus group.

The second challenge was about keeping students engaged and motivated to participate in the discussion. First of all, most students would not volunteer themselves very easily to participate, and some of them made clear they were very shy and had some difficulties in speaking in public. Even with a small group, some students tended to remain quiet during the session, and I had to try my best to motivate these students to engage in the conversation. Still, sometimes the answers received where just a yes or no without any further elaboration. I then would have to ask the question again, sometimes giving more details about the topic being discussed so that students would feel more comfortable to give better answers.

Another issue involved in keeping them engaged and motivated is that students would normally be very tired after around four hours participating in a workshop. Some of them clearly wanted to rush to school exit to go home or have their lunch with friends. Even though I explained more than once the importance of the focus group for the research project, not all students would understand it – or even care about it.

Summary

The objective of this first chapter was to introduce the reader to the main elements involved in this research project: the participating schools and how their students, facilities and teaching resources had an impact on the research; the Media Literacy programme and the teaching experience, giving some important details about each learning stage within the plan proposed for the activity and how both researcher and students responded to that; and the research experience, showing some challenges faced by the researcher while observing and talking with students.

This introduction is intended to give support to next three chapters, whereby the three main themes that emerged from the data will be discussed and analysed. The three main themes, which relate to the media literacy model described in chapter 5,

are meaning-making practices; information literacy and critical awareness; and cultural engagement and creativity.

Chapter 9

Meaning-making practices

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter the first theme that emerged from the data analysis is presented and discussed. This theme encompasses the data related to the research sub-questions that inquire about how students communicate; how they express themselves using different digital and non-digital resources; how they create and interpret meaning through different systems of representation; and how they tell stories using different modes of communication. The theoretical framework used to analyse this set of data is based on the first four categories of the Medial Literacy Model presented in chapter 5: 1. Language; 2. Meaning and Representation; 3. Media Platforms; and 4. Storytelling. First, the reader will be introduced to some general features of the five workshops in terms of the technology available, the digital artefacts created and how students engaged with the learning activity. Next, the chapter will explore the opportunities that the digital technologies offered to students in terms of the different modes of communication available to them – writing, image, gesture, colour etc. – and how they used these modes to create their digital artefacts and reflect on the experience. Finally, the chapter draws on some key emerging themes in Media Literacy to discuss how students can use digital media in the classroom to engage in both critical and creative discussions around media, and how they express themselves in unique ways through the creation of digital artefacts.

9.2 The workshops and students' general impressions on media formats

Media literacy is about the use of mediated communication. Young people belonging to the same age group of the participants in this project – 15/16 years of age - routinely use many different media platforms to communicate with their

friends and family. Texting messages on their mobile phones, sending pictures with captions through Snapchat or posting videos and photos on Instagram or Facebook are some of the everyday activities of many of these teenagers. Communicating in this digital world involves acquiring new knowledge and new abilities such as, for instance, understanding how devices, software and applications work; familiarizing with the design and affordances of digital platform; and making sense of the meaning-making resources available to communicate (Hobbs and Tuzel, 2017; Marsh et al., 2017; Simpson and Walsh, 2017; Burnett and Merchant, 2018)

The media literacy program used in this research project was developed taking those new knowledge and skills into consideration. Students had the opportunity to explore three different applications – Book Creator, Pixler and iMovie - and create four different digital artefacts: a digital magazine, a photo story, a movie and a TV ad. Each of these formats allowed students to experiment different modes of communication – text, image, sound, moving image, colour etc. – and tell stories using different formats and narratives.

Workshop 2 was dedicated to introducing students to the very basics of semiotics and multimodality theory (please refer to chapter 6). The idea was to show students that people can use many different *languages* or *semiotic resources* in order to convey an idea, a concept or a thought; and that these semiotic resources are related to the modes of communication attached to them. Semiotics and Multimodality are disciplines taught in graduate and post-graduate courses of media or communications (or both). They are not simple subjects and even mature students sometimes struggle to fully understand them. This of course was taken into consideration when designing the workshop, making sure that students would have access to just the basics of this field of study.

The practical activity in workshop 2 was to create a digital magazine on the topic 'the refugee crisis' using Book Creator. Following brief introduction about modes of communication and meaning-making resources, students were expected to reflect on the many different ways they could tell the story about the refugee crisis using different modes of communication available in the app – writing, image, moving-image, sound and colour. The analysis of the digital artefacts created by the participants reveals that this kind of practice using digital technology enable students to experiment different ways of telling a story using different meaning-making resources. Also, the analysis of transcripts from both students' presentation

and the focus groups suggests that the practice can indeed promote a very fruitful reflection on how different modes 'carry' different meanings and how different arrangement of modes produce different results.

The majority of the groups of students created their digital magazine as if it was any other ordinary magazine, i.e., they simply used text, colours and image. This in principle suggested that students did not perceive the use of sound - as in music or narration - or video as something useful for their magazines. However, further investigation showed that the reasons for not using these resources were connected with lack of time, and also because text, image and colour were technically much easier to use than music and video.
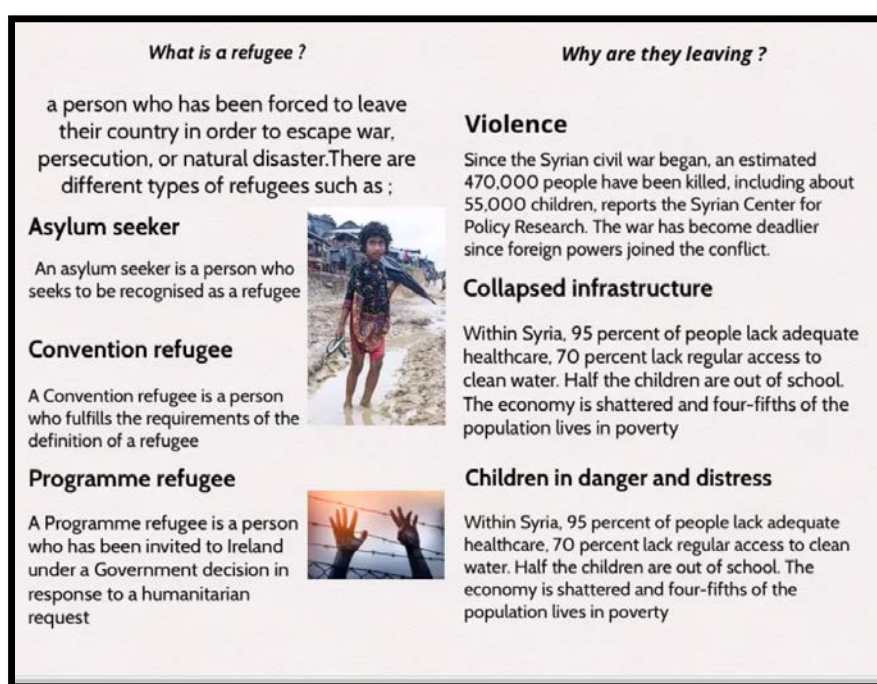
Figure 9.1 – An example of two pages of a digital magazine created during workshop 2 in School A. Students did not insert any audio or video, only text and image.

A conversation with students that created this magazine in school A shows an example of why some students did not use videos or sound in their magazine.

RESEARCHER – As I can see your magazine is a very traditional magazine, we could say. We have text and image. Erm… So, any reason why you didn't want to use, like, for example, video, or audio, or more interactive resources?

Student – If we had more time we'd have put that in, but we were just, like, focusing on the facts.

RESEARCHER – Ok. So if you had more time, what would you have done?

Student – Maybe put in videos, or like, sounds. Like an interview with a refugee.

An interesting aspect about the production of the magazine was the balance between text and image. Some groups decided to create a magazine full of text, with a lot of descriptions and explanations about the refugee crisis. Other groups decided to create a more visual artefact, with plenty of photos, drawings and infographics. The way students decide to combine text and image is something very revealing. As it will be discussed in the next segment, in some cases, the images have a more demonstrative role, simply illustrating the content of the text. If the images were removed, very little or even nothing would be lost in terms of meaning. In other cases, however, images had a more important role, serving as a complement to the text without which the meaning would be severely affected. In more extreme cases, yet, the images had a central role in the production of meaning, with an informational load equal or even bigger than of the text.

The combination of text and image was also present in workshop 3, where students had to create a photo story on the topic 'food and environment'. On this day students did not receive any content on semiotics or multimodality; instead, they learned the basics about photo manipulation and discussed the use of photographs in photojournalism, advertising and social media. For the practical activity, participants were told they should avoid using anything that was not image for this task – photos, cartoons, emojis etc. -, trying to restrict the use of text to the minimum level.
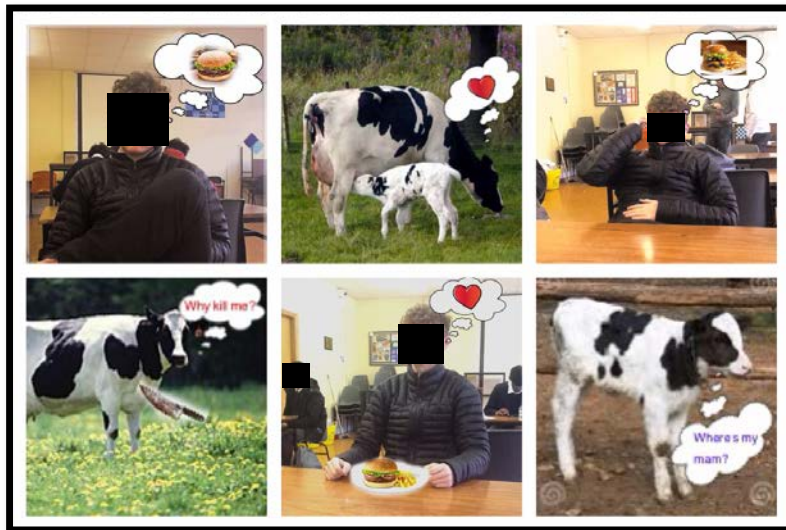
Figure 9.2 – An example of a Photo Story created during workshop 2 in School C.

This task was the one that demanded the most from students in terms of abstract thinking. A magazine, even a digital one, is something that teenagers are more used to in terms of format, layout and content. A photo story, on the other hand, is a medium a little harder to grasp. Creating a meaningful photo story demands a lot of planning and organization. Students were required to choose a topic within the main theme – such as vegetarianism or animals rights, for instance – and then decide how they would create a consistent and meaningful short story using images they could both download from the internet and take using their iPads. It was not uncommon during the activity to have students asking me how exactly they were supposed to tell a story using photos. Moreover, as already presented in the previous chapter, some students did not even understand what the purpose and usefulness of the activity was, and in two out of the three schools the workshop 3 was voted as the least useful of them. In addition to that, the charts below give a good idea about how students understand the idea of using only images in order to convey meaning. When asked about which format they would use to get a message across in an online conversation, and to inform or explain a very important issue to the general public, only few of them chose image/photography, which suggests that participants understand that creating a story using pictures is not an easy task – and one they are not used to – and may not be as effective as other formats to convey a message.
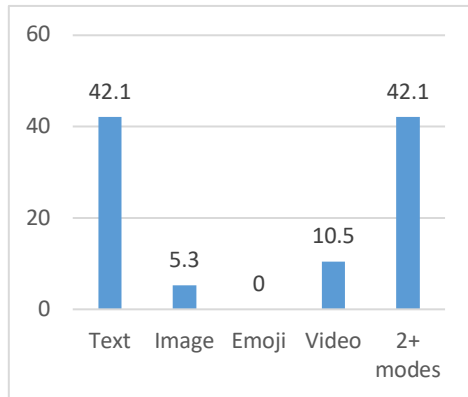
Pre-research   Post-research
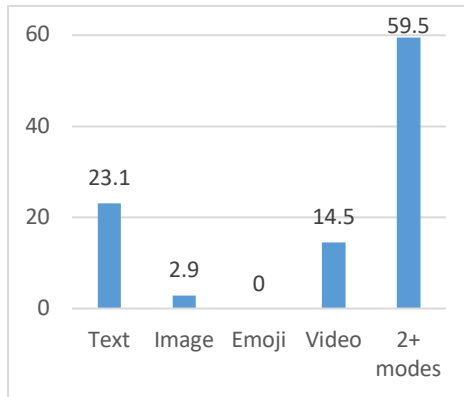
Figure 9.3 – Charts from both pre and post-research surveys with the answers to the question 8 - '*When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:*'.
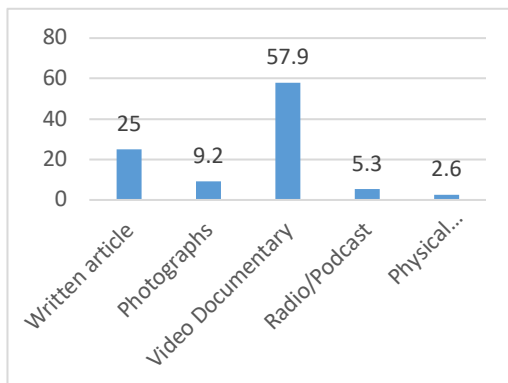
Pre-research   Post-research
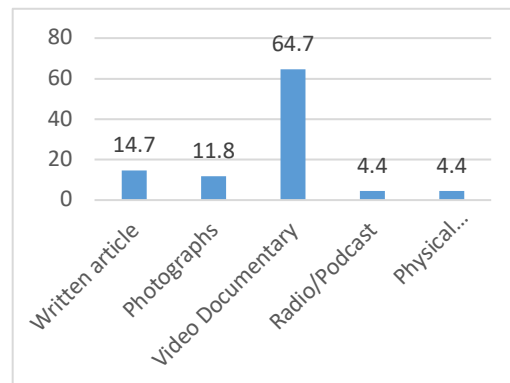
Figure 9.4 – Charts from both pre and post-research surveys with the answers to the question 9 - '*If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why?*'

If, on the one hand, students are not used to photo storytelling, on the other hand this is not the case with video. Moving-image storytelling has long been embedded in young people's popular culture through TV series and movies and, more recently, through videos created by ordinary people and shared through digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp and Snapchat. Even though some students had little or no experience creating a movie, the practice seemed to be much more intuitive; the difficulties were mostly technical, and related to construction of narrative or

storytelling. During workshops 4 and 5, participants had the opportunity to create movies about Shakespeare (workshop 4) and a TV add selling a product (workshop 5). In both occasions, they used iPads to record the videos and the app iMovie to edit them. As discussed in the previous chapter, most students felt very comfortable shooting their videos with the iPads, and they learned very quickly how to use iMovie.

Figure 9.5 – An example of a movie created during workshop 4 in School B.

Charts on page 6 show that students consider video as the best digital format to communicate an important issue to the general public, and this opinion only becomes stronger among participants during the ML programme – the number of students who shared this opinion jumped from 57.9% before the programme to 64.7% after it. Some qualitative answers given by students in question 9 of the survey suggest that participants consider videos to be a more complete medium to convey an important message. Some answer from students:

Q9 (c) – It's much more interactive and engaging.

Q9 (c) – Because videos have a better chance of going viral.

Q9 (c) – People don't always want to read long articles. Video provide minimal effort for the viewer and is more engaging.

Q9 (c) – A long article may seem boring to most people and a video documentary can show pictures and videos making it more entertaining.

Q9 (c) – Video documentaries catch people's attention and hold it for longer. You can use music, talking and movement to make the message dramatic and more influential.

Q9 (c) – Because if it was a written article the person writing it could be making some of it up where at least you know it's true if it is a video.

Q9 (c) – People use their eyes more than the ears to believe things nowadays so this would get the message across easier.

These answers show how many different qualities students see in video as a media format, some of them very naively, such as the case of understanding that video is more reliable because one can cheat with text but not with video; other ones, though, show some specific benefits that students see in digital video. It can go viral more easily. It is more visual than text or radio, so it is more engaging and holds people attention for longer. It does not require too much effort from the audience, like a long text. It can combine both image and moving-image, so it is more entertaining.

Students also had the opportunity to use video in their digital magazine, even though the majority of them ended up not using it for reasons discussed previously in this chapter. In conversations with students about their decisions to use or not videos in their digital magazines, it is possible to understand better how they see features of video in comparison with other modes of communication.

A conversation with students in school A, during a presentation in workshop 1:

RESEARCHER – *So you decided to start your magazine with the video. Why?*

STUDENT 1 – *'Cos so people know what they are reading.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok, so you think… You think the video… do you think… I mean, comparing the video with the text, what is the difference for you? Why do you think it's better to start…*

STUDENT 2 – *It attracts more people.*

STUDENT 1 – The video keeps them interested before they start reading.

STUDENT 2 – I think videos would work well, like, to keep people interested, but…

STUDENT 4 – There are more information on text, like, there's not that many videos that, like, have that much information about freedom of speech.

RESEARCHER – Ok, so you think that when you use text, it's more like in depth…

STUDENT 4 – yes.

STUDENT 2 – and most of the videos were like… 7 or 8 minutes long.

RESEARCHER – Ok, great. Very good.

In the same presentation, student 2 reinforces the idea that text is better for a more in-depth approach, but still people prefer to watch videos:

STUDENT 2 – Text will, like, have more details and stuff but video would be good at the start to give people an option if they just, like, want to continue reading or maybe access the video. So if, like, instead of reading a big long article there's just a video at the start explaining everything. They may not need to read it but…

In school C, during a focus group after workshop 2 (digital magazine), a student tries to articulate ideas around video, audio and text.

STUDENT 1 – To be honest, like, the video and audio they are kind of the easier forms of communication. It is easier to kind of, like, take up. For reading, say, for example, most people they see a lot of text, they are not going to start reading it. Like, it's much easier to take up things, say, from a video because it's just given to you. Like, you have to watch the video, whereas, like, written is a little bit more difficult.

In the same focus group, the researcher asks a student why his group decided not to use video in their digital magazine:

STUDENT 3 – Like, our first call was to have a video in it… Just to show (inaudible). Most people, like, rather than just reading text they really want to…

Most people are more, like, into it when they see a video. They are more concerned, maybe…

RESEARCHER – *They are more concerned?*

STUDENT 3 – *Yes, when there's audio and video… so than just text.*

RESEARCHER – *ok. And do you think that this is more appealing to people?*

STUDENT 3 – *Yes*

These segments reinforce some general concepts and ideas that most participants have around video. According to them, using video in their magazines attracts people's attention and keeps them interested; video is also easy to use and to watch especially compared to *'a lot of text'*, as one student puts it. Another student even suggests that people get more concerned about a sensitive cause – in this case, the refugee crisis – when they see a video compared to when they read a text, for instance. It is interesting to observe that students' answers do not go beyond these general considerations of comparing video with other modes of communication, and checking these ideas against observations and informal talks with students during the sessions it becomes clear that participants have a very strong bias towards acknowledging video as an entertaining, captivating and efficient digital media format following their own experience with those different digital media formats in their everyday lives.

Students' enthusiasm with video changes when it comes to messages exchanged in social media platforms. The charts on page 6 show that students do not regard video alone as their best choice of communication when it comes to get a message across on social media. Some of the qualitative answers in question 8 of the survey suggest that the main reason for that is because text alone or the combination of text and image – be that a picture or an emoji – is quick to create and effective in the outcome. When thinking about speed and efficiency, two important features when chatting with someone on these platforms, students understand that video gives them only the latter, and for this reason text or the combination of 2 or more modes of communication have their preference.

Students' impressions on different media platforms reflect the way they engage with these media in their everyday activities, and also their experience creating

digital artefacts during the ML programme. The next section will explore in more detail how each mode of communication was used and reflected upon by the participants.

9.3 Modes and their functions

Workshops 2 and 3 were very helpful to understand how students make sense of each mode of communication, especially text and image, and how they perceive their function and their informational load. The analysis of the data reveals that when using digital media technologies students have the ability, even though still at a very basic level, to make choices about which modes they are going to use based on their understanding of how these modes will create meaning and convey information. A few students were even capable of articulating these ideas in a more elaborated way. This analysis will be presented next taking into consideration the most relevant modes of communication used by students during the creation of their digital artefacts: writing, colour, image and video.

9.3.1 WRITING

Field observations showed that there was a general perception among the participants of the project that writing is a more formal mode compared to the other ones. When asked about the reasons why writing was the chosen mode to explain or describe something, students would strongly associate it with the concepts of *seriousness* and *depth*. In the digital magazine, for instance, even though there were at least five different modes available to them, the preferred one was writing and one of the reasons for that, according to students, was the fact that the topic (refugee crisis) was a very serious one.

On the other hand, the writing mode was also seen as a problem in certain situations, and this has a lot to do with the current way people – especially youngsters – communicate digitally. The process of sending and receiving messages has become very fast in the current era, and young people have become used to a system of communication that is very direct and dynamic. Young people increasingly crave for information that comes in 'small packets'; that is, they don't want to spend too

much time reading or watching anything, even if this comes at the expense of acquiring a knowledge that is too superficial (European Commission, 2017)

The data analysis reveals that the mode writing is seen sometimes as problematic because, according to many students, people do not like to read long texts. Text is also seen as 'boring' and for this reason if one chooses writing as their mode of communication the receiver of the message might lose their interest very quickly. This is due to students' own observation about how they and their peers use writing in their everyday lives. They assume that people do not like to read long texts because that is the common understanding they have among themselves within this digital media culture.

A fragment of a conversation with students in school A during focus group after workshop 2. They were talking about their preferences in terms of choices of modes.

RESEARCHER – You prefer pictures. Why?

STUDENT 1 – I feel like… reading use too much effort. Videos, some videos are too long to watch all of it and you get bored half way through.

STUDENT 2 – Yes, that's true.

RESEARCHER – And what about text?

STUDENT 2 – You have to concentrate to read.

A fragment of the same conversation:

STUDENT 6 – I think when people see, like, big loads of writing they are, like, I don't want to read it. They kind of, like, ignore it. A video is more appealing to them.

Text is perceived to be very effective for short conversations and to convey quick and simple messages. It is also seen as very good for a more in-depth description or analysis of something, even though in this case students admit that not everyone will be willing to immerse themselves into a long piece of writing. Charts on page

6 show that in the pre-research survey, when asked about what is the most efficient way to get a message across when chatting on social media, text was chosen as the best sole mode for this task.

Some qualitative answers from the survey for students that selected *text* as their favourite mode in question 8:

Q8 (a) – It is fast and clear

Q8 (a) – Easiest way to get your point across and easiest way to explain something.

Q8 (a) – It is easy to receive straightaway, and it is not a complicated or hard thing to do.

Q8 (a) – Text is like talking

Q8 (a) – as it is straightforward and not confusing

Q8 (a) – Very easy and fast to do while being very accurate

Q8 (a) – Gets to the point very clearly and simply.

Q8 (a) – you can say exactly what you want

Q8 (a) – it is the most efficient way of expressing yourself.

Writing is, together with reading, the main skill associated with the traditional definition of literacy. Writing has been in use since long before the emergence of the new digital media technologies, and it continues to play its part even though now it 'competes' with many other modes available in the various digital platforms (Benzemer and Kress, 2016). Writing has also changed in format and style to fit into the new digital world: new words and expressions have appeared; old words have been shortened to speed up communication. In certain cases, it is difficult for adults to understand what is being talked about due to the way young people change words and expressions and crate or incorporate new meanings into their language (Van Dijk et. al., 2016).

This research project did not aim to carry out an analysis and discussion about these new features in the mode writing and the practical consequences of its use by young people during a learning activity. However, the data suggests that text continues to

be highly regarded as an important form of communication by students. It is simple and quick for simple talks; straightforward and accurate, avoiding misunderstanding; and it allows in-depth exploration of a topic. The digital technologies used in the ML programme allowed students to explore the mode writing in its more traditional form, such as when students created the digital magazine, and also in more inventive ways, such as when participants combined text and image to create a photo story, or when they used text to explain something in video. Those uses of text in combination with other modes will be explored further ahead in the chapter.

9.3.2 COLOUR

The fact that most students opted for a more traditional layout for their digital magazines does not mean, however, that they did not give importance to how they were going to use the modes of communication. It was very revealing how students payed great attention to the use of colours, for example. Some digital magazines had a very interesting combination of colours, in some cases highlighting a statement, expressing some kind of emotion or simply adhering to the content.

Figure 9.6 – The front cover and two pages of a digital magazine created in school B during workshop 2.

A conversation with students that created this digital magazine review how they made decisions about the colours in the digital magazine:

RESEARCHER – Ok, so this is the cover. Beautiful. Why did you decide to do a black cover? Any specific reason?

STUDENT 1 – 'Cos, like, it stands out…

STUDENT 3 – And 'cos they had to wear black. They didn't have to, but they decided to wear black.

RESEARCHER – Why did they decide to wear black?

STUDENT 2 – It was for feminism.

RESEARCHER – All right, so you decided to do a black cover because the women decided to wear black during the Golden Globe. Good.

(later in the same conversation)

RESEARCHER – And what about the colours? I love the colours. Why did you decide to use these colours?

STUDENT 3 – We just thought of the theme… Golden Globe thing.

RESEARCHER – All right. So the golden colour for the Golden Globes.

Some frequent words and expressions used by students when talking about their choices for the colours they used were "highlight" and "stands out".
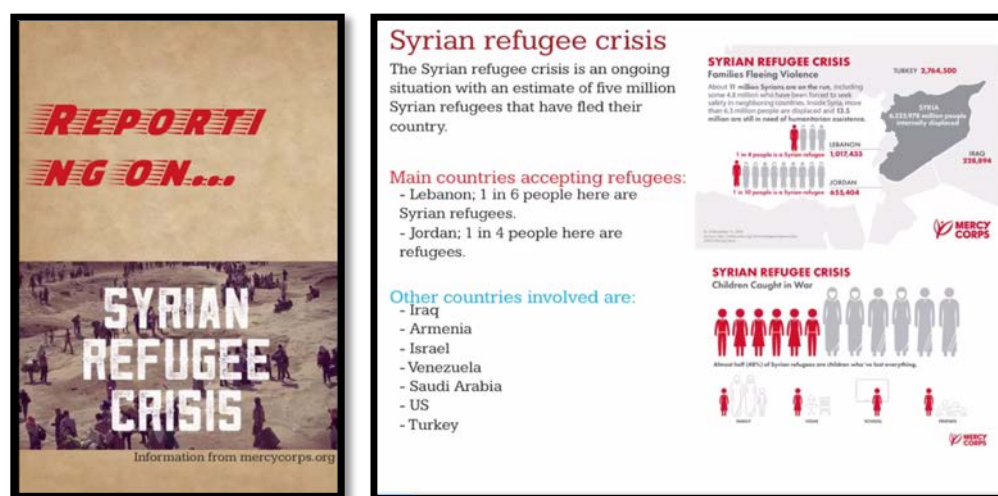
Figure 9.7 – The front cover and two pages of a digital magazine created in school C during workshop 2.

A conversation with students that created this digital magazine:

RESEARCHER - The red, why did you go for red for the main title?

STUDENT 3 – It stands out.

STUDENT 1 – Yes. It is eye-catching, so you know exactly, erm…

STUDENT 2 – That's, like, important.

RESEARCHER - Great. And also here you used different colours for the sub-titles as well. Do you think that this helps people to read through…

STUDENT 1 – Yes, I think it makes easier to understand, like, to know where your eye should be looking to first. You should not just… You should read what is going to be about before you actually read all the information that is given.
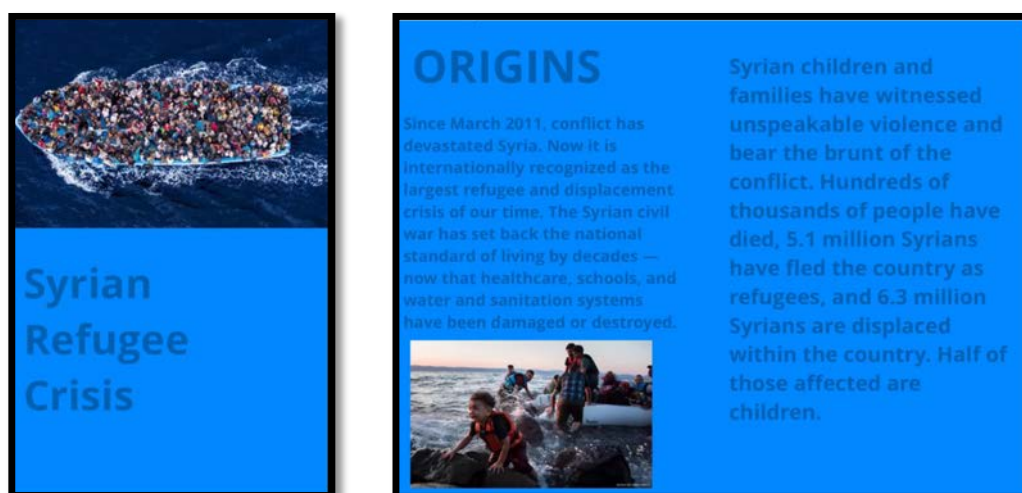
Figure 9.8 – The front cover and two pages of a digital magazine created in school A during workshop 2.

A conversation with students that created this digital magazine:

RESEARCHER - Tell me about your decision to use colours.

STUDENT 1 – We just, like, used cold colours, 'cos it's just like, erm… it's not really a kind of happy subject.

Colours convey meaning in various ways (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) and the production of a digital magazine was a good opportunity for students to reflect on the uses of colours as a mode of communication. This does not mean that all groups of students created magazines paying a lot of attention to colours; there were groups that did not use colours at all, and others that used colours in a way that was very confusing and did not have any semiotic purpose other than making the page colourful.
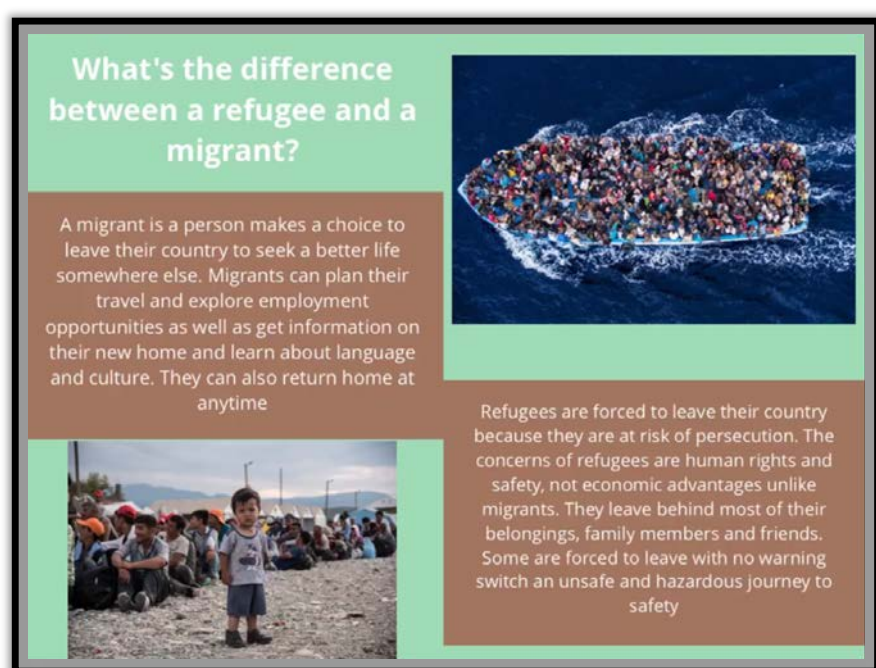
Figure 9.9 – Two pages of a magazine where students used colours without any specific purpose, and struggled to articulate ideas around their choices during the presentation.

The digital technologies used by students allowed them to use colours and play with them while creating their digital artefacts. In some cases, students wanted to use colours simply to mark a boundary between different sections in the magazine. In other cases, students wanted to highlight an important message or title, making something *stand out* from the rest on the page. And there were some instances where it was possible to see a more elaborate reflection of the use of colours. In the first example (**figure 9.6**), the girls decided to use the colour black because the women that attended the Golden Globes wore black as a support for the #metoo movement. So, they consciously made a choice based on a social aspect involved

in the ceremony they were reporting on, and at the same time used the colour black to show their support for the cause (this same magazine will be analysed from a critical perspective in the next chapter). In the second example (**figure 9.7**), one student said that the use of different colours in the title was meant to drive the attention of the reader, because in his opinion "*you should read what is going to be about before you actually read all the information that is given*". That is a very insightful way of analysing the choices for colour, and it demonstrates awareness of the different ways people might look at a magazine's page following different reading paths (Kress, 2003: 10) depending on the way the information is organized. Finally, in the third example above (**figure 9.8**) students used the colour blue because, according to one student, the topic they were reporting on – refugee crisis – was not "*a happy subject*". In this case, the colour was used to set the mood of the magazine.

It is important to mention that, in some cases, the conversations around colours did not result in any good reflection on the choices that were made, with some students limited to saying things like '*I chose this colour because I like it*' or simply '*I don't know why I chose this colour*'. However, the analysis of data suggests that when students are compelled to look at their choices of colours in a more significant way, they tend to look for meanings, even if they have little or absolutely no knowledge about colours as meaning-making resources. This effort to reflect on their choices and search for meanings eventually leads to some students being able to articulate ideas around the uses of colours, such like the ones presented in the dialogues above. The digital technologies provide students with the opportunity to use colours to express themselves, create meanings and organize information according to their needs, selecting priorities and creating reading paths for the reader. It also provides the opportunity to reflect on the experience and discuss the choices in a more significant way.

9.3.3 IMAGE

Students demonstrate some understanding about how photographs work as a language and images in general as a mode of communication. The vast majority of them would not choose an image to get a message across on social media or to inform the general public about a very important issue (**figure 9.3**). However, that

does not mean that students think images are not useful for communication; on the contrary, the data analysis reveals that the mode image is highly associated with *truthfulness*. Even though participants had a chance to discuss and learn more about photographic manipulation, which included a demonstration of how people can edit photos in a deceitful way, the general perception among students that images are more reliable and trustworthy than text did not have a significant change throughout the ML program.

In the next example, students from School B created a very visual magazine, and the researcher asked them to explain their choices in terms of images and design:

Figure 9.10 – Cover and one page of a digital magazine created in the workshop 2, school B.

RESEARCHER – So why did you decide to go with this picture?

STUDENT 3 – It grabs, it grabs the tension. It shows how bad the situation is and, people, like, people tend to erm… I am searching for a word…

RESEARCHER – Help them.

STUDENT 3 – No, it's more, like, sympathise with them. It makes more dramatic in a way.

RESEARCHER **–** So you think this is appealing to people who would want to read your magazine?

STUDENT 3 – Yes. It's, it's the tension-grabbing that is the main point.

RESEARCHER **–** The tension…

STUDENT 3 – Yes.

RESEARCHER **–** Ok. And… here is very interesting because 2/3 of the page is a picture, and just a little text. So, it seems to me that on this page, the image is more important than the text itself.

STUDENT 2 – Yes

RESEARCHER **–** Why?

STUDENT 1 – The image says a lot more than the text here, so we thought the best would be to make it most of the page.

The main point here is that the effectiveness of images as a mode of communication is not only about the images themselves, but actually about *how* images are used to convey a message. The analysis of the digital magazines created by students show that photographs were used in different ways with different functions. Sometimes they had a more illustrative role, simply serving as a complement for the text (**figure 9.11**). In other cases, they had a more central and dominant role, where the amount of information carried by the image was equal or even bigger than the one contained in the text (**figure 9.10**).

Figure 9.11 – Two pages of a digital magazine created during workshop 2 in School C, where the images have a more illustrative role.

A conversation with the students that created this magazine:

RESEARCHER - I see that you have a good mixture of text and picture.

ALL STUDENTS – Yes.

RESEARCHER - So why is that? Because some people decide to have more text…

STUDENT 1 – To show people what is happening in the world.

STUDENT 2 – I don't think that reading loads of… writing…

RESEARCHER - You don't like to read loads?

STUDENT 2 – No, I like to have pictures as well.

STUDENT 3 – Pictures have meanings as well. Not just the sentences.

RESEARCHER - Some of them have meaning. So they are not only… Let's say, only a complement for the text, they have meanings themselves. Is it what you are saying?

STUDENT 3 – Yes. Like… If there was no text there, when you just look at that, one of their pictures they got on a boat, you know they are going to cross… the… like, to try to get out.

STUDENT 4 – Get out of Syria.

Those two examples show that students made conscious choices on how they were going to tell a story about the refugee crisis in a digital magazine, and that they were also able to articulate ideas around that, even if it was in a very basic level. For some students the images they found online were very meaningful and represented very well the drama experienced by those refugees trying to flee their countries and find another home; other students decided that it would be better to describe the crisis in more detail through writing, and that images could be used as a good complement to illustrate the narrative. This kind of activity allowed students to reflect on their choices in terms of communication and on how different modes work in different ways depending on how they are used and arranged.

In workshop 3, because students were asked to avoid text, they found much more difficult to plan and create a story using images as the main mode. In workshop 2, on the other hand, they could combine many modes together, and for this reason their perception of how images work as semiotic resources was very different. Despite that, some students succeeded in creating a meaningful photo story and some of them managed to articulate how was the planning, the creative process and the result of the digital artefact they produced.

Figure 9.12 – Two photo stories from school B (left) and school A (right) where students used only images.

In this example, students used both photos that they took from themselves and pictures they downloaded from the web. No text was used. The story on the left is about animals' rights and is very simple and straightforward. Students used the concept of junk food, represented by a burger, and healthy food, represented by a bowl of salad, in order to create a contrast of ideas that is resolved and explained by the expression of the cow. They used the same picture of a cow and just changed the position of its mouth in order to convey the idea that the cow is sad about the burger and happy with the bowl of salad. The message is simple: animals are not happy that people eat them, so we should stop doing this.

The story on the right is about the food chain, and students wanted to explain why it is important that we know the source of what people eat in order to keep a healthy diet. To do so, they got a few images from the web showing people handling food in a very clean and safe manner, from the farm to the table, and replaced the characters' faces with their own faces.

Those stories are two examples of how students can articulate their ideas in order to create meaning with images. In the first case, the participants simply used a dichotomy to create a contrast of ideas, and the meaning of the story was revealed by just changing the shape of the cow's mouth. In the second case, the structure of

the story is very important, since there is a sequence of events that must be understood so that the viewer can make sense of the food chain and understand why this is important for a healthy diet. The stories were conceived, planned and designed in different ways, but they both suggest that students can indeed create meaning using a more abstract approach to communication.
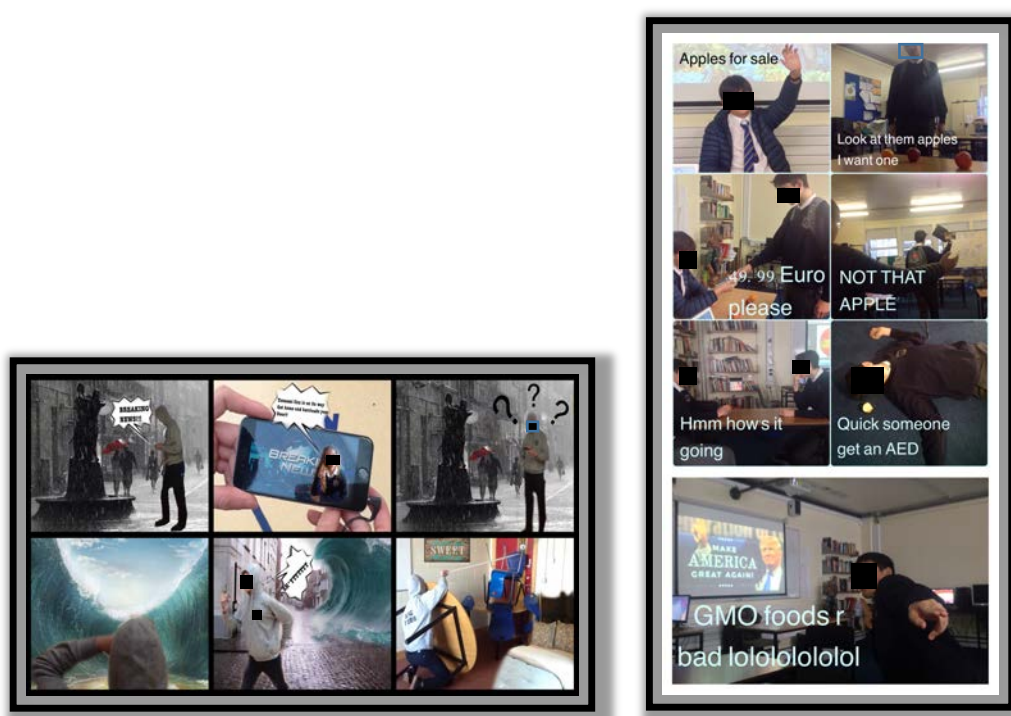
Figure 9.13 – Two photo stories from school A (left) and school B (right) where students used both writing and images. The stories follow a structure similar to a comic strip.

In these examples, students decided that a little text would be helpful to make the story clearer and more meaningful. What is interesting about those stories is that not only they need a structure based on a sequence of events in order to make sense, but they also require the writing mode, otherwise it would be very difficult to understand what is going on.

In the first story, which is about fake news, the first frame comes with the speech that says '*braking news!'.* In the second frame, a lady on the mobile phone is giving the news: '*Tsunami Con is on its way. Get home and barricade your door!!'*. The character gets confused, but then he sees the wave coming – representing the wave of fake news – and then he starts running home. The last frame shows him with a

barricade behind the door. Would it be possible to create this story with no texts? How to represent the idea of 'Tsunami Con', or the Tsunami of fake news, without text? There is probably a way of doing this, but it requires a lot of abstract thinking, imagination and, probably, a photo story with more than only six frames. Asked about why they decided to use writing in their photo story, students said: '*it would be impossible to create this story only with images'*; '*the text makes the story stronger*'; and '*text complements what the picture is showing*'. It is interesting to notice that, even though the only piece of text that really matters in the story is the one in the second frame, without it the story would be impossible to understand. Students put a lot of effort in the layout and manipulation of the pictures, however they ended up being totally dependent on one text that would explain all the rest of the story.

In the second story, text is present in every single frame and has a central role in the production of meaning. Students wanted to convey the message that GMO food (genetic modified food) is bad for people's health, and to do so they create a story where a character buys a GMO apple, eats it and dies. The last frame shows a guy laughing with an image of Donald Trump on the background while the text says '*GMO foods r bad lololololol'*.

Unlike the first story, this one did not require text in order to be understood. According to the students, the dialogue created by them was just a way of simplifying or making things easier for the viewer. One of the students put it in this way: '*we, like, we planned it out more like a sequence. So... Like, we have that, the images, and the dialogue. It's easier for people to understand'*. The character in the last frame is being very sarcastic and it is very revealing that they opted for a picture of Donald Trump behind him in order to reinforce the idea of sarcasm.
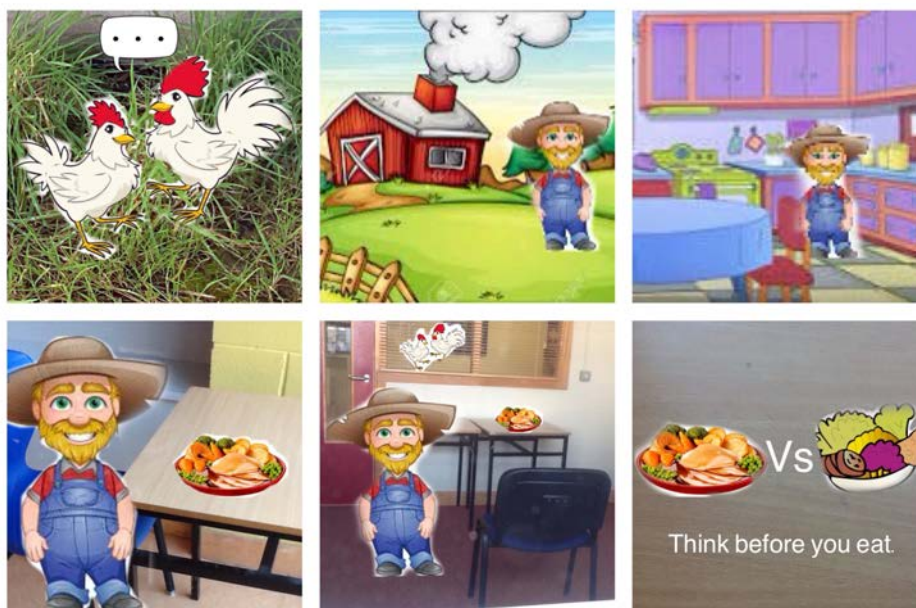
Figure 9.14 – A photo story from school A where students only used text in the last frame.

In this last example, text was used only in the last frame. Here it becomes clear some limitation of the image mode. The characters of this story are the farmer and the two chickens. The farmer decides to have a dinner and kills the chicken (the plate in frame 4 has chicken fillets on it). On frame 5 the chickens appear portrayed as ghosts, just to make sure everyone understands that they died. Up to this point the story does not have a clear point. The viewer, with some effort and abstraction, can understand that there were two chickens in the farm, that the farmer decided to eat them and that because of this the chickens are now dead. But there is nothing else in there; no point is being made. So, the students have one last frame to make their point, which is that vegetarianism is good for people. They decide to put the plate with the chicken and a plate with vegetables, creating this opposition of ideas. However, they did not want simply to say that one is good and the other is bad. They wanted to make the point that this comes down to people's choices, and that everyone should choose wisely. How do you convey this idea with only images? According to students this was not possible, so they resorted to text in the last frame: '*Think before you eat*'. The mode writing here was necessary in order to explain exactly the message students wanted to convey.

These three sets of photo stories show that students were able to use the digital technologies available to create meaningful stories through images, even though in

some cases they needed to use the mode writing as well. Modes have different modal resources and informational load, since no mode carries all the meaning displayed (Kress, 2003, Jewitt, 2008), and the way students combine them and articulate ideas around this combination suggests that they are able to think about the functions of each mode both separately and combined, even if superficially.

The following fragments provide more information on how students understand the relation between text and image, and how they articulate it.

Students during focus group in school C, discussing the combination of text and image:

STUDENT 4 – They work together basically.

RESEARCHER - They work together?

STUDENT 4 – Yes.

STUDENT 3 – Yes, text and image…

STUDENT 2 – The mix of all of them just make things… perfect.

RESEARCHER - Ok, but how does the image work with text? As an illustration…

STUDENT 4 – You read erm… when you read, when you are reading, and then there's the image, it gives you more of a visual about what it actually is, because you could be imagining something that is completely different… You couldn't probably imagine it in the same way it is in the picture. So… when you see the picture it gives you more… factual.

Two students from school C during a focus group after workshop 3 – where they created a photo story. The first one is explaining to the researcher why he thinks that the combination of writing and image is the best way to communicate. The second one tries to articulate ideas around which of the two modes are more persuasive:

STUDENT 3 – Like, from an image you might be able to say what is going on, but, with the text, it shows you the whole background, more information going… the context.

STUDENT 2 – You can make your own interpretation when it comes to pictures, but when it comes to text, it's people's opinion. So it's not… You kinda… You kinda forget your own opinion for a while when you are reading. And you are, like… You are kinda looking from their eyes. When you're looking at a picture you can make up your own opinion. So…

During a discussion about a presentation in school B, a student explains to the researcher that the more modes you use, the easier the communication gets:

RESEARCHER - Erm, you drew a little bit, you used text, so you used many different forms of communication. Do you think that the fact that you used many different forms of communication helped you to communicate your ideas?

STUDENT 2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER - Why?

STUDENT 3 – Because it's easier to understand. It's more clear. When you look at the picture and you, like, have text, or something, like, more than just a picture.

RESEARCHER - Ok, so if it was only picture you think it would be more difficult to understand.

STUDENT 3 – Yeah. If you can use different resources, more resources, it makes it easier.

The conversation about the combination of modes goes beyond the learning activity, as this is actually part of students' everyday practices. A dialogue between the researcher and students in school A about Snapchat and Instagram shows how they can articulate ideas around the use of images and writing, and also how these modes have different functions in different digital platforms:

RESEARCHER - So, let's say, I am talking about vegetarianism, then a put a picture of a vegetarian to illustrate what I am saying. But some people think that nowadays we can actually… erm, this combination can be stronger, so we can

actually use pictures with text to communicate together. You guys use this in your daily lives. In what ways do you do it?

STUDENT 1 and *STUDENT 3* – Snapchat.

STUDENT 3 – Like, everyone takes picture and then add text. That's pretty much…

STUDENT 2 – Snapchat is more a combination of a picture and words. But in, like, Instagram, just because of the caption, it's like mostly the picture and then the caption can explain a little bit.

RESEARCHER - Can you explain this better for me?

STUDENT 2 – Like, in Snapchat people illustrate what they are saying with the picture. But on Instagram it's the opposite, people, like… It's mainly the picture with a little bit of text to explain it.

RESEARCHER - Ok, ok. On Instagram… Yes. And do you think this works well?

STUDENT 2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER - In Instagram, I mean, the picture and a little title, or maybe…

STUDENT 1 and *STUDENT 2* – Yes.

STUDENT 5 - Snapchat is more a combination of both.

RESEARCHER - How it is a combination?

STUDENT 1 – Sometimes there's even no purpose of sending pictures, some people send, like, a blank screen with words on it. And then other times, like, you can show, like, emotions I suppose if you send, like, different faces or something like that. Or even if you, like, send a picture of something and you're gonna, like, type something and say something, like, you put the words on the picture.

STUDENT 2 – People don't really want to see lots of words on Instagram, they wouldn't want to read the whole thing. But in snapchat, if you see a lot of words, you just tend to be, like… you tend to read them.

The pre-research survey showed that even before the ML program most students believed that the combination of more than one mode was a very efficient way of

getting a message across on social media (**figure 9.3**). Interestingly, this perception only became stronger over the course of the program, and it jumped from 42.1% to 59.5% in the post-research survey. Some qualitative answers given by participants for this question in the survey:

"Most people use a text with an emoji so the person receiving the text knows how the sender feels about that topic."

"Text to give the content of the message, emoji to show emotion of the message."

"A text can be put over a snapchat therefore expressing an emotion along with an opinion."

"Because images can be deceiving and people might not get what you are trying to say. But a text and an image can get what you have to say across and show how you are feeling too."

"Because words, facial expressions and the way you say/explain a message can determine how the other person understands it."

"By using multiple types of communication you can convey emotion and your idea much more easily than sticking to one mode of communication."

According to students, photos are very good to convey feelings and emotion, while text is regarded as a much "colder" or flat mode of communication. Students would argue that it is usually very difficult to express their feelings or emotions in text, but in pictures, it is very straightforward.

A conversation with students in School B during focus group:

RESEARCHER – Why do you think photographs are a good way of communication?

STUDENT 2 – You can show to people what you are like, not just, like… From text, you can show them what you are like, but you kind of show, like, style or like, your personality in text. But you do it much easily with photos.

RESEARCHER – So in your opinion, in pictures I can show my personality and style better or more easily than…

STUDENT 2 – Yes. It's really like a staged picture.

RESEARCHER – Staged picture?

STUDENT 2 – Yes, you can kind of show your personality on a staged picture.

STUDENT 3 – Yes, a lot of, like, more emotions than what you have in a text.

RESEARCHER – Emotions…

STUDENT 1 – It's more personal…

STUDENT 2 – It takes more… Like, you have to write a lot of pages to get, like, what you actually think in writing, but in photo you kind of get straight away what they are like, and what they are feeling.

STUDENT 3 – Yes

RESEARCHER – so you think pictures are more straightforward in this sense?

STUDENT 1 – Yes

STUDENT 2 – It's easier.

This of course has to do with students' own perspective on how words work. It is obviously possible to make a very good account of feelings and emotions with words; however, it is necessary a good command of the language and its figurative and symbolic resources in order to accomplish that. This suggests that students are not used to reading more sophisticated texts where they would find a very good composition of information, ideas, feelings, emotions and so on. Most students made clear that they do not like to spend too much time reading or even watching a video; they want information quickly and easily.

The digital media technologies used in workshops 2 and 3 enabled students to create two different digital artefacts – digital magazine and photo story, respectively – and in both of them they could explore how images can convey meaning. They also had the opportunity to combine different modes of communication, such as image and text, and make meaningful choices about how the many possibilities of this combination would work for them. Students demonstrated that, at a very basic level,

they are able to reflect on how different modes convey meaning in different ways, such as when they associate images (photographs, emojis etc.) with emotion and text with seriousness. These associations may be very superficial or incomplete, but the fact that students can elaborate ideas around the use of images and their functions and also around the combination of images and text suggests that the production of digital artefacts can foster in students the ability to reflect on their choices when they are using different modes of communication to create meaning.

8.3.4 VIDEO

Students had the opportunity to create digital videos in workshops 4 (movie about Shakespeare) and 5 (TV ad about the year in 2048). It was remarkable to see the excitement of the vast majority of participants when they learned they would be working with videos during the sessions. Whereas in the two previous workshops students did not know exactly what to expect from the practical activity, creating a video was clearly something that they were very comfortable with, and enthusiastic about. In the previous section, some of students' impressions about video as a mode of communication was briefly presented, and they will now be discussed in more detail.

Video, as a media format, is multimodal. If the moving image is understood as a mode, it should be regarded as a mode that works with other modes within it. In video one finds moving image, image, text, sound, music, gestures, facial expressions and so on. To understand the complexity of moving image compared to other modes, Andrew Burn (2013) developed a multimodal theory called *kineikonic*, which proposes that in video there are two main modes (orchestrating modes): filming and editing. "Filming produces spatial framing, angle, proximity and camera movement and provisional duration; editing produces temporal framing, and the orchestration of other contributory modes, especially sound and graphics" (ibid: 5). The contributory modes, according to him, would be embodied modes, such as dramatic action and speech; auditory modes, such as music; and visual modes, such as lighting and set design. In this sense, video offers many more possibilities of arrangements and orchestration of different modes of communication compared to the other modes that have been discussed in this chapter. Students took advantage of this to combine many modes in meaningful

ways, and the way modes were arranged and combined reveal a great deal about the meaning-making intentions of the participants.

Students had their first chance to use video when they were creating the digital magazine in workshop 2 (some students also created digital magazines in workshop 1). As explained in the first segment of this chapter, most students opted not to include video in their magazine, and the most common reason claimed by the participants was the lack of time to do it during the session. Even in the teams that decided to use video, only one group in all three schools created their own video from scratch to include in the digital magazine, whilst the other groups simply used videos they found on YouTube. Therefore, even though workshop 2 was revealing for providing some clues about the way students understand the use of videos together with other modes of communication, workshops 4 and 5 provided the best opportunities for analysing how students used the technology available to create meaningful short movies using different modes of communication.

Students used iPads to record their videos and the app iMovie to edit them. iMovie allows users to add and arrange video clips in a timeline, and offers many editing tools to trim unwanted parts of the clip, change speed, apply visual effects and so on. It also offers some choices of music and sound effects that can be added to the same timeline and edited according to the user's needs. The app also can record sound, which some students used to record their own voices or songs from other devices. Even though it was not possible to download YouTube videos on the iPads, students were told that they could play videos on YouTube and record them with their devices to use in the movies. In terms of settings and physical resources, in the three schools participants were allowed to use classrooms and common areas in and outside the building, and any material or object they could find around the school. Therefore, with many choices in terms of multimodal arrangements provided by the digital technology, together with many other choices provided by the physical space and the objects available in the schools, there was a lot of scope for meaning making and expression.

The construction of meaning and the use of different modes of communication starts with the production of the movie. The researcher had the chance to observe some groups while they were organizing and shooting their videos, which proved to be a valuable source of data. Based on the story they wanted to tell, students spent some time discussing ideas around the resources they needed for the film, the

appropriate setting, the number of clips necessary to complete the project, the role of each member of the team, and the structure of the narrative. This was a very interesting part of the activity, where students had to negotiate with their peers the best way to create and shoot their story. Observing this negotiation one can see how ideas that are thrown into the discussion are confronted, polished, refined and organized until everyone – or at least the majority – agrees with them. During this negotiation, participants begin to talk about the modes of communication they are going to use, and this whole process is a search for meanings.

Not all the groups wanted to appear in the video, but for most students acting was an important part of the production of their movies. Acting involves de mode *physical expression*, whereby students will use their bodies to create meaning through the expression of ideas and feelings. Acting also involves de *setting* where the scene unfolds, and the *physical resources* used by students during the action. During this process it is possible to observe students articulating ideas around how they are going to express certain thoughts, or how they can convey certain messages using the resources available to them. It is a very rich creative process, and this creative aspect will be addressed in more detail in chapter 11.

Acting, per se, does not need any digital technology to happen; drama classes are a good example of that. However, the digital technology adds new elements to the action, which opens up new possibilities for meaning making and expression. For example, when the action is being recorded by a digital device with a camera – in this case an Ipad – this means that the action is being framed according to a certain position of this device. This position has to do with the distance between the device and the action taking place, the angle of the camera, and so on. The device, in this case, is taking the role of the audience, and students are well aware of that. Even though most students had no or just little experience with camera movements and different shots or angles, during the recording they would constantly refer to the 'camera-man' in order to discuss the best position that would capture their physical expressions according to the message they wanted to convey. Thus, in this case the digital camera would add another layer of signification to the mode *physical expression* and, in fact, to the whole scene, including the setting and the physical objects.

Another way in which technology influences acting is the fact that students are not only recording the scene, they will also edit it afterwards. Some groups made very

explicit that their acting was conditioned to the editing, in a sense that they would plan the scene having in mind that the action would be edited in a certain way afterwards. This awareness adds another layer of signification to the practice, whereby the mode *physical expression* was being affected not only by the use of the digital camera, but also by the fact that in some cases the scenes were being created based on students' awareness of how it would be edited afterwards. The images below show two close-up shots taken by a group in school A that realized before going for editing that they needed some close-up shots of their hands for the movie.
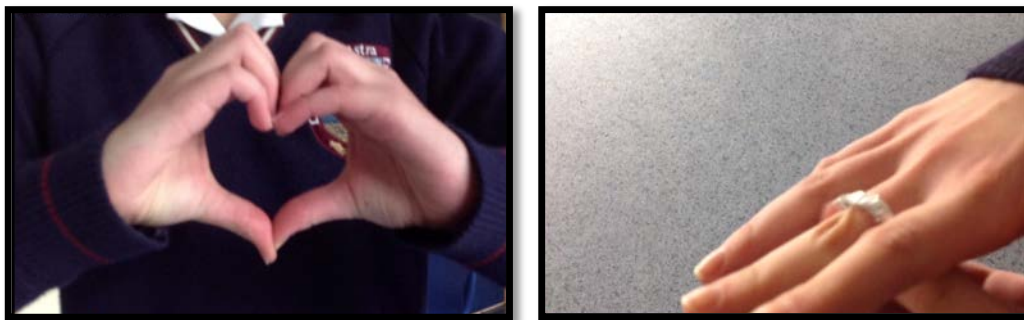
Figure 9.15: students in school A use close-up shots to get details of the scene.

Not all participants would organize their activity in this way though. In fact, most groups observed during this activity would record their scenes without discussing the editing possibilities that they had. During an activity in school C, students wanted to show that Romeo had taken Viagra instead of poison. Students shot the clips and went back to the room in order to edit them. After a few minutes, they asked the researcher if they could go back to the setting because they had forgotten to shoot one scene. What actually happened is that they realized during the editing that it would not be clear for the audience that Romeo had taken Viagra instead of poison because it was not possible to read the word 'viagra' that they had written in a printer cartridge box. So, they decided to retrieve the box again and get a close-up shot of the box and add it to the movie, so that it would be clear that Romeo had taken Viagra (**figure 9.16**). This process of assembling video clips in a timeline, constructing a narrative for the movie and realizing how meanings in the message were being created could be observed throughout the video activity. It was not uncommon to hear students saying that they should have done this or that during the shooting, which shows how during the editing part they were constantly

assessing their material, reflecting on the what they had recorded, and looking for solutions to convey the message they wanted.

Figure 9.16 – Movies from school C. Close-up showing details.

As mentioned before, iMovie provided students with many different tools for editing. In the image below, students shot a scene whereby one of them is being shot down. In order to create this action, the actor moves his body as if the bullets were hitting him. During the editing, students decide to play the action in slow motion, which makes it more dramatic and gives more emphasis to each bullet that hits the actor's body.
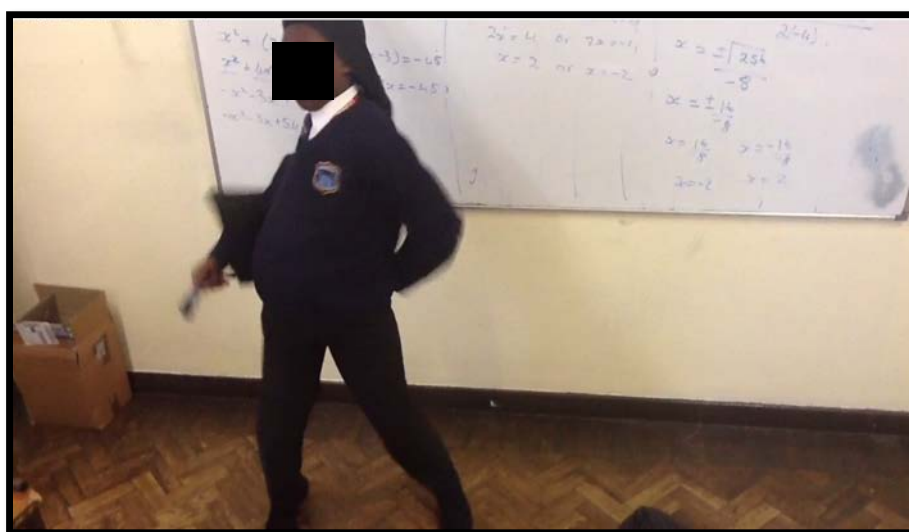
Figure 9.17: a scene from a movie created by students on school C. The actor is being shot, and the whole scene is played in slow motion.

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This is one way in which the editing app gives the participants the opportunity to add other layers of signification to their practice. In the scene below, students use a combination of the *physical resources* they have at hand (coats, white board and projector) with the editing tools available in the app (add text) to create meaning and convey their message.

Figure 9.18: students in school C use their own coats, a projector and a white board to compose a scene. During the editing, they added text.

The mode *colour* also played an important role in students' movies. In the example below, a group decided to use colours in order to make a clear division in the Romeo and Juliet movie: the first scenes, where Romeo meets Juliet and declares his love, is in colour. The last scenes, where the characters decide to take the poison and die, is in black and white. That's a very interesting way of using a semiotic resource available in the app to communicate ideas about happiness and sadness. In this case, the colours basically set the mood of the movie.

Figure 9.19 – Students in school C used both colour and black and white scenes in their movie.

Colours were also used as a visual effect. In the example below, students use a filter with the colour red in order to represent heat. Whereas in the previous case the use of colours is more subtle, in a sense that it requires the audience to be sensitive to the possible meanings that a black and white scene in opposition to a coloured one may carry, in this case the colour red is used in a more explicit way, helping to compose a scene together with the physical expressions of the students (they react strongly to the heat when the door opens) and the little cartoon of a flame right in the centre of the screen. The use of a mode, in this case colour, can be nuanced, which adds more layers to the possibilities of signification.

Figure 9.20 – Students in school C combine physical expression, colour and cartoon to represent heat.

Students also used videos from YouTube in order to create their narrative. In the example below, participants created a 'black hole bin' in workshop 5 that would take in any rubbish and disappear with them. In order to show the bin working, students recorded one of the actors throwing a plastic bag into the bin, and they also recorded the same actor showing that the bin was empty, meaning that the bin really works. However, the group decided that between the two scenes there should be a transition, something to represent the passage of time between the moment the rubbish is thrown into the bin and the moment it vanishes forever. Since the bin was called the 'black hole', they found two clips on YouTube, one showing images of space, and the other one showing a graphic representation of a black hole, and used them to represent the passage of time during which the bin was working and getting

rid of the rubbish. In this case, the digital technology allowed students to use digital resources based on their own popular culture references. The idea of *transition* and *passage of time* is very important for the *moving image* mode, and students could have represented these ideas in many different ways, even without having access to the internet. The way they decided to do it reflects the resources provided by the digital technologies available for them, and show how the combination of wi-fi connection, tablet and editing software opens many possibilities for meaning making and representation.

Figure 9.21 – School C – Sequence shows student throwing litter into the the 'black hole bin', followed by two clips that students took from YouTube to represent the bin working, and finally the student happy that his litter has vanished.

Finally, the use of the sound mode in video reveals another interesting aspect of meaning making with the use of digital technologies. Students used music, for instance, to create an ambience and construct another layer of signification to complement the dramatic action. In the example below, there is a scene where a girl is leaving a room on which door is written 'Capulet'. On the next scene, another

girl is leaving another room where one can read 'Montague' on its door. The family feud is represented by the girls walking around each other in slow motion wearing masks. Students decided to use the sound effect of steps on a wooden floor very loud while the girls walk, and they used a music that consisted basically of very strong Spanish guitar strokes. The combination of the girls walking around each other (acting) with the slow motion (editing effect) and the strokes of the Spanish guitar (music) creates a very dramatic atmosphere, and deeply involves the audience in the scene, creating an expectation about what is going to happen next.
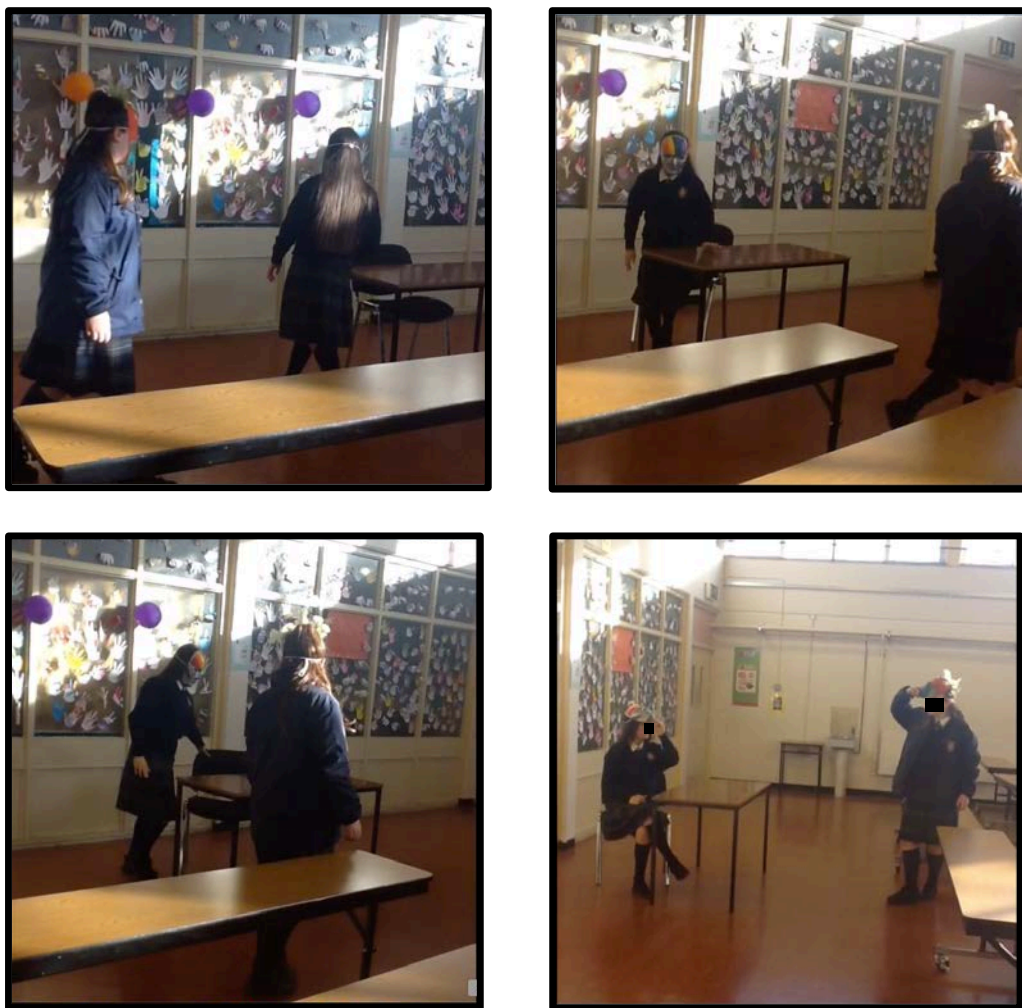
Figure 9.22 – School B – Sequence where students walk in slow motion sorrounding each other in a threathful way. In the last frame they remove their masks and stare at each.

Music was also used as a means to set the mood and prepare the audience for what was to come next in the scene. In the example bellow, the scene starts with an open door and then students decided to play a loud fear sound effect before the girl walks

in and shouts in horror. This creates suspense, as the music gives the audience the feeling that something scary is going to happen, before the girl appears and shouts reinforcing the idea that something really bad has just taken place in the room – even though the audience cannot see what it is. In this case, the open door alone does not explain anything about what the scene is about. The sound effect here is used to convey the message that something scary is going to happen, which is concluded by the girl entering the scene and shouting in horror.
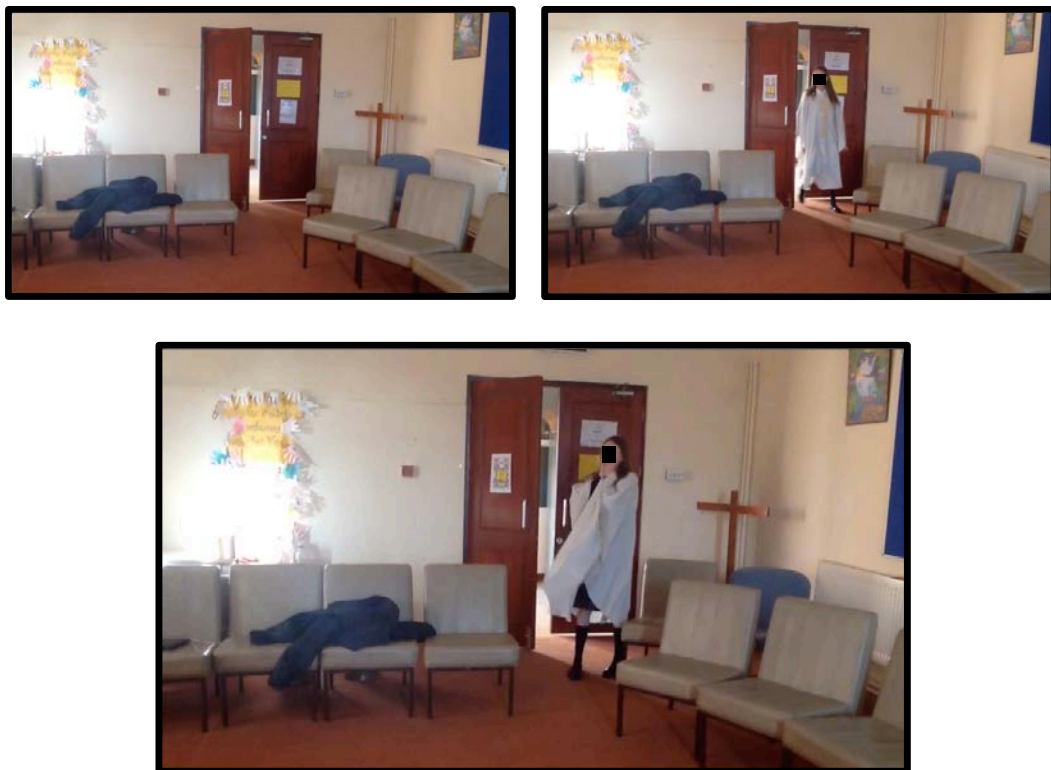
Figure 9.23 – School B – Sequence where the camera shows an open door while a scary music is played, and then the student walks into room and shouts in horror, but the audience cannot see at this point what has happened.

Another way of constructing meaning through the sound mode in video is the use of voiceovers. Students could use the Ipad to record their voices and then insert them into the timeline on the iMovie app. Voiceovers can be used for various reasons. In the example below, students shot the death scene of Romeo and Juliet and decided to include voiceovers because, according to them, this would make the movie funnier. They recorded the scenes folowing the original story, acting normally without any trace of humor. The humor only comes when they add the voiceovers with funny voices. The mixture of seriousness (the acting) with fun (the

funny voices) was planned beforehand and works very well. It is interesting in this case to see how students planned the use of different modes to find a creative way of conveying a funny message.

Figure 9.24 – School C – In this scene the student (playing Romeo) is crying over the body of the other student (playing Juliet). Even though the acting looks very serious, they used a funny voice to create humor.

During and after the activity, students were asked about their experiences with the video production, and some of them reflected on their experience with the sound mode. This is a fragment from a focus group during workshop 4 in school A.

STUDENT 5 – I think music, like, music can help enhance the meaning of the video.

RESEARCHER – Music?

STUDENT 5 – Yes.

RESEARCHER - Great. I love the music you put there. Why do you think music enhance the meaning of the video?

STUDENT 5 – I think it adds another layer of... Erm… of, like, meaning. 'Cos you have the image, the characters, like, the stuff you recorded. And then, like, if you add music you add more, like, more stuff.

RESEARCHER – More stuff? (students laugh)

STUDENT 5 – Yes, like… you add more meaning. Or, I don't know, maybe not meaning, but, like… Erm…

RESEARCHER – Breath (students laugh). Go on, you are doing well.

STUDENT 5 – It's just that, like, the music helps you understand better what is going on in the movie. Like, if you have a scene, like, a scene about… I don't know, something scary, and then you add a scary music, it helps to, like, to create the atmosphere for the movie.

RESEARCHER – OK.

STUDENT 5 – So, I believe, like, this helps with the meaning of the video.

STUDENT 3– I agree.

RESEARCHER – You agree?

STUDENT 3– Yes, like, music is very important. Think of silent movies. They are horrible.

RESEARCHER – Well, but then it's not only about music, you're talking about sound in general…

STUDENT 3 – Oh, yes I know, like… but music adds a lot, if you are creating a story, it helps you with that.

RESEARCHER – The music helps?

STUDENT 3 – Yes. It helps you with the message. I think, like, you can record a scene without music, and then have the same scene with music, like… People will understand them differently. Not understand, but, like…

RESEARCHER – Perceive?

STUDENT 3 – Yes, like, they will have different experiences. So music adds meaning to what you are trying to present to people in the movie.

Some students clearly made conscious choices about the way they used the sound mode in their videos. Some of these choices were planned before they started the production, others were made during the shooting or the editing part of the activity. When asked about their choices, most students struggled to give an explanation in

terms of meaning making and the multimodal aspect of the activity, but with some help from the researcher, some participants were able to reflect on their choices and articulate how the sound mode play an important part on the construction of meaning, like in the example above.

Video production allowed students to construct stories using different modes of communciation and reflect on their choices. During the practice, they discussed with their peers the possibilities available in the digital technology and how they could construct and enhance their stories through acting, camera movements, visual effects, music etc. The possibilities for meaning making in video production is large and varied, and this creates a good opportunity for new literacy practices, as it will be discussed next.

9.4 Discussion

Media Literacy involves, among other things, the understanding that the concept of literacy in the 21st Century has changed to encompass other forms of knowledge, skills and practices other than the ability to read and write printed words (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003). This has to do with new meaning-making practices that appeared with the emergence of the new digital media technologies and the way these technologies affected the way people communicate. For young people, this involves new literacy practices which start when they are still very young, playing with digital devices at home (Marsh et. al., 2017), and continue through the school years whereby children and teenagers increasingly have access to digital resources in schools and use them to learn, collaborate and express themselves (Global Kids Online, 2019).

When young people navigate through various digital platforms, including social media, research engines and news websites, they encounter content that is designed using different semiotic resources and delivered in different formats, such as text, image, sound, video etc. In order to read, interpret and understand this content, young people need to have a basic understanding of how different modes of communication work, and how they convey meanings in different ways (Benzemer and Kress, 2016). According to the data analysis of this research project, these new

literacy skills and practices, which are grounded in semiotics and multimodality theory, can be developed through practices using ICTs in the classroom.

Participants of this project demonstrated that when they use digital media to create an artefact and have the chance to reflect on the experience guided by a facilitator, they are able to articulate ideas around their choices in terms of how they communicate, including both interpretation and expression. Students have different perceptions about different modes of communication, and this is reflected on their everyday experience with digital media. The everyday practices of students in the digital world have a significant influence in the way they create meaning, represent ideas and reflect on their choices. Students regard long texts as boring and at the same time as appropriate for serious subjects, and short texts as very effective for quick online conversation., especially if accompanied by an image, which, according to them, is a very good mode to represent feelings and emotion. These are literacy knowledge and skills being articulated by young people while reflecting on their experience with digital media production.

Digital media offers many possibilities for young people to play with different modes of communication and meaning-making resources. The ability to create meaning and represent ideas using different modes is aligned with recent studies on new literacies, digital literacy and dynamic literacies (Coiro et. al., 2008; Benzemer and Kress, 2016; Marsh et. al., 2017; Potter and McDougall, 2017; Burnett and Merchant, 2018). During this research project, students needed little guidance to create their digital artefacts and tell digital stories in a meaningful way, even though more guidance is expected to improve their ability to create digital artefacts and articulate ideas around how they constructed their stories. During the practice, participants played with the different modes, testing and experimenting various possibilities of arrangements and visual combinations. They sought for and selected resources to use in their stories, making conscious choices both individually and collectively about how they would represent their ideas and convey their message. They learned the 'language' of apps they had never used before, and shared this information with their peers. They used their digital skills to create the artefacts, and then reflected on the experience through the articulation of ideas around meaning-making practices.

All these practices are new literacy practices within the wider Media Literacy field. They are ultimately meaning-making practices whereby young people construct

meanings through digital media and orchestrate different modes of communication to express ideas, thoughts and concepts.

Chapter 10

Information Literacy and Critical Awareness

10.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the second theme that emerged from the data analysis. This theme relates to two important topics within the media literacy field: first, how students research, understand and use information they find online; and second, the way students critically consume and make sense of the media and its messages. I understand that those two topics are closely related due to the *critical aspect* that both of them possess, and for this reason they have been grouped under the same theme. The theoretical framework used to analyse this set of data is based on two categories of the Media Literacy Model: Information Literacy and Critical Awareness.

The first section, information literacy, will discuss students' habits and behaviours when they need to search for information online. Even though the data reveals that most of them are well aware of the importance to evaluate the quality of the information they consume on a daily basis, it also shows how students dislike the task of researching and how little this awareness is put into practice during the learning activity. The second section, Critical Awareness, will explore 4 topics within the critical analysis framework. The first one, *Trust in the media,* will discuss how much students rely on various media outlets and platforms and how this influenced their understanding of media products throughout the programme. The second topic, *Media affordances and the critical view*, will show how the affordances of the digital media available to students shaped the way they expressed themselves and how this had an impact in the learning activity. The third topic, *Media texts*, will discuss the constructedness of media messages, and will suggest that, within certain limits, the production of digital artefacts can help students understand how media messages are constructed. The fourth and last topic, *Photo Manipulation*, will explore how information can be manipulated and the ethical limits of that, and will reveal students' perceptions about photo manipulation.

10.2 Information Literacy – Searching, evaluating and using information.

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the interest that Media Literacy scholars have in understanding how people find, select, interpret and use information available online (Leaning, 2014; Brayton and Casey, 2019). There are many reasons for that, but the main ones are the growing number of people who have access to high-speed internet connections worldwide; and the massive amount of information that is created, shared and used every day in many different digital platforms (Wilson et al., 2011).

The information revolution that gave rise to the internet and later to the new digital media technologies enabled individuals to have access to a vast amount of information online. This has been framed – with inflated optimism – as the emancipation of humanity that gives everyone the opportunity for acquiring new knowledge that prior to this revolution would be very difficult and sometimes even impossible to get. The benefits of this achievement can be seen in many sectors of the society, from education to civil engagement to the labour market (Saylor, 2012). However, this revolution has also brought a lot of concerns. It did not take long before scholars realized that too much information available for people does not necessarily mean more knowledge available to everyone (Pariser, 2011). The learning process involves many different abilities and skills, such as the ability to research and find information online; distinguish between reliable and non-reliable sources and between fake and real information; and use information appropriately (Breen and Fallon, 2005; Buckingham, 2015; European Commission, 2017)

In the education sector, this topic concerns how students can make the most of the information they find online in order to learn about a subject, and what the pedagogical issues involved in this process are. During the Media Literacy Program, every session required that students did some research in order to complete the task they were assigned to. Besides that, in workshops 2 and 3 students had the opportunity to discuss some of the subjects related to the consumption and use of online information. In workshop 2 students discussed the difference between information and knowledge and talked about bias and journalistic neutrality. In Workshop 3, they talked about the difference between controversial, careless and

false information, and discussed how to avoid being deceived by unreliable sources. The idea was to show students how it is important to care about the information we consume, and how this might affect the task they were assigned to complete in case they did not use quality information for it.

10.2.1 – RESEARCH AS A LEARNING PRACTICE

In the first workshop (testing workshop) students were given the task to research about the topic they had chosen, and after collecting information about this topic to move forward in order to complete the task. They were not given any input about the importance of online research. The observation of students working in teams showed that the research generally involved typing the subject on google, clicking on the first and sometimes the second link that appeared on the screen and collecting information from that source. If students did not find the information they wanted, they would type something different, but very seldom they would scroll down the page looking for other sources. Besides, I did not witness any instance where students looked for a specific source for the information; students would always type the topic they wanted to know more about. I occasionally asked students how the research was going, how difficult was to find information about the topic and the sources they were using. Students showed they had absolutely no concern with the source, which in many cases ended up being Wikipedia. Students did not mention any difficulties in finding information about the topic either; since they were not worried about the source and the quality of information, this suggests that they were happy with any data they collected.

Workshop 1 was very open and loose in terms of structure and defined goals, so at first this could simply show that students did not care too much about sources and quality information because they were not assessed for this. They were actually far more concerned with learning how to use apps in the iPads and with the preparation for their digital artefacts. Some groups did not even carry out any research at all, and others only looked up videos and images for their artefact. This situation was expected to change from workshop 2 onwards, with students improving their awareness about the importance of research over the course of the program as they were given some time to discuss with the facilitation of the researcher issues related to online research as mentioned before. The analysis of the data shows that students

did improve their awareness about the importance of the research over the course of the ML program, however in practice very little changed in terms of how they used this awareness to improve the quality of sources and data that they used in their projects.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the vast majority of students did not like to carry out *serious* and *compulsory* research during their project. In other words, students were not happy to be 'forced by the teacher' to carry out a careful, mindful and laborious search for good quality information about something that is not of their immediate interest. The observation of students looking up information online revealed that this part of the practical activity was the one that they enjoyed the least. Even though they were told to do the research before moving on to the next phase (planning), most groups would normally have one or maximum two students doing the research while the other students were either starting to plan out the activity or doing absolutely nothing. And the students who were doing the research would try really hard to finish as soon as possible in order to move on to the next steps. The atmosphere in the classroom was not very pleasant during this activity, the organization among the groups were very poor and I had to constantly intervene in order to make sure that the job was being done.

The data analysis does not allow for an ultimate explanation as to why students did not like to do the research for their project, and there is probably more than one reason for that. However, based on the field observation and on conversations with students, it is clear that the fact that there were other tasks in the project that were more dynamic and which students regarded as 'more fun', such as recording videos, taking pictures, acting, playing with apps and so on, made the research part look very bland and even boring. During a focus group in school A, I asked students if they enjoyed doing the research for their project. All of them replied "no". One student illustrated his peer's feeling about this issue:

"It's just… kind of, like, when you know you can be doing something more fun, it's kind of boring to sit down and research what you are supposed to do… if you know you have something more interesting to do later, do you know what mean?".

During a focus group in school C, the researcher asked the same question. Two students commented:

STUDENT 1 - Research you need to learn, like, to filter the information and sometimes it's kind of hard… You're just, like, scrolling through pages and pages.

STUDENT 2 –You would only do a research if you only need to do it, it's not something that you're going to do, like… If you have the option of not doing it, you're not gonna do it.

STUDENT 2 and STUDENT 3– Yes.

RESEARCHER – Does everyone agree with that?

ALL STUDENTS – Yes.

Students demonstrated a strong inclination to dislike tasks that demand them to be more meticulous, careful and responsible, as opposed to tasks that are more relaxed, playful and fun. In the ML workshops students were far more interested in the creation of the digital artefacts than in researching and planning their work. They often acknowledged the importance of research for the completion of their project, but this acknowledgment very rarely turned into an effective action. The result was that the research part ended up being seen by the participants as the least interesting and fun part of the practical activity, and for this reason they tried to spend as little time as possible doing it and not giving the proper attention it deserved. As a student in school B summarized when asked if the research part was not important for her project, during a presentation:

I know, like, erm… It's important, of course. But it's not fun (students laugh). Mary (fictitious name) likes to do it (everyone laughs). No, ok, seriously, it's important, I know that, next time we're gonna do it better. But, like, nobody likes to do research, I mean, not like this one we are doing here. You know? Searching information, checking the… the (somebody shout 'Sources!') Yes, thanks, erm… the sources. We have to do it, but we don't like it. But we have to do it! We'll do it next time, I promise.

Students demonstrated a good level of awareness in relation to the importance of evaluating sources of information in order to decrease the chance of getting false or

misleading information while doing an online research. On the other hand, students also made clear that the research part of the activity was not enjoyed by most of them, and this could be one of the reasons why their critical awareness did not materialize into actions, as it will be discussed in the next segment.

10.2.2 RESEARCH SKILLS THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME

Another important aspect about how students did the online research for their projects is related to whether or not they were progressively improving their research skills as the ML program progressed. In every session they were asked to do some research on the topic addressed, and I always emphasized the importance of that for the completion of the task. The emphasis was always about two elements in the research: reliable and varied sources; and good quality information. Besides, in workshops 2 and 3 students were exposed to some content exploring concepts around the difference between information and knowledge; between real and manipulated images; and also the difference between three types of information they find online: false, controversial and so-called 'bullshit' information - the last one following the concept created by the philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt (2005), used here to mean information that is used irresponsibly without regard for truth. The term 'careless information' was employed to replace the term 'bullshit information' in school B because of ethical reasons, i.e., appropriate language use.

I facilitated discussions around these concepts. The basic idea was to show students how important it is to make sure one finds good quality information online, how bad research can have a negative impact and how easily one can be deceived by false or irresponsible information. The experience as a whole was very productive and students responded well to it. Most students struggled to articulate their ideas without help, but once the concepts were defined, explained and discussed, participation was very high among the teenagers and they showed a good level of understanding. In principle this suggested that, even though students did not like doing the research, they would give more importance to it and gradually improve their search findings and outcomes over the course of the ML programme.

10.2.2.1 What they know, what they think they know, and what they do

Because in workshops 2 and 3 students discussed topics related to best practices in online research, it was possible to notice a slight improvement in their findings and how they used the information they found online in their projects. However, this improvement was very small and limited to a few groups that at least were more concerned about the number of sources they used and the quality of information they collected.

A focus group conversation with students from school A, after workshop 1, shows an example of that. Similar conversations took place in the other two schools:

RESEARCHER – *Ok. I think you guys are used to trying out and learning things without going through tutorials… Just by experimenting. In terms of research, you guys were doing some research online. Did you have any specific difficulties when you were doing your research? To find some kind of information, for example.*

STUDENT 3– *Not really.*

STUDENT 1 – *No. 'Cos we just looked up the umbrella term, like, I was doing freedom of speech and then we put freedom of speech and then… hundreds of results came up… so you are just clicking and seeing which one you want to use.*

RESEARCHER – **-** *But what about the sources?*

STUDENT 1 – *I mean… you just have to make sure that you don't go to, like, any really bad site, like, make sure they are not, like, bad, the information is ok…*

RESEARCHER – *What do you mean by bad site?*

STUDENT 1 – *I don't know… Just bad.*

RESEARCHER – *Bad in what? Like, you don't…*

STUDENT 1 – *Some websites look messy.*

RESEARCHER – *Visually speaking?*

STUDENT 1 and **STUDENT 2** – *Yes*

RESEARCHER – *Something else?*

(no one answers)

RESEARCHER – Ok. So we have to be careful with bad websites… erm, all right, so…

STUDENT 2 – Yes, and do a lot of cross-checking to make sure that what you get is what is actually there.

RESEARCHER – Cross-checking? Did you do cross-checking today?

STUDENT 2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER – All of you did cross-checking today?

STUDENT 1 and STUDENT 2 - Yes.

STUDENT 3– I didn't do too much research really. 'Cos we were interviewing people.

RESEARCHER – Ok. But do you usually do cross-checking when you are doing your research online?

ALL STUDENTS – Yes.

STUDENT 4 – If you are doing a project with a lot of facts…. Then yes.

Later in the same focus group, talking about the information they used in their projects:

RESEARCHER – Not all of it. But you trust the information that you put there…

STUDENT 2 and STUDENT 3 – Yes.

STUDENT 4 – I don't know…

STUDENT 2 – The one that comes from official sources…

STUDENT 1 – Yes, but, like… Wikipedia, I wouldn't trust Wikipedia that much, 'cos anyone could go there and change the information, it is an open source thing.

In these extracts some students demonstrate that they are mindful of the importance of being cautious with the information they collect online. They talk about not going to 'bad sites', 'doing cross-checking', trusting information from 'official sources' and 'not trusting Wikipedia' because anyone can edit it. However, they could not

articulate appropriately what a 'bad site' is in terms of source of information. They gave one reason to suspect a website: it looks visually messy. The problem here is that the fact that a website is poorly designed does not necessarily mean that it is not reliable. And, even worse, the fact that a website is well designed does not guarantee that it contains reliable information.

Cross-checking was not witnessed by me during any of the 20 ML workshops delivered in the three schools, even though some cross-checking might indeed have occurred while I was not observing a particular group in a particular moment. Cross-checking was not mentioned by any group in their presentations during the ML program either, and there is no evidence in the digital artefacts that a cross-checking was carried out by students before they used the information they found online. On the contrary, what was evident during the learning activities as mentioned before is that students would spend as little time as possible doing their research, and they were happy with whatever information they found about the subject as long as they could move forward to the production of the digital artefact. So even though students mentioned cross-checking during the focus group, the data suggests that this was not a regular part of students best practice to evaluate information online. This indicates that in most cases students were simply concerned about giving 'the right answer', as they knew they should be careful with the information they collected online.

In the fragment above students also mentioned that *Wikipedia* is not reliable because anyone can edit it, and also that one can trust information that comes from *official sources*. Wikipedia was used as source for information throughout the ML programme in all three schools. Students expressed mixed feelings and opinions regarding the website; some of them would defend Wikipedia by saying that the information there is clear, well organized and easy to access; and, besides, everyone uses it. Others would say, like the student from the previous extract, that Wikipedia is not totally reliable because anyone can edit it. The interesting aspect is that even the students who acknowledge that Wikipedia has the potential to not be a reliable source use the website to collect information. The extract below is from a presentation in School C during workshop 2.

RESEARCHER – Ok, so first thing, your main source of information was Wikipedia, yes?

STUDENT 2 – Yes.

STUDENT 1 – And some news articles.

RESEARCHER – And some news articles.

STUDENT 1 – Irish Times…

RESEARCHER – Ok. Do you trust Wikipedia in the same way you trust the articles you found in the Irish Times?

STUDENT 1 and STUDENT 2 – No.

STUDENT 3 – Not all the time.

RESEARCHER – But how do you….

STUDENT 3– Sometimes people can edit Wikipedia.

RESEARCHER – And this makes Wikipedia not as reliable as other sources… but you still use Wikipedia. Why? What draws you to Wikipedia? What's the thing with Wikipedia to say "I go there because…"

STUDENT 4 – Cos, like, all the information is there.

STUDENT 1 – Whenever you search for anything Wikipedia is always the first thing… for information.

RESEARCHER – It's always the first thing. Why?

STUDENT 1 – The search engine.

STUDENT 4 – They pay google…

STUDENT 2 – They pay money a lot.

STUDENT 4 – They pay a lot of money so…

This is an example of students who actually used Wikipedia as a source of information, even though they acknowledge that Wikipedia can be edited by anyone. Two students even suggested that Wikipedia pay Google so that its page is always on the top. The reasons they give for using the website goes from 'all the

information is there' to 'Wikipedia is always the first thing for information' during an online search. They did not mention anything about how it would be possible to evaluate the quality of the information. Other students in all three schools mentioned similar reasons to continue to use Wikipedia as a source of information for their projects during the ML program.

Students also mentioned the reliability of 'official sources' and mainstream media, such as The Irish Times. The quantitative survey shows that even before the ML programme started most students (74%) said they trust mainstream journalism, so it comes with no surprise that they would refer to important newspapers and magazines every time they wanted to assign importance to their sources.

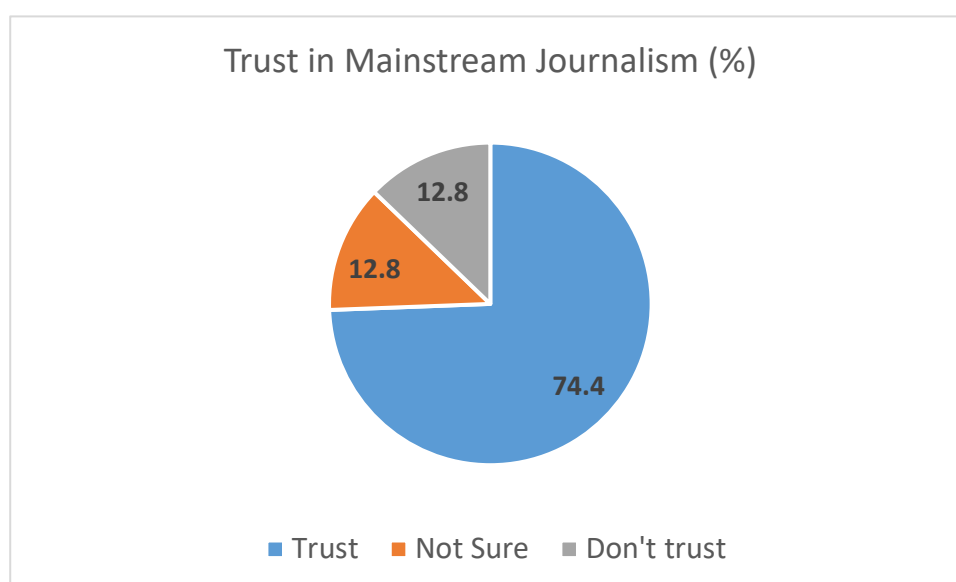**Figure 10.1 – Pre-research survey. Students opinion about how much they trust mainstream journalism.**

This is an extract from a presentation during workshop 2 in School B:

RESEARCHER – *And this information, the text information, where did you get this from?*

STUDENT 1 – *Newspapers.*

RESEARCHER – *Newspapers. Like what, for example?*

STUDENT 1 – *Irish Independent.*

STUDENT 2 – *And The Journal.*

RESEARCHER – *The Journal, Irish Independent…*

STUDENT 2 – *Irish Times.*

RESEARCHER – *And Irish times, ok. Dou you girls trust this source of information?*

STUDENT 1 and STUDENT 3– *Yes.*

STUDENT 2 – *It can be biased but, like, it has some truth to it, 'cos… most of them write the same thing.*

RESEARCHER – *Do you think it's better than Wikipedia?*

ALL STUDENTS – *yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Why?*

STUDENT 1 – *People can change…*

STUDENT 2 – *They can edit it.*

RESEARCHER – *So it is not reliable…*

STUDENT 2 – *No, Wikipedia is not reliable.*

STUDENT 3– *It can be sometimes, like… Teachers put up things there too.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok. But you think it is more reliable to find information on this kind of… what we call the mainstream media, yes?*

STUDENT 1 and *STUDENT 2* – *Yes.*

The girls in this group mentioned three Irish newspapers as their source, and they said they trust the information they found in there. They think it is better than Wikipedia because of the reasons already mentioned before, that is, Wikipedia can be edited by anyone. Interestingly, they acknowledge that even the main newspapers can be biased, which shows a good level of awareness in terms of critical view of the media. However, the only reason they gave for their trust in the newspapers is because most of them write the same thing. Certainly, a more in depth evaluation of how the media industry works would not consider the fact that many newspapers write the same thing as a guarantee of reliability and truthfulness to the information they convey; there is obviously other factors that need to be taken into

consideration. But considering the age and experience of the participant it is interesting to note that she at least established a criterion to evaluate the information she collected, understanding that if most mainstream media are talking about the same thing there must be some truth to it, so she considered safe to use the information from these sources.

10.2.2.1 Image as information

In the same conversation with these students, another pertinent aspect of their research arose. The previous chapter addressed the way students use and combine different modes of communication, such as text and image, in order to convey meaning. When creating a digital artefact, they attribute different weights to different modes, depending on how they perceive the usefulness of each of them to convey the message. In relation to the way students search for information online, it emerged that they also treat text and image in different ways. If, on the one hand, students at least made an effort to justify why they had chosen their sources for the text they used in their artefacts, there was no such concern in relation to images. As the analysis of digital artefacts revealed, some groups carefully chose their images in order to convey a certain message, sometimes as a matter of illustration, sometimes to complement the information in the text. However, the same carefulness with the meaning of the images was not observed in relation to the sources of the images used in the projects. The extract below (continuation from the extract above) is an example of that:

RESEARCHER – Ok, so you trust that information. Good. Where did you get the pictures?

STUDENT 1 – Google image.

RESEARCHER – Google image, I knew that! (students laugh). Tell me one thing. Why are you very careful with the information you get for text but you are not as careful with the information you get in pictures?

STUDENT 1 – Some pictures can go with any text…

STUDENT 2 – Some pictures are actually from the magazine (inaudible – apparently she says the name of a magazine)

STUDENT 1 – The text has to be, like… really, like, I don't know.

RESEARCHER – No, say it.

STUDENT 1 – I don't know. Like… it has to be accurate.

RESEARCHER – So in your opinion the picture has not to be as accurate as text.

STUDENT 1 – Yes. You can get more information from the text.

'Google images' was by far the most common answer for the question 'Where did you get the images from?'. Some groups occasionally managed to give a more accurate answer, but the pattern observed throughout the ML programme was that students would simply go to Google image, type the word or expression related to the picture they wanted to find, collect the image and use it without any concern about the source. Images are, of course, information. Actually, one can find a lot of different information in just one image. However, students generally did not demonstrate to understand this or, at least, to give images the same importance they would give to text in terms of their reliability. As a student illustrated in the extract above, 'some pictures can go with any text' and 'you can get more information from text'. She also confirmed that pictures do not have to be as accurate as text. This pattern was observed in all three schools.

The fact is that students continued to use Wikipedia and other not so reliable sources throughout the Media Literacy program. They became a little bit more concerned about checking other sources during the activity, probably because they knew I was going to ask them about that during the presentation, but there was very little evidence that they were actually selecting different sources, comparing and evaluating information, and reflecting carefully on the reliability of the content they were creating based on that information. Students demonstrated a very high level of awareness of the importance of searching for reliable information online; they also demonstrated that they know very little about the main best practices involved in online research; and, even after being exposed to some content where they could learn some basics about it, they did not feel that they actually had to spend too much time being vigilant and cautious of the information they were going to use in their projects.

These findings cannot guarantee that in a different context students would not carry out a rigorous online research. For instance, if they knew their project was going to be graded based on the accuracy and reliability of the content of their digital artefacts, they would probably think better about how they collect information. Or, in a situation outside of school, in which they were, for instance, researching about a very important issue that might possibly affect their lives, it is not possible to say that they would have the same behaviour they did in the ML programme. What it does show, however, is that in a context of a media course delivered to Transition Year students; where the main objective of the sessions was to create a digital artefact which was not going to be graded or assessed in any way; and where there was no clear rationale and structure guiding students during the research part; students limited themselves to spend as little time as possible doing the research and demonstrated not to be concerned with the quality of the information nor with the reliability of the sources they used.

10.2.3 BIAS

Another relevant topic related to Information Literacy that was introduced and discussed with students in the ML program was the concept of bias. In workshops 2 and 3 students had the opportunity to reflect on how bias might affect a media message, such as a journalistic report, for instance, and also how people's personal bias also may influence how they will understand the messages they receive from the media. Students discussed biased information in general; they reflected on how neutral the media outlets are or should be, especially in the journalism industry; and they were also provoked into thinking about their bias, both as consumers and producers of media messages.

The activities around this topic went very well and students demonstrated a good level of understanding and commitment during the session. At some stage the participants were asked if they believed journalists should be neutral when reporting some facts, and all students in all three schools agreed with that. Next they were asked if it is possible for a journalist to be a 100% neutral (they were asked to raise their arms for Yes or No), and almost all of them agreed that no, it is not possible for a journalist to be a 100% neutral, and the common reason given for that is that everyone has bias. Thus, even though all students agreed that journalists should aim

for a total neutrality, most of them were aware that everyone has its own opinions and those opinions affect the way they think and behave. The next extract from a focus group in School C exemplifies that:

RESEARCHER – Do you think that it's possible to have journalism without bias?

STUDENT 3 – No, that's impossible 'cos everybody has opinions. And if they think, like, their opinion is getting wrong, they go towards their opinion being right, so they will always be biased.

RESEARCHER – The journalists?

STUDENT 3 – Yes, the journalists. They will always be biased.

RESEARCHER – A hundred percent neutral is…

STUDENT 2 – There is no 100% neutrality but, there is like, what they should be is as close to neutral as possible. Or say, this is only from the top of my head but, like, say, this idea… when journalists are assigned a topic, they should choose people who don't have strong opinions on a certain matter. So, like, say… there's a debate on gay marriage, say, they should choose a person who doesn't have an opinion on that, who should just go and take information for the report as it is, not as much as in, like, a person who is really into that stuff.

Students in this fragment talk about journalists' opinions, and how difficult it is to report something if that goes against one's opinion. It is a very honest and straightforward account of how human beings in general behave. One of the participants even made a suggestion by saying that journalists should not be involved in report which they have strong opinions on, so that the chance of a biased account of the facts is reduced. It is indeed a very interesting way of looking at how people are affected by their own bias.

Still in school C, during the focus group after workshop 2 students were talking about the quality of their digital magazines, especially in terms of the information they collected online and presented in the magazine. One student was comparing his magazine with other ones:

STUDENT 1 – Maybe if we got to put more things it would show more. For example, in, like, in the other ones. I don't want to be critiquing anybody, 'cos… I

know the person who should be critiquing anybody. But like, erm, I thought as if all the information was presented in kind of, at least a bit in favour of the refugees.

STUDENT 2 – *Yes.*

STUDENT 1 – *It is the way of saying, like, 'oh, they are trying to escape, it wasn't their fault in the first place'. Or 'oh, they are in a bad situation', you know, they need help. It presents them as, like, the… As complete victims. So they are victims, they are victims of what happened there.*

RESEARCHER – *But they didn't show the other side. Because some people don't agree exactly with what they do… So, do you think that to be completely fair with the information and neutral you should present both sides?*

STUDENT 1 – *Yes. And then it is up to people to read that and decide what to believe.*

In this fragment the student was questioning why some of the magazines were clearly so in favour of the refugees, instead of presenting just facts, without choosing a side. It is obviously one of those situations where it is difficult to report only facts without showing some kind of empathy and support for one side. This student in particular was a boy with very strong and quite often controversial opinions about many topics, and he would regularly be at odds with the rest of the classroom in many subjects discussed throughout the ML programme. Nevertheless, in terms of the topic that was being discussed, it is important to notice that he has a point, and his last sentence demonstrate this very well: "it is up to people to read that and decide what to believe". He is actually advocating for a more neutral description of the facts and, even though the report that he was analysing is probably not the best one to critique people for taking sides, it is important to acknowledge that he demonstrates a good understanding of how bias can affect and distort media messages.

It was also very interesting to see how students would reflect on their artefacts as journalists creating a magazine. The extract below is from a presentation during workshop 2 in School A:

RESEARCHER – *Ok. Do you think the opinion… do you think the information here on the magazine reflects the opinion of the group? Or not necessarily?*

STUDENT 1 – Like… on having refugees in our country?

RESEARCHER – Yes, I mean… the information you put here in the magazine, I mean… you have a summary of the refugee crisis. Right? So, for example, I am reading this magazine now, so I go to the first page, I learn about refugees and so on… there's a lot of information in there. The information that is there, do you think it reflects your opinion? I mean, do you agree with everything that is in there?

STUDENT 1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER – Yes, so could we say that your magazine is biased in some way?

(SILENCE)

RESEARCHER – Or could you say you are not neutral?

STUDENT 1 – We are more kind of, like… (long pause) Yes, actually we are a bit biased (laughter).

RESEARCHER – What?

STUDENT 1 – We are a bit biased.

RESEARCHER – No problem. I mean, you made a magazine that reflects your opinion, that's what I am asking. Do you think that, as a journalist… You are not a journalist, so it's fine, you can be biased, this is just a presentation, but do you think that as a journalist it's ok to be biased? To make a magazine that reflects your opinion?

STUDENT 1 – It depends on, like, the story. Like, if you are talking about something, like this, it could be controversial, it could like… different people's opinions can, like… (long silence). I don't know. I think journalists shouldn't be biased, but, like, sometimes it happens, erm… Like in our magazine. We thought it was for a good reason, though.

RESEARCHER – Yes, sure, no problem, I know it was for a good reason. I am not complaining; I just want to know your thoughts on it. Thanks anyway.

The situation with this group happened with other groups in the same school and in the other two schools as well: when confronted with the question: 'do you think your magazine is biased?', students would usually be silent for a while, and then

would try to explain their choices away. This is mainly because in the context of the workshop students saw bias as something bad, so hearing their magazines being called a biased magazine was not something pleasant to them. It was very interesting to see students reflecting on their own choices and putting themselves on journalists' shoes. They spent a good amount of time during the activity discussing how important it is for journalists to be neutral, and then all of sudden they found themselves creating a magazine that in some way reflected their own opinions, and for this reason could not be called totally neutral.

The concept of bias had already been present in students' responses in the survey they answered before the start of the program. In question six students were asked to choose from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) in relation to 5 sentences. One of the sentences was the following: "*Different people experience the same media message in different ways*". The vast majority of students (84.2%) chose either 4 or 5, which means that they either agree or strongly agree with the sentence.

Figure 10.2 – Answers to the question *Different people experience the same media message in different ways.* Students chose from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

The sentence was not exactly about bias, but it is understood that when talking about how people experience the same media message in the same way bias is one of the aspects involved in it - other aspects would be their level of literacy; their cultural repertoire; their educational background etc. The respondents had also a space where they could explain their choices. Some qualitative answers below:

Some media messages are perceived differently by people depending on how they feel about the topic.

Someone who has a strong opinion against the subject already would see it differently from someone who has an unbiased opinion.

People with different opinion will often view a media message differently.

Everyone has a different perspective depending on their situation in life and previous experiences.

The survey suggests that most participants had a good understanding about how different people experience the same message, and some qualitative answers reveal that some of them could even articulate the reasons to think this way. The words they used to explain their choices, such as *feel*, *opinion*, *unbiased*, and *perspective*, are the same words they used when discussing bias during the ML programme. So the idea that people have their own thoughts and convictions and that those thoughts and convictions in some way shape the way they interpret and understand media messages was already placed in most students' minds. What was more revealing to them during the ML programme was actually how this bias works in practice and, most of all, how it is difficult to be totally neutral when you are the one producing the message.

In the post-research survey, the number of students who chose 4 or 5 for this question practically did not change – it went from 84.2% to 87.3%. However, many students moved from *agree* to *strongly agree* – *agree* fell from 72.4% to 56.3%; whilst *strongly agree* went up from 11.8% to 31%.
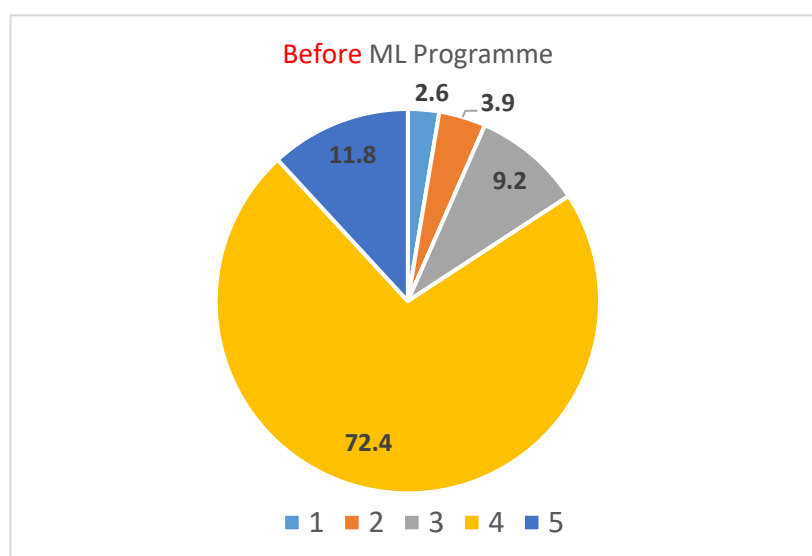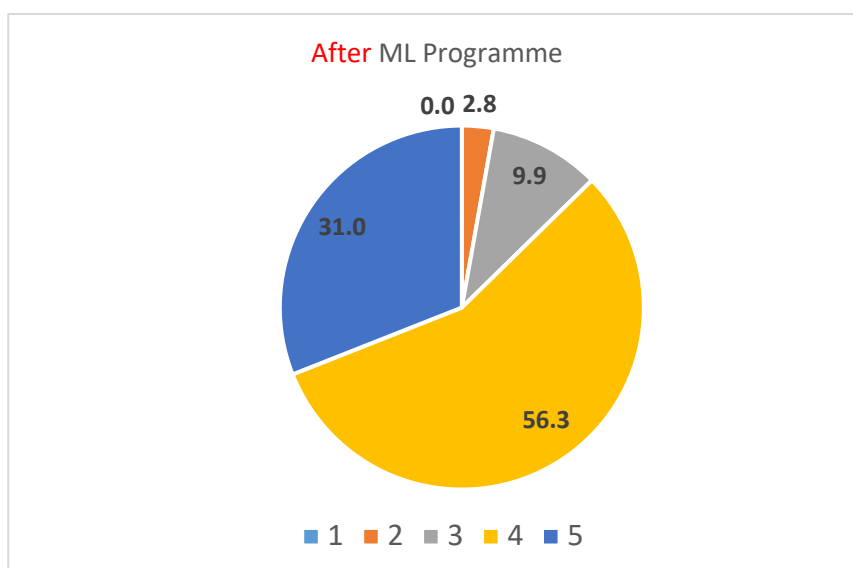
Figure 10.3 – Answers to the question *Different people experience the same media message in different ways*. Students chose from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

This suggests that after the ML programme students had a stronger opinion on this issue. A good number of students who were not one hundred percent sure whether they agreed with the sentence before the programme changed their minds and were more strongly sure about it.

This section presented the main findings related to the *information literacy* aspect of the research project. The observation of students during the learning activities showed that the vast majority of them are not cautious enough with the information they search and collect online. This is despite the fact that during conversations with the researcher they demonstrated high levels of awareness in relation to the importance to evaluate the quality of the information when doing an online research. In this case, the technology available to students, that is, tablets and an internet connection, enabled them to look up for the content they needed in order to complete their tasks and create their digital artefact. However, the technology alone did not guarantee that students would turn their critical awareness into appropriate action to avoid collecting and using information from unreliable sources. This suggests that the role of the teacher/facilitator in this case is important to guarantee that students will use the technology following the best practices in media literacy education.

The practice of creating a digital artefact can lead to an important reflection on students own opinions and personal preferences and how they affect the way they

construct and convey their messages. This is an interesting exercise to discuss media bias and journalistic neutrality in a more practical way, since participants could experience the job of a journalist – research, collect and synthetize information – and feel how their own bias affect the way they think and express their ideas.

10.3 Critical Awareness

Broadly speaking, critical awareness about the media means to understand the nature, the role and the mechanisms of the media industry in the society; be aware of how media messages affect and influence people's behaviour and attitudes; and be able to produce media artefacts in a critical and civilized manner. To be critical of the media is one of the three social functions described in the Media Literacy Model (please refer to chapter 5) and the competences and skills linked to it are understood to be very important for anyone willing to become media literate.

The Media Literacy programme developed for this research project touched on some topics related to the critical media approach, such as discussions around manipulation of information, propaganda, ethics in journalism and media influence on the society. The idea was to provoke students into thinking critically on certain issues related to the media, and then observe how they would respond to that during the learning activity and how this would be reflected on their digital artefacts. The data analysis revealed that some themes around critical media literacy did emerge from the raw data, and they will be presented next.

10.3.1 TRUST IN THE MEDIA

Throughout the Media Literacy program students had the opportunity to talk about many topics related to media consumption. As media consumers, it is expected that people become critical in relation to what they consume. This means being inquisitive, questioning media practices and making sense of the meanings contained in their messages (Buckingham, 2003; Kellner and Share, 2019). One of the issues that emerged from the research is how much people actually *trust* what they are consuming. In the survey that students had to answer before and after the ML programme, they were asked the following question: *on a scale from 1 (don't*

trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on, and then there were 4 different types of media – social media, search platforms, mainstream journalism and advertisements. The answers 1 and 2 were grouped into the category *DON'T TRUST;* 4 and 5 into the category *TRUST;* and answer three, the middle one, formed the category *NOT SURE.*

SOCIAL MEDIA
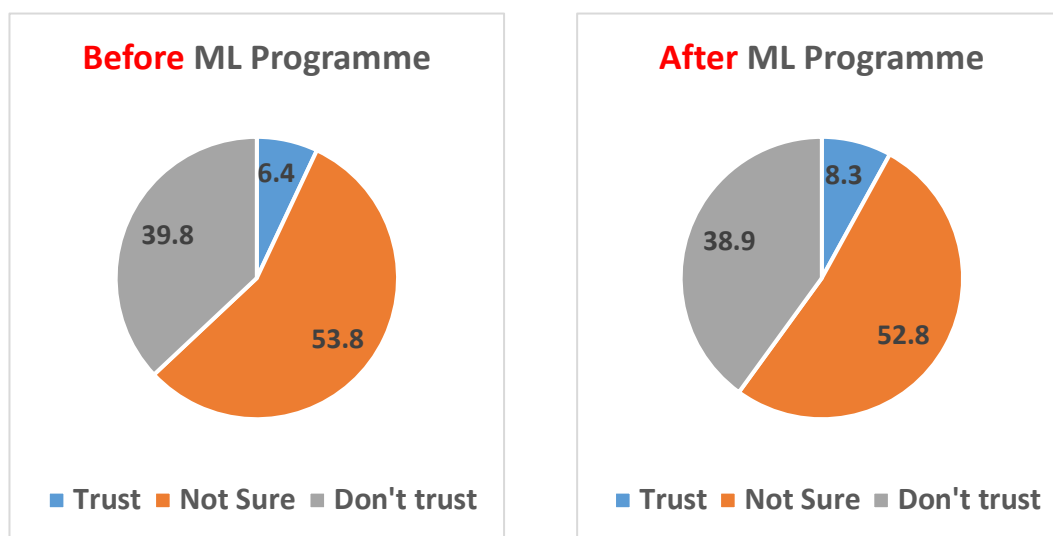
SEARCH PLATFORMS
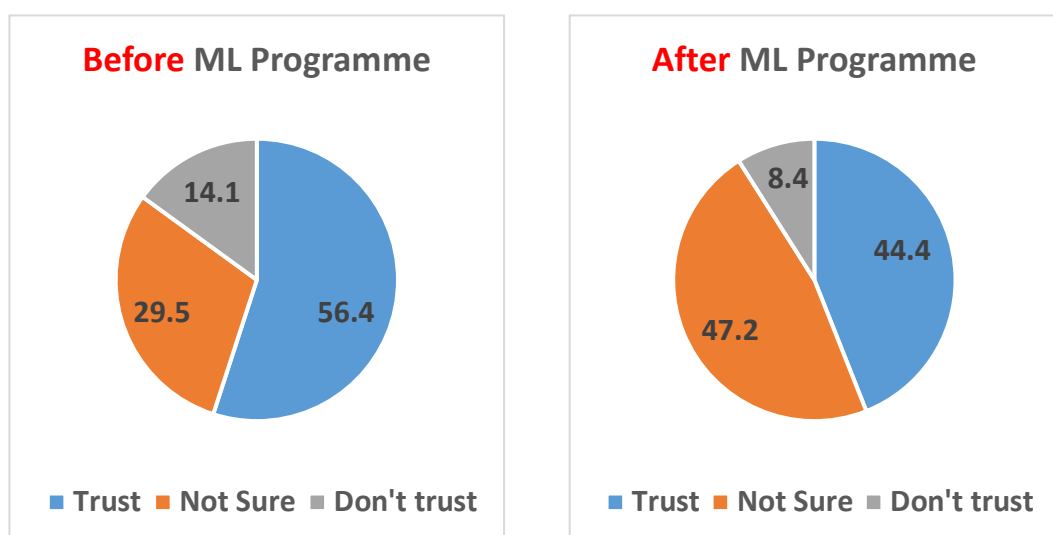
MAINSTREAM JOURNALISM
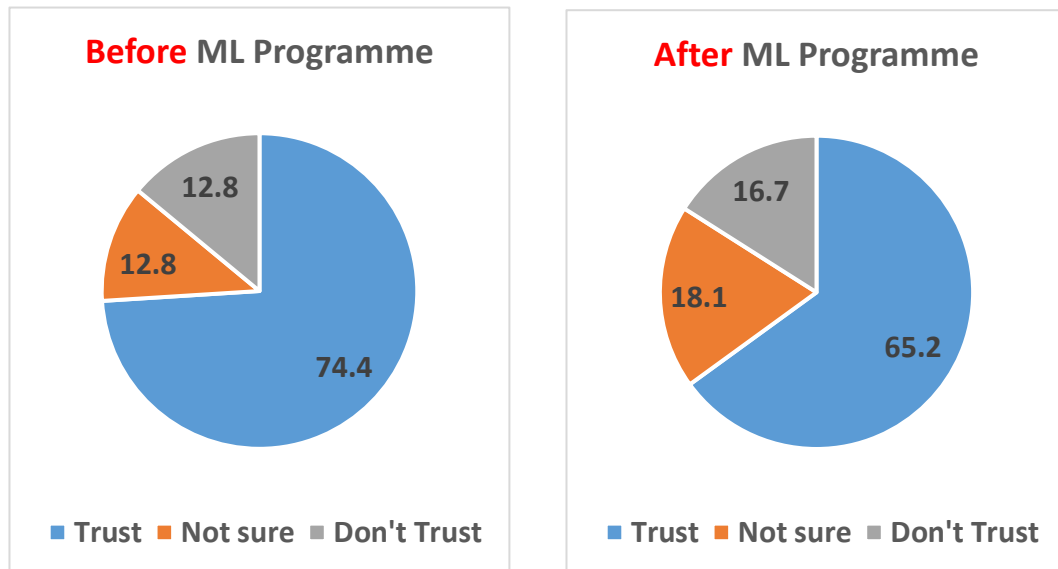
ADVERTISEMENTS
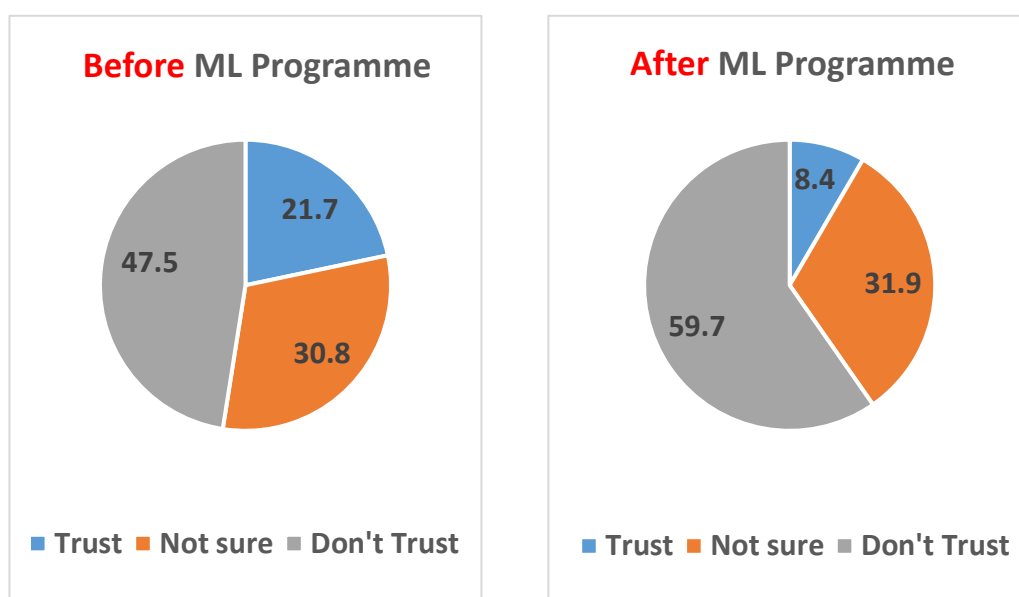
Figure 10.4 – Students answers for the question: *on a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:'.*

The comparison between students' answers in the pre and post-research surveys shows that, except for Social Media, where the numbers changed very little, all the other types of media had a tendency to be less trusted by students after the ML programme.

It is important to mention that all the four types of media were subjected to discussion throughout the ML programme. However, whilst journalism was largely discussed in workshop 2; advertisement was the main topic in workshop 5; and search platforms were present in all five workshops due to the research component within them; social media as a topic was the least addressed and discussed one among them all. This suggests that the fact that students were exposed to debates around journalism, search platforms and advertisement made them understand better how these media actually work and, as a consequence, they became more inquisitive and suspicious in relation to the information these platforms deliver to the general public. This, in turn, would imply that if Social Media had been the main topic of a workshop students would also become more inquisitive of how much they trust the information they find in social media. However, this actually cannot be confirmed by this research project as the reasons for the numbers about social media to have only slightly changed might have a different cause. For instance, it could be argued that students are more actively engaged with social media than with the other types of media, and this could make them less inclined to change their views about it.

Another interesting aspect of the data contained in the charts is that the decrease in the percentage of students who trust those three media platforms did not mean that the participants would simply swap *trust* for *don't trust*; what the graphics actually show is that there was also a significant increase in the *not sure* category. This suggests that for some students, discussing issues around journalism, search engines and advertisement created an element of *doubt* or *uncertainty* in their minds in relation to how much they trust the information delivered by these types of media. Rather than simply switching from *trust* to *don't trust*, many participants preferred to choose number 3 as their answer, showing that they are not very sure whether or not they can trust the media platforms.

Both doubt and uncertainty are important elements of critical thinking, as they lead students to becoming good enquirers of the world around them. Thus, learning activities using digital media technologies in which students engage in discussions around their uses and purposes can make them review their positions about those technologies and approach them in a more critical way. At the same time, there is always a danger that both doubt and uncertainty lead to cynicism, which could not be measured or analysed in any way in this research project. For this reason, the

role of the teacher/facilitator in making a clear distinction between being critical and being cynic is extremely important.

10.3.2 MEDIA AFFORDANCES AND THE CRITICAL VIEW

In the first workshop, students were asked to do a brainstorm and come up with any word, expression, idea or concept that was related to media. After that, they had to choose one of these ideas as a topic for their digital artefact. This was a good opportunity to learn a little bit about participants' own media references and discuss topics that were trending in their everyday experiences across many different media platforms.

In School C, one of the teams decided to create their digital artefact about the movement 'Black Lives Matter'. According to students, they chose this topic because it had recently been trending on social media due to some violent protests in the United States. Interestingly, the boys decided to create a movie criticizing the movement, and their main argument was that Black Lives Matter was an activist group that had turned very violent and no longer represents the interest of black people. In order to express this idea, students used a mix of videos from YouTube and images they downloaded from Google. The scenes showed activists throwing stones at police officers and burning down cars and stores, whilst a narrator provided some statistics trying to discredit the real intensions of the group.

Figure 10.5 - Screenshots from the movie about Black Lives Matter created by students

The video was received with anger by the other students. It quickly became clear that two of the boys in the team were regarded by the other students as 'very controversial guys', so the class was not actually surprised with the movie; they were only angry because they did not agree with its content. The following discussion broke out right after the movie was over. I asked if anyone in the audience had any question. (Students with an "x" are the ones in the audience).

STUDENT-X-1 – *Yes, I have a question. Are you guys saying that black people are scary?*

MANY STUDENTS IN THE AUDIENCE – *Yes, yes, yes.*

STUDENT 2 – *No, let me explain, let me explain. We are not saying black people are scary, we are saying the organization black lives matter is scary. That was black*

lives matter protest, that doesn't show how peaceful they are, they are saying, they are not against the violence they are causing.

Students in the audience start talking and discussing all at the same time, mostly against the presentation.

RESEARCHER – Listen up, if everyone talks at the same time we don't hear anything. So you were saying…

STUDENT 2 – The clip we just saw, with the police cars, that was BLM protestors breaking into a store. Now tell me who is causing the violence here?

Students in the audience start protesting and discussing again.

RESEARCHER – George (fictional name) was going to say something.

STUDENT-X-2 – Police will show up at any protest.

STUDENT 2 – Police showed up at this one.

STUDENT 1 – And BLM protesters are throwing cocktail Molotov and bricks at them. And are they peaceful?

STUDENT 2 – They claim to be peaceful.

STUDENT-X-3 – How many police officers killed black people?

STUDENT 2 – Actually, more black people kill black people than white people kill black people. It was in the actual video. If you had listened to the voiceovers…

RESEARCHER – Ok, folks. Listen, please.

STUDENT 2 – So my point is that BLM is not what they claim to be. They claim to be that peaceful organization who just wants better lives for black people. In fact, they have ripped more lives of black people than what they have claimed to have saved.

RESEARCHER – So what you are saying is… It's important to have a movement that…

STUDENT 2 – It's important to have a movement that liberates people, that's obvious, but they are not the right movement for it.

RESEARCHER – So you're not against any movement that fights for black people's rights, what you are saying is that this specific…

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STUDENT 2 – *This specific movement they are wrong, they are lying…*

RESEARCHER – *Victor (fictional name) wants to say something.*

STUDENT-X-3 – *That was not the intension of BLM, that was how some people behaved.*

STUDENT 1 – *That was what they became.*

STUDENT 2 – *Yes, but the people are black lives matter. The supporters are BLM.*

STUDENT 1 – *They are a hate group. More black people kill black people than white people.*

STUDENT 2 – *I am not talking about the movement's intension we are talking about what they are doing. Don't judge people on what they say, judge on what they do.*

RESEARCHER – *What Victor is trying to say is that you are generalizing the violence…*

STUDENT-X-3 – *The minority of black people are violent*

STUDENT 1 – *No, black lives matter is a hate group.*

Discussion breaks out again. Everyone is speaking at the same time.

Black Lives Matter is a topic that could be discussed in a few subjects within the school curriculum, such as History or Politics and Society, for instance. What makes the topic interesting in a class where students are using digital media technologies is the fact that participants can *represent* their ideas using a specific medium, which in this case was a film. The kind of debate that broke out in the activity would probably have happened in other classes about the same topic. However, what students were discussing in this case was related to how students *represented* their ideas through the film they created. Using moving-image, music, voiceover and pictures students created a narrative selecting the facts they deemed the most important ones and showing their point of view, which is something very different from simply discussing a topic with their peers.

The question that started the discussion is an indication of how the class received the message contained in the film. "*Are you guys saying that black people are*

scary?", asked a student. It is interesting to note that the student did not ask anything about the movement BLM; his question was related to how black people had been represented in the film. Besides the scenes of violence caused by black people who are members of the movement, there was a particular scene that caused a fuss when it appeared on the screen. Students decided to use a picture of a black woman with a red wig pouting to the camera (**figure 10.6 below**). Amidst scenes of police officers and people burning down cars and stores, the picture appeared to be completely out of context. The reaction from the class was clearly a response to what was understood as an attempt to mock black people, and not make a criticism of the BLM movement. The question that opened the discussion was a manifestation of that feeling.
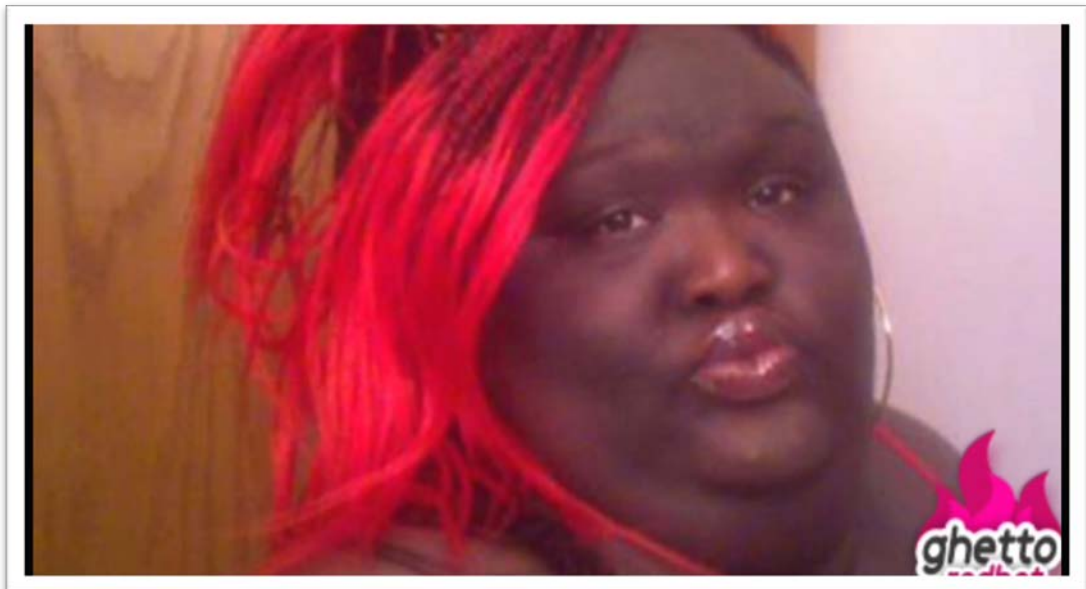
Figure 10.6 - Screenshot from the movie showing the picture of a black woman

The extract from the conversation with students shows that the members of the group tried to explain that their intension was not to mock or despise black people, but actually criticize the BLM movement. Their argument was that the movement is very violent, they are a hate group, even though they claim to be a peaceful organization, and this violence, according to students, would generate more violence even for black people themselves. Therefore, while the group of students was trying to generalize the behaviour of a few members of the organization, the

rest of the class was trying to make the point that the movement itself is not violent and have a legitimate cause to defend.

What this experience shows is that digital media allow students to practice their critical thinking in different ways, both as producers and as consumers of media texts. The group who created the artefact had to explain their choices to the rest of the class, and in doing so they had to critically think about the way they constructed the narrative and the elements they used in the film to convey their ideas. At the same time, the rest of the students were exposed to the meanings created in the film and reacted to it; they listened to the explanations, enquired further to expose the flaws in the argument and expressed their own point of views. All this experience was done having a digital media artefact as the interface between the two group of students, which is also an interface through which the teacher can mobilise work on criticality, and this is what makes the experience unique and different from other leaning activities about the same topic. The meanings that were created and critically discussed in the activity were only made possible because they had access to technologies that allowed those meanings to be constructed, conveyed, analysed and discussed.

There were other examples of this kind of critical engagement with the topic in other schools and in other workshops as well. In some cases, the result was some discussions and debates with students, in other cases this critical approach was subtler. In the previous chapter, I presented the work of a group of students in School B who decided to create a digital magazine on the topic Golden Globes, and I discussed the way they used the colour mode to represent the fact that women wore black in the event in support of the MeToo movement.

Figure 10.7 – Cover of the digital magazine on the topic Golden Globe

I will remind the reader about the conversation with students during the presentation of the project, presenting below an extract with the complete dialogue between researcher and students about this topic.

RESEARCHER – Ok, so this is the cover. Beautiful. Why did you decide to do a black cover? Any specific reason?

Student 1 – 'Cos, like, it stands out…

Student 3 – And 'cos they had to wear black. They didn't have to, but they decided to wear black.

RESEARCHER – Why did they decide to wear black?

Student 2 – It was for feminism.

RESEARCHER – All right, so you decided to do a black cover because the women decided to wear black during the Golden Globe. Good.

STUDENT 3 – Yes, we thought it would be nice to, like, do the same as they did, like, they wore black and we, like, erm… we made the cover black for the same reason.

RESEARCHER – Ok. So there's a kind of association between the colour black and, erm… the… I mean, the colour black and the fact that women wore black

there… Do you remember exactly what happened? I mean, you said it was for feminism, but do you girls remember exactly what happened?

STUDENT 2 – *Because of sexual harassment, like…*

RESEARCHER – *Sexual harassment?*

STUDENT 2 *and* **STUDENT 3**– *Yes.*

STUDENT 2 – *They, like…*

STUDENT 3 – *They wanted to support all the women.*

STUDENT 2 – *Yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok…*

STUDENT 3 – *So we thought it would be nice to do the same in the magazine. I mean, with the cover.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok, so you girls also support their cause?*

STUDENT 2 and STUDENT 3 - *Yes*

RESEARCHER – *Ok, that's great. Yes, great idea.*

This conversation with the girls in School B did not result in a debate involving the whole class, like the previous example with the boys in school C. However, it shows how digital media technologies enable students to express their opinions and critical view on current affairs such as feminism, for example, in distinctive ways. Again, the topic feminism could have been addressed in many different ways in various disciplines within the school's curriculum. What makes this learning experience unique is that by producing a digital magazine, where they can combine many different modes of communication, students had the opportunity to address the topic feminism by creating a correspondence between the colour of the dress used by celebrities in the Golden Globe and the colour of their magazine cover. In doing so, they did not only exercise their critical awareness about the topic, but did it in a way that was only possible due to the affordances of the media platform they used. Had their digital artefact been a movie instead of a digital magazine, for instance, they would have to find different ways to express the same idea according to the affordances of the iMovie app.

The central point here is that the media platform used by students allowed them to *experience* the topic feminism in a different and distinctive way, whereby they created an artefact that was not only reporting the events of the Golden Globe, but also expressing the opinion of the group about the action taken by the celebrities who decided to wear black. In doing so, they could feel as though they were also part of the movement that supports women who had been subjected to sexual harassment.

Other examples of this kind of experience happened when, for instance, students created digital magazines and gave their own critical view on the refugee crisis, or when they created a photo storytelling on vegetarianism and expressed with pictures their critical view on the issue. Throughout the ML programme students in the 3 participating schools were able to critically engage with many different topics using the technology they had at hand, and the way they decided to do it reveals a lot about their media references, their cultural repertoire and their ability to express their critical view in distinctive ways.

10.3.3 MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION

The last topic related to Critical Awareness is *Manipulation of information*. The word manipulation can have different interpretations, such as in an action of manipulating something in a skilful way, which has a positive connotation; or as in an action of manipulating something or someone in a more deceitful way, which in turn has a negative connotation.

The idea of manipulation in media studies can be discussed in many different topics within the field. Following a more critical tradition, for instance, it is associated with the power of media corporations – and, more recently, the power of anyone who produces media artefacts and reach a large audience – to influence, control and exploit people's behaviours and attitudes (Kellner and Share, 2019).

The topic *manipulation of information* was discussed throughout the ML programme in different occasions, but it was more deeply debated during workshop 3, where students talked about visual media, especially photography, and created a digital photo story. The idea of giving a special importance to manipulation during workshop 3 is because the mode image gives many possibilities for exploring both

positive and negative connotations of the word, which results in a more balanced debate around the causes and effects of manipulation of information. During the session, students discussed, for instance, the use of Photoshop to change the meaning of pictures used in advertising, propaganda, social media platforms, artistic work and journalism. I showed a few pictures and encouraged students to think about the appropriateness of those manipulations; what effects they might cause for people and institutions; and the limits and ethical issues involved in these manipulations.

Students in this age group – around 15 years of age – are quite used to manipulating pictures themselves. They easily take photographs using their mobile phones and share those images in social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat. Many of these pictures are edited using various simple available editing tools, such as cropping, changing colour or applying masks and simple effects. Those editings reveal an intention to manipulate the meaning of the picture, and students were very comfortable talking about these meaning-making actions that they perform on a daily basis. The data analysis suggests that most students do not see any problem with the manipulation of pictures for entertainment purposes, such as when they are exchanging pictures on social media just for fun. They also feel quite comfortable with the manipulation of picture in advertising, for instance, or in artistic works. But this scenario changes when it comes to propaganda and journalism.

The following extract is from a conversation in school A during focus group after workshop 3:

RESEARCHER – *What do you think is the reason why people change… people manipulate pictures, why do you think people edit them? Not only you, people in general?*

STUDENT 2 – *Make you look like you are a better photographer*

STUDENT 3 – *Everyone wants to feel, like… to look the best you can.*

STUDENT 2 – *Like, like… They look like they are better photographer if they get a nicer clean photo.*

RESEARCHER – Ok. But do you think this is ok? I mean… because you change the photo, you are not representing really as it is, right? Do you think this is acceptable in any way? Or you think there are certain limits?

STUDENT 1 – There are probably certain limits…

STUDENT 4 – Yeah.

STUDENT 1 – 'Cos some people probably do it 'cos they feel more comfortable I suppose, with what they put online, you know? Cos, it's, like, everyone is going to see it…

STUDENT 4 – Yes.

STUDENT 1 – So, like, you're putting yourself out there so they have to make themselves, like… I suppose they want to feel, like, ok with what they are sending there, I suppose.

RESEARCHER – ok.

STUDENT 1 – Like, ok in that extent, but if you're doing something, like, photography or something like that and you're editing the photo mad, like, it's not your original or anything like that…

RESEARCHER – So if you are a journalist, for example. A photojournalist. Do you think it is ok to edit photos for a newspaper?

STUDENT 2 – I don't think so.

STUDENT 3 – I think yes, a little bit, like, if you're not completely changing, making it completely different.

STUDENT 2 – Yes. To change a little bit, maybe, if it's obvious that you edited it.

RESEARCHER – If it's obvious that you edited it?

STUDENT 2 – Yes. If you're kind of, like… If it's not obvious. The newspapers are telling you that it's true. Like, you are expecting the newspaper to be reliable, but on social media, no one is telling you 'this is what it looks like'. You kind of assume that it's already edited.

The next extract is from a conversation in school B during focus group after workshop 3:

RESEARCHER – Do you girls think it's ok to manipulate pictures?

STUDENT 1 – In some cases.

RESEARCHER – In what cases?

STUDENT 1 – Like…

STUDENT 3 – Advertising.

STUDENT 1 – Yes, advertising or stuff like that. But it's not ok when you make something look bad, like, by just editing a picture, or something like that.

RESEARCHER – So, for example, do you think that journalists they should be allowed to manipulate pictures?

ALL STUDENTS – No.

STUDENT 2 – What they are saying is, like, fact, and… but the picture isn't real.

STUDENT 4 – Yes, 'cos that makes it look biased. Because it's making you think, like, in one way… when it should be completely, like, neutral.

RESEARCHER – Neutral. Yes, but you know that it depends on angle, for example, that you take, you get a different point of view. So it's hard to be a hundred percent neutral.

STUDENT 2 – Yes.

(…)

RESEARCHER – Ok, so you think that it's ok to manipulate in certain circumstances.

STUDENT 2 – Yes, like, if you are joking or, if, like, erm… like if you and your friend are messing with each other.

In the first extract, the conversation starts with the possible reasons why people manipulate or edit pictures. There is no one simple and definitive answer for that, so the idea was just to provoke students into thinking about both their own and other

people's behaviours when it comes to editing pictures to share in digital media platforms. One student (STUDENT 2) says that people want to look like a good photographer, so his focus was on the quality of the picture, whereas another student (STUDENT 3) mentioned that everyone wants "to look the best you can", shifting the focus to the person's own qualities. Students were then faced with a question about how editing a photo means that you are not representing reality as it is, and what the limits for this practice are. During workshop 3, students discussed the idea that a picture is just a representation of reality, and that editing it can change and create new meanings for the picture. So it was inevitable to talk about the concept of truth and all the different representations that we can create of reality using digital media. STUDENT 1 mentioned that "some people probably do it (edit pictures) 'cos they feel more comfortable I suppose, with what they put online. (…) They want to feel ok with what they are sending there". According to her, this is acceptable after all because "everyone is going to see it". Then she makes the point of saying that this is "ok in that extent", that is, if one is editing pictures of themselves to look better, however this is not ok if you are "editing the photo mad".

This fragment shows how mindful students are about the fact that people edit their photos to look better, because they want to show their best part to the rest of people out there, that is, to their 'audience'. And, according to them, this is fine, as long as the editing does not change too much, creating a photo that is completely different from the original. In this same conversation but in a different moment, another student elaborated better this idea around how people edit the content they post.

STUDENT 2 – They want to portray their life the way they wanted it to be. They have full control over, like… they can make it into whatever they want it to be. They can obviously play, they can make themselves a lot, like, less of what they are, or, like, exaggerate their lives. Or they can lie, no one would ever know, so… It can be exaggerated.

In this fragment the student addresses the power that the online platforms give to people in terms of how they can curate the content they post online, not only slightly editing what they show in order to make it look better, but also exaggerating and even creating a completely fake story about their lives. The student also articulates

ideas around *representation* and *identity* when he says that people "want to portray their life the way they wanted it to be". This suggests that he is reflecting on how people represent their lives online in order to create an image of themselves, which is a critical way of framing this issue and it could be further explored by a teacher if this was a discussion within a learning activity. In addition, here there is a clear move from the editing that can slightly change the meaning of a picture in order to improve it or to make it look better, to an editing that can manipulate reality, the truth, and eventually deceive people. This is possible due to the tools available in the new media technologies, which give people, as the student said, "full control over".

This negative connotation of manipulation appears strongly when students are asked about the limits of photo manipulation, especially when it comes to journalistic purposes. The two main extracts above show that students do not easily accept the idea of photo manipulation in the journalism industry. In the conversation in school A, two students (STUDENT 2 and STUDENT 3) say that it is acceptable for a journalist to edit a picture "if you're not completely changing, making it completely different" and "if it's obvious that you edited it". The main point in the argument here is *transparency*, that is, students expect journalists to be reliable and make it clear if they have edited a picture for whatever reason they might have. Student 2 reinforces this idea when he says "you are expecting the newspaper to be reliable", and then he goes on to mark a clear difference between social media and news media in terms of what people expect from them: "(…) on social media, no one is telling you 'this is what it looks like'. You kind of assume that it's already edited".

In the segment from the conversation in school B, the girls are even less tolerant to photo manipulation by journalists. One student (STUDENT 1) says that in some cases it is fine to manipulate pictures, and another student (STUDENT 3) complements saying that in advertising, for example, it is acceptable. But when it comes to news media, student 2 claims that what journalists are saying is *fact*, so the picture has to be real. Another student enters the conversation to point out that if journalists edit pictures, this could "make it look biased", making the audience think in one way, when journalists should actually be neutral.

The topic *manipulation of information* also appeared in the surveys that students answered before and after the ML programme. Also part of question 6 where

students had to choose from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) in relation to five sentences about different critical aspects of the media, the last sentence was '*in the* <u>*news industry*</u>*, manipulation of information is never acceptable'*. The focus on the news industry is because it is common sense that news outlets should always report the truth, and the idea was to understand how students would associate this fact with manipulation of information. This topic is currently very important and has been largely addressed in the public debate, especially in relation to fake news and its consequences (Ireton and Posetti, 2018).

Most students in the pre-research survey chose either *agree* or *strongly agree* (49.4%), as opposed to 22.6% who chose either *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Almost one-third of participants (28%) chose *neither agree nor disagree*, which suggests that they would accept manipulation of information in certain cases. Some examples of students' answers in the pre-research survey - the numbers between brackets are students' choices from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree):

(2) – It depends because sometimes telling the full truth can be worse so sometimes it's better to leave certain stuff out.

 (3) – It depends on what information is being manipulated. If they are reporting on a serious topic than no, it isn't acceptable.

(3) – Manipulation of information can make a story more interesting but sometimes can be taken too far.

(4) – The public should be given raw information that isn't exaggerated nor manipulated.

(4) – If it is news it can't be changed.

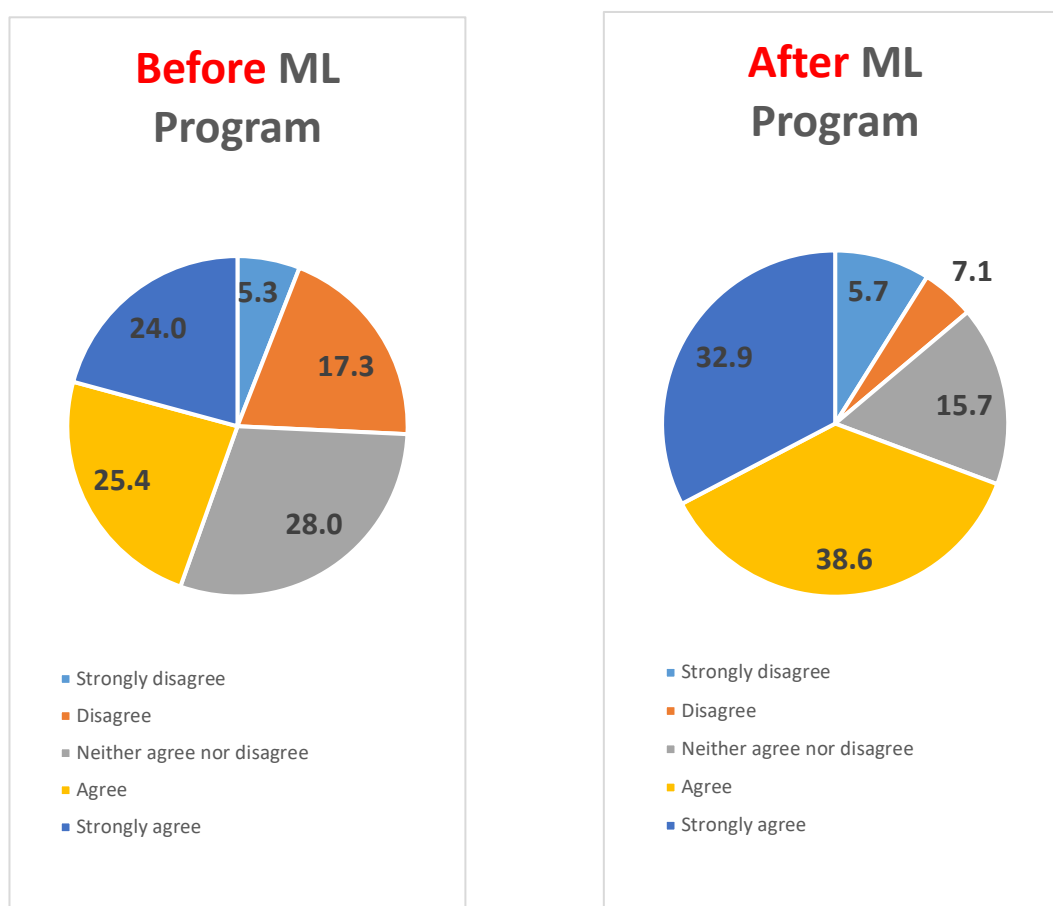(5) – This is the opposite of democracy

Figure 10.8 – Students answers for the question '*in the <u>news industry</u>, manipulation of information is never acceptable'*.

Unlike the other sentences, this one had a quite different result in the post-research survey. The amount of students who chose either *agree or strongly agree* had a sharp increase from 49.4% to 71.5%, whilst only 12.8% (down from 22.6%) chose either *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Likewise, only 15.7% (down from 28%) said they *neither agree or disagree.*

As mentioned before, even though the topic 'manipulation of information' was more strongly addressed in workshop 3, it was present in some way or another throughout the ML program, especially when discussing online research, information literacy and fake news. It could be argued that this is the main cause for this sharp increase in the number of students that regarded as unacceptable that journalists manipulate information. Students had the opportunity to discuss this topic with the researcher and among themselves in many occasions during the five sessions, raising questions about the role of journalists, the ethics around news coverage and media bias.

The technologies available allowed students to experience the many ways in which a photograph can be edited and manipulated, exploring the many facets of how information can be used for different purposes and reflecting on the importance and relevance of this topic. They also allowed the researcher to get students to reflect on how meaning can be constructed and manipulated in practice, and how editing plays an important role in the way people present themselves online and help them to create meaning through different forms of representation.

10.4 Discussion

Information Literacy and Critical Awareness are two topics within Media Literacy that deal with the *critical* aspect of education. Unlike the previous chapter where I sought to explore how the digital media can be used to promote the understanding of meaning making practices using different modes of communication, in this one the focus is on how ICTs can help students develop critical understanding of both media consumption and production. In this sense, this chapter deals with the interface between the use of ICT in education, Critical Pedagogy and Critical Media Literacy.

Many media educators argue that a good way of helping young people understand how media texts are constructed and how meaning is manipulated is through practical hands-on activities, whereby students get to create media artefacts and, as a result, this experience allow them to better understand the techniques, the grammar and the affordances of different types of media (Buckingham, 2003; Burn and Durran, 2006). In critical pedagogy, teachers are supposed to act as facilitators of learning, using students' everyday experiences to promote analytical discussions, question normative practices imposed by powerful institutions, and reflect on the learning activity establishing practical connections with the real world (Freire, 2002). Following these rationales, the workshops allowed the researcher to observe some critical aspects of their work as media producers, and analyse their ability to think critically about the topics being addressed in each session.

The fact that schools are increasingly investing in ICTs means that, besides the school library and textbooks, the internet is increasingly becoming an important source of information for both teachers and students during their learning activities.

For this reason, it is very important that young people learn how to find, select, organize and synthesise online information. The Media Literacy programme developed for this research project was not designed to teach students about research tools to improve their research skills. Instead, the idea was to provoke students into thinking about the importance of collecting good quality information, confronting their own bias and evaluating the truthfulness of their sources. From the outset, students demonstrated that they do not like to research for 'serious' information in the context of a learning activity, even after a few sessions being exposed to the dangers that poor quality information may have. The only factor that seemed to motivate them to be concerned about their sources and select more than one source to collect data was the fact that they were going to be assessed by the researcher on this. This suggests that the use of technology in the classroom for research purposes has to be supported by a pedagogy based on teachers' guidance and information literacy best practices. Even though most students demonstrated a good level of awareness about the importance of a careful online research to collect data, and some of them could even elaborate further on the reasons for that, this awareness did not materialize into research best practices. Again, this does not imply that in a different context they would not be more careful with the information they collect, but it suggests that technology alone does not guarantee that students will be better equipped to find information and turn it into knowledge. A combination of ICT and Media Literacy skills is necessary to ensure that online research becomes a powerful tool for students in the classroom.

Still in the context of information that students encounter online during learning activities, the data analysis suggests that the production of digital artefacts in the classroom can promote an important reflection on media literacy topics such as journalism neutrality and bias. By selecting the most appropriate information according to their view, and reporting this data choosing words, images, videos and music, participant could reflect on their choices as 'media producers' and analyse how these choices carry their own opinion and point of view. In the case of digital magazines, for instance, media production allowed students to understand, at least at basic level, the production process of a media report, moving from theory to practice.

In terms of critical awareness, the classroom has always been an important place for the development of activities involving critical thinking and analysis. Even before the emergence of digital media technologies, teachers and students could engage in conversations and debates around crucial topics such as politics, culture, social movements, climate change etc. The main modes of communication available for students to express their thoughts and opinions were speech – in debates involving the class, for instance – and writing – in essays, for example. What has changed with the digital media is that now students can represent their ideas in different ways using many different modes of communication together. What the data analysis reveals is that, by producing a digital media artefact, students can express their thoughts and feelings in unique ways. This does not mean that creating a video or a digital magazine is better than writing an essay. What it means is that digital media offer more possibilities of expression for students, more possibilities for meaning making practices. Furthermore, the possibility of expressing solidarity with colours or anger with music, for instance, opens an interesting opportunity to promote a critical reflection on the activity that involves a more nuanced approach to different forms of expression and abstract thought. Throughout the Media Literacy programme, students critically engaged with different topics using the technology available, and the way they decided to do it reveals a lot about their media references, their cultural repertoire and their ability to express their critical view in distinctive ways.

Another important aspect of critical awareness is related to production and editing. Production and editing in digital media are practices that allow students to experience how media content is constructed, how meaning is created and how information can be manipulated. Even though there is no evidence in this research project that the production of a digital artefact on its own can promote understanding about how the media work, the data analysis suggests that digital media production and editing are practices that can promote critical understanding of the media if they are planned following media education best practices and followed by a group reflection based on critical pedagogy principles. During the Media Literacy programme students were capable of articulating ideas around meaning-making practices during their practical work, reflected on their role as media producers questioning their own bias and cultural influences, and demonstrated understanding of how editing techniques can manipulate information and meaning.

Chapter 11

Popular Culture and Creativity

11.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the third theme that emerged from the data analysis: popular culture and creativity. In the media literacy model, this theme draws on the theoretical framework of two of the *social functions* presented in the model: creative practices and cultural engagement. The first section, Popular Culture, explores how students' popular cultural references were used during the workshops and how they shaped the outcome of the digital artefact created by the participants. The second section, Creative Process, discusses how students' creativity took place while they were planning, designing and creating the digital artefacts, and what kind of impact it had in the learning process.

11.2 Popular culture

According to the Media Literacy model, best practices in media education involve educators embracing student's everyday experiences beyond the school's walls, celebrating the cultural references of young people and incorporating them into the learning activities. This does not mean that students' cultural and media practices would be passively assimilated without any challenge or critical understanding; on the contrary, by integrating those references into their classes, media educators have a chance to *problematize* those positions and make pupils think critically about them (Buckingham, 1998). Following the Creative and Participatory tradition discussed in Chapter 3, the first step should be to acknowledge the importance of these cultural repertoires that students have, which influence their understanding of the world around them, and make the most of these references in order to create a more welcoming and valuable learning experience.

The use of digital technologies allows students to create media artefacts that reflect their social and cultural background in unique ways. This is evident not only in the cultural references used by students, such as when they mention a singer they

follow, a game they play or a TV program they watch; but also, in the way those students use the semiotic resources available to them. As Barthes (1993) and Fiske (1989) explained in their works, the use of semiotic resources and the active meaning making work derived from this use are largely dependent on people's frames of cultural references. Besides, it is also worth considering aspects around *motivation*, *familiarity* and *pleasure*, following Raymond Williams (1958) perception that people create meaning and pleasure through learning practices which they can relate to their everyday practices.

The cultural repertoire of students forms the building blocks of how they perceive the world around them. For this reason, it is impossible to dissociate this stock of ideas and values from the learning process. In any educational activity where students have some freedom to create and express themselves, these set of references is used as 'thinking tools' (Dennett, 2014) and is ultimately reflected in students' work. This is no different with learning activities using digital media. The production and creation of digital media artefacts allow students to explore their cultural repertoire in many ways and use it in order to create a piece of work that reflects how reality is perceived by them.

This section will present and analyse four examples of how students used their cultural repertoire to create their digital artefacts. Throughout the ML programme students used their cultural references in many different ways, with different formats, purposes and outcomes. The new media has allowed the emergence of new behaviours and practices, and participants demonstrated to be highly influenced by their 'digital lives'. Young people participate in this new cultural environment in many ways: exchanging messages using different modes of communication; playing games; following people they like; taking and publishing selfies; reading blogs; creating and spreading digital stories; meeting new people; learning about other people's lives; and so on. The influence of this *digital culture* in which teenagers are immersed will be used as the rationale for the analysis of the first example of students' use of cultural references in their projects.

Within popular culture it is also possible to find many different forms of expressions, and one of the most popular one among young people is *music*. The participants would mention many things related to the current music scene during talks with the researcher: their favourite songs, the most popular bands and singers, the latest tendencies, and so on. For this reason, it is not a surprise that music would take an

important role in students' production of their digital artefacts, especially when the technology allowed for the inclusion of sound, such as in movies created with iMovie. The second example in this section will explore the use of music by students and how their musical references influenced the outcome of their work.

The third example will investigate the use of two cultural references: *popular stories* and *public figures*. Popular stories here refer to stories that students come across in books, TV programmes, films, cartoons, graphic novels etc. It may be a children's story, such as Little Red Hiding Rood; or a more refined literature, such as Pride and Prejudice. Those stories appear in young people's lives in different ways and contexts, and they contribute to form their perception of the world. Students also come across many public figures in their daily lives, such as politicians, actors, activists, and so on. These encounters come in various forms, such as in a journalistic report, a video on YouTube or a meme spread across social media platforms.

Finally, the fourth example of uses of popular culture references by students will show how these references cannot only provide inspiration, ideas and content for their digital stories, but also influence their choices in terms of the format they choose in order to convey the meanings they create. This will be explored using *comics* as the rationale underlying some students' choices when they were creating their photo stories.

11.2.1 DIGITAL CULTURE

During workshop 1 in school B, one of the groups decided to create a short film on the topic 'stalking in social media'. The analysis of the artefact reviews that students used a great deal of digital culture references in order to create their story.

The main character of the story is Chelo, who is a famous blogger. In the first scene she is celebrating how popular she is.

Figure 11.1 – Chelo says: "I just hit a million followers"

Because Chelo is popular, the girls want to make contact with her. The next scene shows the girls approaching Chelo and taking a selfie with her. They put a caption "Oh my gosh is that Chelo?" to emphasize how excited they were to meet the blogger.
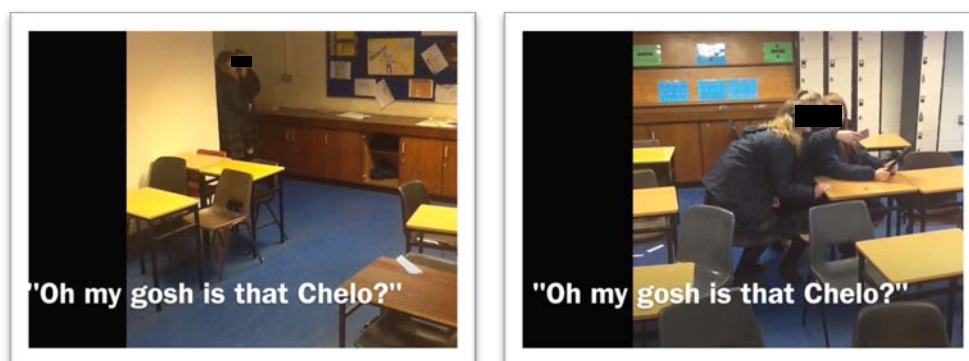

Figure 11.2 - Girls see Chelo and run to take a selfie with her.

Only in the last scene the *stalking* element of the film is eventually presented.

Figure 11.3 - Amy is stalking the blogger Chelo behind the curtain.

This narrative about the famous blogger shows how students use references from their 'digital lives' in order to compose a coherent story using moving image. The vocabulary and the actions they use are demonstrative of that. They show how famous and popular the blogger is by making her say that she "just hit a million followers". To have *a million followers* is a very recent event, something connected with students' digital culture. In the next scene, the girls meet Chelo by chance, get very excited and want to make contact with her. Following another recent event connected with the digital culture, students ask Chelo for a *selfie* with her. Lastly, in order to represent the *stalking*, which is the last element of student's digital culture in the film, the girls create a scene where the blogger is sitting on a couch looking at her mobile phone. The camera then pans horizontally showing the room and it stops on the opposite side, where there is a curtain and Amy, a girl who is hidden behind the curtain watching Chelo. The idea of stalking has in recent years been used a lot, especially in social media discussions, to refer to someone who anonymously and obsessively views other people's profile in platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. It is interesting to see how students take this idea from the digital world and represent it in the physical world, using a poorly illuminated room and the camera movement to create an atmosphere of stealth and sneakiness, and the shadow of the girl behind the curtain, hiding her face, to represent what they understand by stalking someone online.

Throughout the Media Literacy program students used these digital culture references in many other situations. The culture around Snapchat, for instance, was present in a few digital artefacts. In school A, during workshop 1 a group created a film about

'Snapchat Streak', which is a kind of game where a person exchanges snaps with someone else every day for a few consecutive days, so that they create a bond (Snapstreak) between them. If one of them does not send a snap in a period of 24 hours, the current is broken so they have to start all over again.

Figure 11.4 - Student asks his friend to use her phone to send some Snapchat Streaks.

In the short film, a student breaks his mobile phone and then asks a friend to use her phone to send his streaks to friends. The main idea of the film is to show how desperate someone can get if they need to send streaks to keep their Snapstreak with their friends going without breaking it down. The students also decided to explain how to use Snapchat using screenshots from the app, just because I had told them that he does not know how to use the app very well.
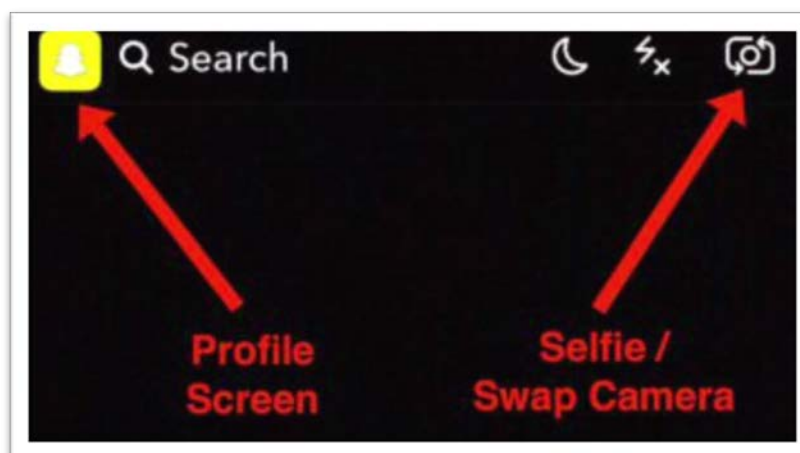

Figure 11.5 - Students explain how to use Snapchat.

Snapchat was also present in a film about Romeo & Juliet during workshop 4 in school B. In the film, a modern version of Shakespeare's story, Romeo approaches Juliet and asks her contact so that they can exchange messages through Snapchat.
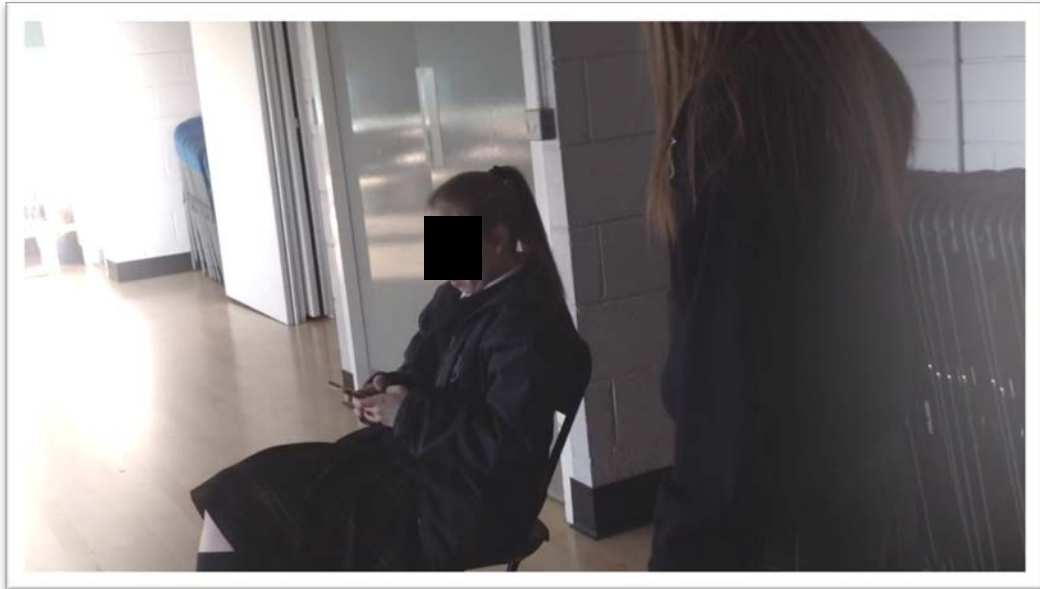

Figure 11.6 - Juliet types her snapchat contact on Romeo's phone

In the next scene, Juliet gets a message from Romeo, and they arrange a date in Romeo's house.
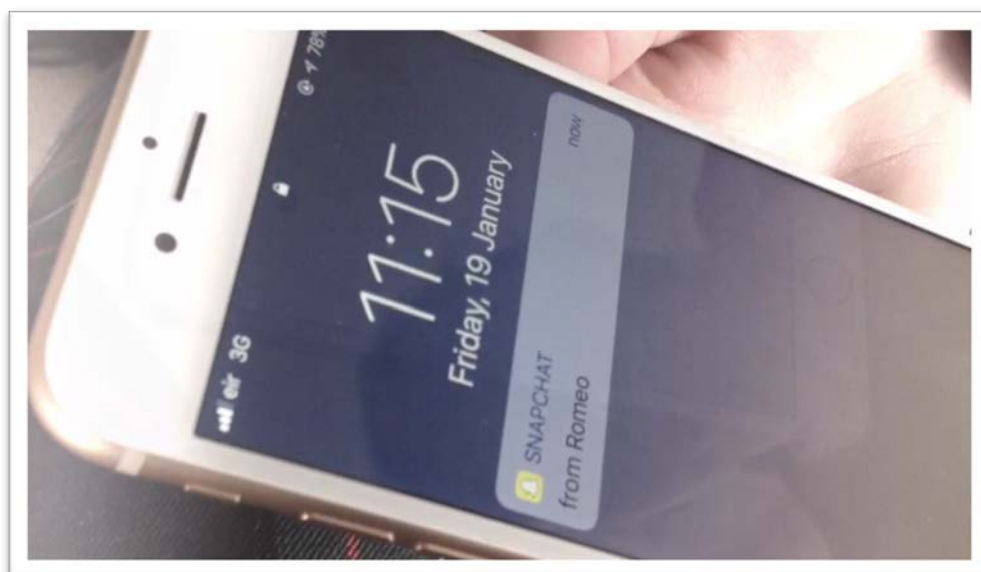

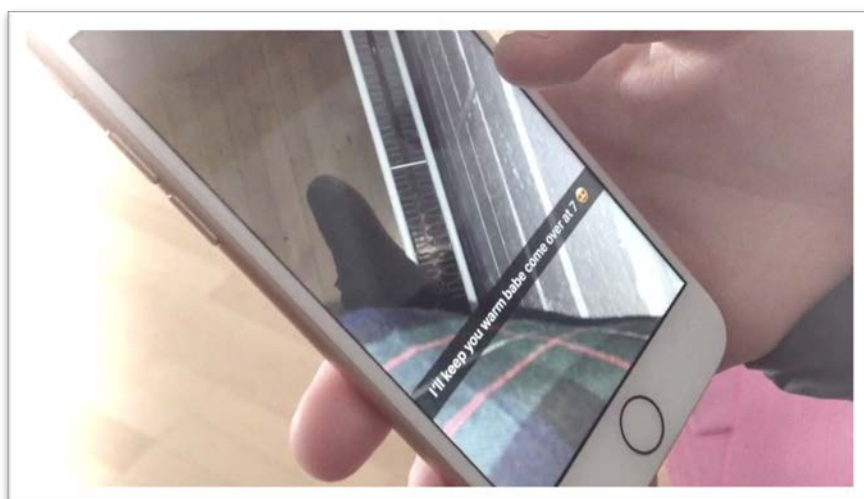**Figure 11.7 – Juliet gets a snapchat from Romeo.**

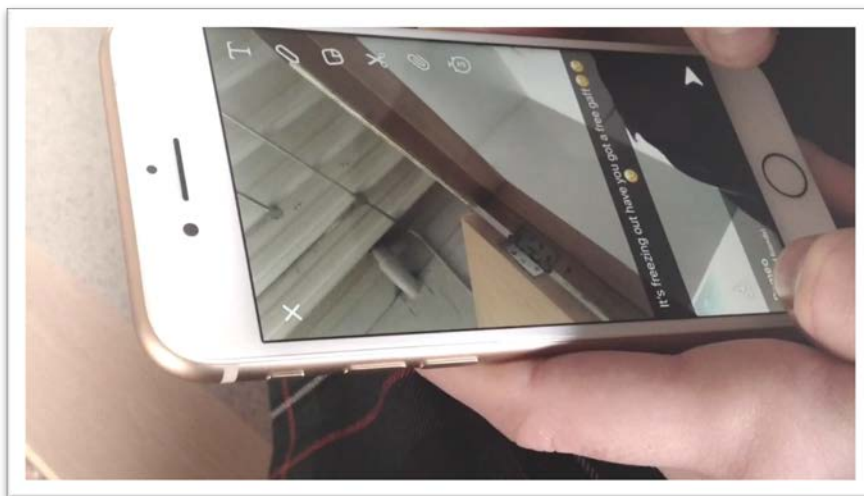**Figure 11.8 – The sequence shows the conversation between Romeo and Juliet. In the first image, Romeo sends "Whats up, coming out later" – with an emoji of a smiling face and a heart. Juliet replies "It's freezing out have you got a free gaff" – With three emojis and a blinking face. Romeo then send the message "I'll keep you warm babe come over at 7" – with an emoji with heart in place of the eyes.**

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In the last scene, Romeo appears lifting weight at home and proudly telling his friends that Juliet will come over soon.

Figure 11.9 – Romeo tells his friends about the date with Juliet.

In the last scene Romeo is represented as a boy lifting weights and telling his friends that Juliet will soon be over to his house. His friends start cheering and celebrating, and Romeo gets very proud of himself. He feels like a winner, lifting the weights with a smirking face. Because this film was created in an only-girls school, it is interesting to see how video enables the girls to portray the behaviour of boys, in this case Romeo getting very proud for having succeed in arranging a date with Juliet.

In the example above, Snapchat, an application used by the vast majority of participants, had a centre role in the plot, mediating the conversation between the two main characters and enabling students to show the way they communicate with their peers. Students constructed narratives using references from the digital culture in which they participate, everyday vocabulary including slangs, and representations of what they understand to be the role and behaviour of boys and girls in the society.

11.2.2 MUSIC

In school C, during workshop 4 a group of boys also decided to create a modern version of Romeo & Juliet. However, in this case, the references they used to construct the story came from their music repertoire. In the first scene, the audience finds out that they decided to change Romeo's name for Asznee (the correct spelling is actually Asnee). They took the name from the song *man's not hot*, by Roadman Shaq, aka Big Shaq. In the song Shaq uses the expression 'Hold on, Asnee', which became quite popular among young people and has been used when one wants to tell somebody to calm down.

The hip hop song plays on the background during the opening scene, setting up the atmosphere of the film. This scene is basically a picture of a play from Romeo & Juliet, with their faces replaced by the faces of two students.
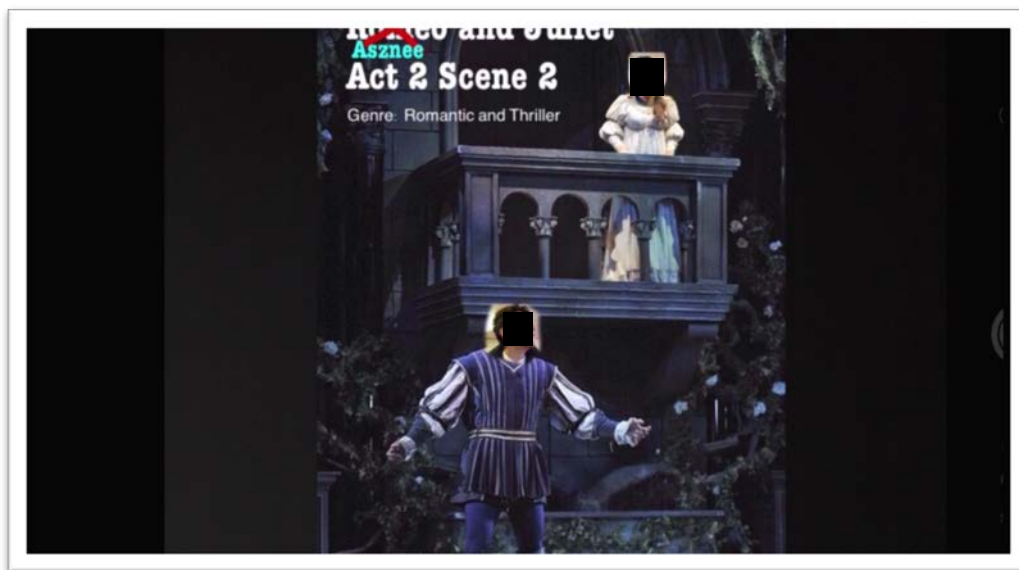

Figure 11.10 – Opening scene of "Azsnee and Juliet".

The story goes on showing Asnee meeting Juliet and inviting her to go out with him. In the final scene, the couple is dancing to electronic music in a night club, and then Asnee proposes marriage to Juliet.

Figure 11.11 - Sequence of Romeo (Asznee) and Juliet in a night club dancing to electronic music.

Students create the atmosphere of a night club by continuously switching on and off the lights and putting on a very loud electronic music. It is important to notice how the element *music* is significant for the film. Students use a popular culture reference related to their musical preferences to give a name to the main character and to create the desired atmosphere for the scenes of the movie. The articulation of these ideas in order to create the story is mediated by the digital media available to them, which, in this case, means the possibility to record a video and add music to it.

11.2.3 POPULAR STORIES AND PUBLIC FIGURES

In the same way that the story created by the previous group was influenced by and reflect their musical references, the stories that are part of young people's universe can also play a role in the way students represent an idea or narrate a story using digital media. In chapter 9, I presented the work created in school C during workshop 3 by a group of students who decided to create a photo story on the topic 'genetically modified food', or GMO food for short. In that chapter I analysed how the used writing mode to explain the story. To complement that analysis, I will present now how their popular culture references also played an important role in the construction of the story.
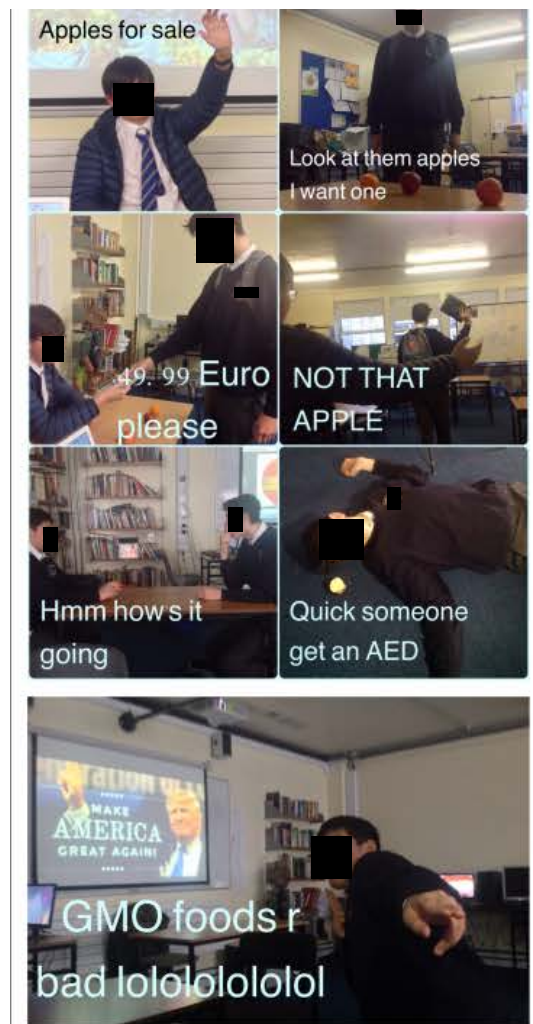

Figure 11.12 – Photo story about GMO foods.

During the presentation, students explained how they created the photo story:

STUDENT 2 – *It's pretty simple, like, the guy just, like, buy a gene… genetically, erm…*

STUDENT 1 – *Genetically modified. (students laugh)*

STUDENT 2 – *Thanks… Erm, yes, he buys this apple…*

STUDENT 3 – *GMO!*

STUDENT 2 – *Yes, GMO, and then, erm… Like, he buys this apple, walks away and then he dies. That's pretty much it.*

RESEARCHER – *All right. So he buys an apple, eats it and dies.*

STUDENT 1 and **STUDENT 2** – *Yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Great. I was thinking that…*

STUDENT 2 – *It's like the Snow White story, you know…*

RESEARCHER – *Hummm. The Snow White story. So you guys chose an apple because of that story?*

STUDENT 1 – *No, we didn't choose apples because of that. But, like, we…*

STUDENT 2 – *We thought it would make sense to use, like… There's a connection between our story and the Snow White story, like… of course it's not the same story, but, like…*

RESEARCHER – *Yes, yes, I know what you mean. It's like a reference that you are using for your story.*

STUDENT 2 – *Yes, that's it.*

STUDENT 1 – *Only the end.*

RESEARCHER – *What?*

STUDENT 1 – *The end.*

RESEARCHER – *You mean… Like, the end was influenced by the Snow White story, is it?*

STUDENT 1 – *Yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Great, it's a good idea. I like that.*

Here it is a case where students decided to create this story about GMO food, and they probably used apples because those were the fruits they had at hand. At first it is not clear when the *snow white* reference came by, but the analysis of the fragment above gives some clues. In the segment, one student seems to want to give more importance to the snow white reference than the other one. Student 1 makes a point of saying that they did not choose apples because of the snow white story, suggesting that the reference appeared later in the narrative. Student 2 tries to elaborate how and why they thought about the snow white story and how it connects with their own story. With a little help from the researcher, he agrees that he used the snow white story as a reference for his own story. Student 2 intervenes again to make it clear that this reference was used only in the end; i.e., in the scene where the boy dies after eating the apple.

What is really interesting about this case is that it tells a little bit about how students construct their digital stories. They decided to create a story about GMO foods. For some reason that is not clear, they decided to use the apples that they had (they probably brought to school to eat as a snack). The fact that they chose to use apples led at least one of the students to make a connection with the snow white story (eat the apple = death), which then made him think about how the story would end, which is the death of a boy after eating a GMO apple. They could have thought of many different ways to tell a story about GMO foods using apples, and the way they decided to do it is connected with the cultural reference they brought into the narrative.

Interestingly, the snow white reference does not seem to be evident when one looks at the photo story. In fact, the most evident cultural reference is Donald Trump, whose picture is used in the last scene.

(later in the same conversation with students)

RESEARCHER – *And, erm… And what's the story with Trump on the background, I mean, on the screen?*

STUDENT 2 – *Erm… Like, I don't know, it's just, like…*

STUDENT 1 – *Trump doesn't care about healthy food.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok.*

STUDENT 1 – *So…*

RESEARCHER – *So it's like Trump is making fun of people who eats genetically modified food?*

STUDENT 1 – *Yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Just because he doesn't care.*

*STUDENT 1* and *STUDENT 2* – *Yes.*

RESEARCHER – *Ok, great.*

In the last frame of the photo story there is a student, the caption 'GMO foods r bad lolololololol' and a picture of Donal Trump on the background. When asked about why they used Trump, Student 1 says that 'Trump doesn't care about healthy food', and agrees with the researcher that because of that, he is making fun of people who eats GMO food. Donald Trump's poor diet has been exposed in the media many times and it has become one of his most popular trademarks. Students took advantage of this to use Trump as an icon for GMO, and the last frame of the story also suggests that Trump also lends his well-known sarcasm to the character who is laughing at the fact that GMO food is bad.

In this story there are two main cultural references: one comes from a popular children's tale, and the other one from the political environment. They have different functions in the narrative because they help students to convey different meanings, but at the same time they work together in order to create a coherent photo story. The digital technologies used in the process enabled students to express their ideas using digital pictures they took of themselves and downloaded from the internet. The boys carefully created each frame to show the sequence of events, and the final frame reveals their ability to compose a picture using body expression, a picture of a politician on the background and captions to reinforce the main message being conveyed.

11.2.4 COMIC STRIP

As mentioned in the first chapter of the Data Analysis, the workshop 3, in which students had to create a photo story, was one of the least appreciated workshops by the participants. One of the reasons for that is because the digital artefact they had to create, a photo story, is not something that most young people are used to doing. Students were instructed to use any image they wanted, including not only photographs, but also cartoons, emojis etc. They were also told that they should try not to use text, or in case where some text was necessary, they should use as little as possible. The idea was to make students think more abstractly on the use of images to construct a coherent narrative and express their ideas. This is not an easy job, and for this reason many students did not enjoy the activity as much as they enjoyed the other workshops.

It was predicted that the participants would try to find some references in order to understand how they were supposed to carry out their work. One cultural reference that appeared in a few photo story was comics.
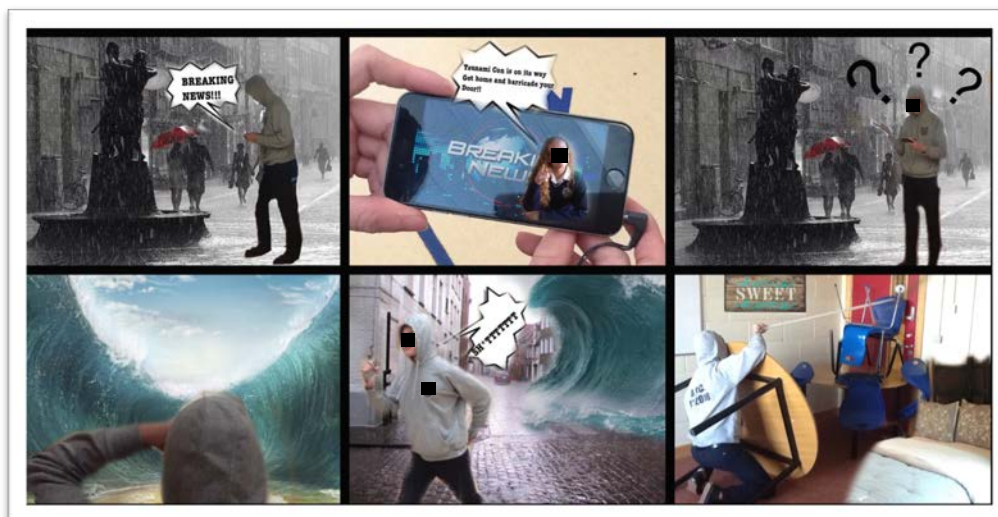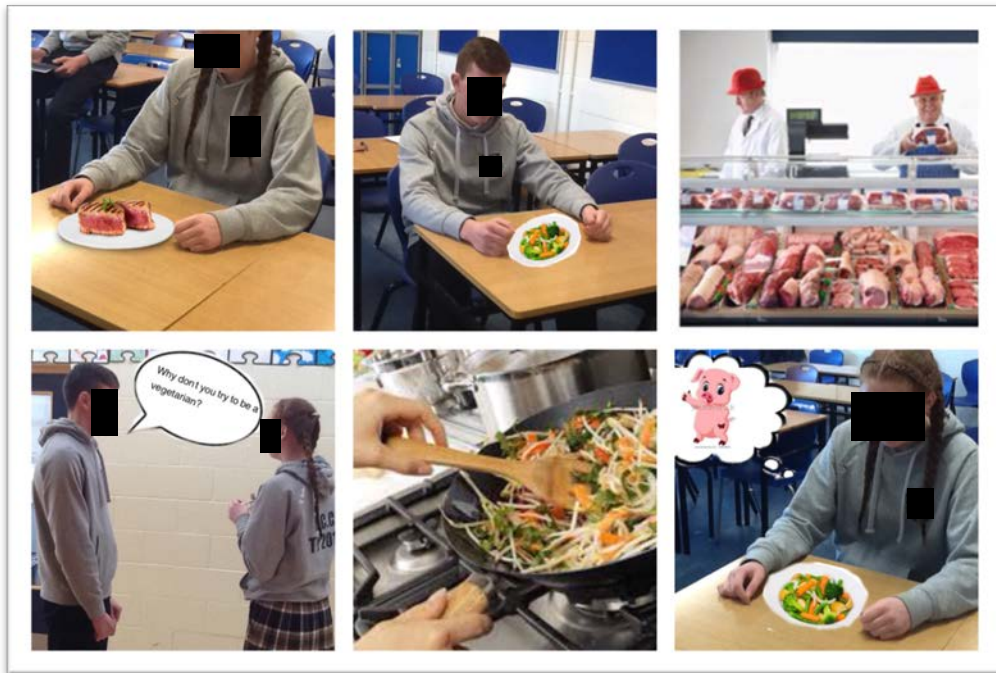
Figure 11.13 - Two examples of photo stories that were influenced by comics from school A.

Comics are constructed in juxtaposed sequences of frames using images and texts. It has been part of young people's popular culture for many decades and today it continues to be consumed worldwide, even in digital formats. Whilst planning how to create and organize their photo story, some students realized that they could use comics as a framework for their narrative.

In a conversation with students that created a photo story in school A (the second image above):

RESEARCHER – You guys decided to use text in one frame, right?

STUDENT 2 – Yes. Just because it's easier to understand. I mean, I know we should try to avoid text, but, like…

RESEARCHER – No problem, I said you should avoid too much text, but you could still use it if you want, it's fine.

STUDENT 2 – It's because it looks more like a comic strip.

RESEARCHER – Do you think so?

STUDENT 2 *– Kind of… Like… (long silence)*

RESEARCHER - *Did you think about comic strip when you were doing the project?*

STUDENT 2 *– Yes, we tried to organize the story in a sequence. Just, like, to make it easier to understand.*

RESEARCHER *– Like in a comic strip.*

STUDENT 2 *– Yes.*

RESEARCHER *– Ok, great.*

In the extract above the student makes clear that the main reason for him to think about comics was the idea around *sequence*. The vast majority of the photo stories created by the participants in all three schools had a sequence of events, even the ones that did not resemble a comic strip. Students were not asked specifically about comics as a reference for their stories, so it is not possible to conclude how many of them were influenced by the comics culture when they were creating their digital artefacts. However, even though it is fair to assume that one does not need necessarily to think about comics in order to create a coherent photo story following a sequence of events, the extract above shows that for some of the participants' comics might have been used as a cultural reference to help them understand how to create the story. Besides, there are other elements in the artefacts that suggest that, such as the use of speech balloons.

The four examples analysed here demonstrate that students bring their popular culture references to the school and, when these references are welcome and aknwledged by the teacher, they become an important part of the learning process. The use of new media technologies in the classroom allow students to engage in activities where they can use their cultural references in very distinctive ways, especially if this technology allows for the use of a combination of different modes of communication. Furthermore, the assimilation of their everyday experiences does not mean that they will not be addressed in a critical way; on the contrary, as discussed in the previous chapter, the use of cultural references by students is a powerful tool for exploring their critical thinking. This was more evident in chapter

10, where I showed some examples of how students' cultural references were used to explore critical aspects of the messages they constructed.

11.3 Creativity

Following the definition proposed in the Media Literacy model, creativity in media literacy education is understood in this project as the ability to put imaginative thoughts at work in order to create meaning in distinctive ways through the resources available. It does not limit itself in considering a creative work something that is necessarily original, because it understands that *imitation* and *reproduction* of previous ideas can also be a very creative process and have a distinctive result. Thus, the key words in this approach to creativity are *imagination* and *innovation*: students playing with their imagination in order to create meaning in unique ways. This process involves the cultural repertoire of students, as discussed in the previous segment; the use of imagination to arrange, rearrange and play with the elements related to the topic being addressed; the representation of ideas through the use of semiotic resources; and lively, collaborative hands-on activities leading to the production of an artefact.

During the Medial Literacy programme the participants had a lot of freedom to practice their creativity, and not only during the production of their digital artefacts. Students were involved in activities where they had to discuss issues around social media or fake news, for instance; they had to work in groups to write down a short story in less than 15 minutes using only 10 key words; and they also had to do a textual analysis of some advertisements. In all these activities it was possible to observe the creativity of students coming up with many interesting and imaginative ideas to accomplish their tasks.

11.3.1 DIGITAL RESOURCES

Every task is dependent on the resources available for its completion. One way of seeing how students would practice their creativity was to observe how they would understand the digital resources that they had and how they could make the most of them in order to create their artefacts.

Figure 11.14 – Students in School A create a photo story using photographs and cartoons
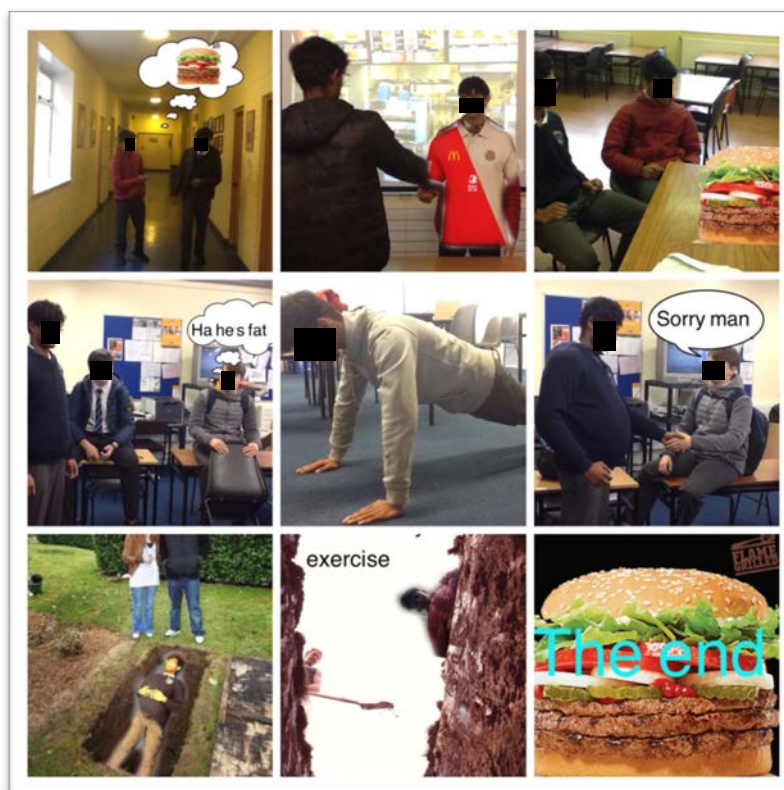

Figure 11.15 – Students in School C create a photo story using photographs, cartoons and speech balloons

In the first example above, participants mixed pictures they downloaded from the internet, pictures of themselves, cartoons and used the app *swap faces* to put their faces in place of the faces of the characters. In the second example, students used

basically the same resources, and also speech balloons. The creative work in those photo is connected with how students evaluated the digital resources they had at their disposal – internet, iPad, Pixlr and Swap Faces apps – and how they used their imagination to combine these resources in order to create something unique and meaningful.

In the first example, students wanted to convey the idea that food leftovers can be recycled and used as fertilizer to help grow other plants. They did not have any garden in the school, so they realized they would have to download from internet all the images they needed to compose the story. They created a sequence with those images, using arrows to emphasize the sequence and the process from food to fertilizer. In the second example, students wanted to convey the idea that if one eats too much junk food and do not exercise, they will end up having health problems and eventually dying. Unlike the previous group, they realized that some footage could be taken from places within the school, but other footage would have to be found online and downloaded.

The work of creativity in these examples comes from the solutions that students found for their task in order express their ideas and convey the main message of the story. These solutions have to do with the semiotic resources available to construct the messages they wanted to convey. It is a work of abstraction and imagination to visualize the story in a coherent way and use the digital resources available in order to compose a meaningful visual narrative.

11.3.2 PLAY AND IMAGINATION

The production of short movies is an activity that enables students to use their imagination. Both in workshops four and five participants had the opportunity to use their imagination in order to create characters and use the physical resources available in the school to create their story. Following the rationale developed by Burn and Durran (2007: 61) based on the work of Vygotsky (*please refer to the Creativity section of the ML model*), the creative process can be understood as the acting of articulating one's imagination and cultural repertoire with the semiotic tools available. In the case of this activity, the semiotic tools were the physical objects they had at their disposal: chairs, desks, books, markers, bins, and so on. The work of creativity was to explore these objects in an imaginative way,

articulating in their minds how they would be able to create the meanings they needed in order to tell the story.

Figure 11.16 - Students in school C use a marker as a gun and an earphone as a hospital tube.
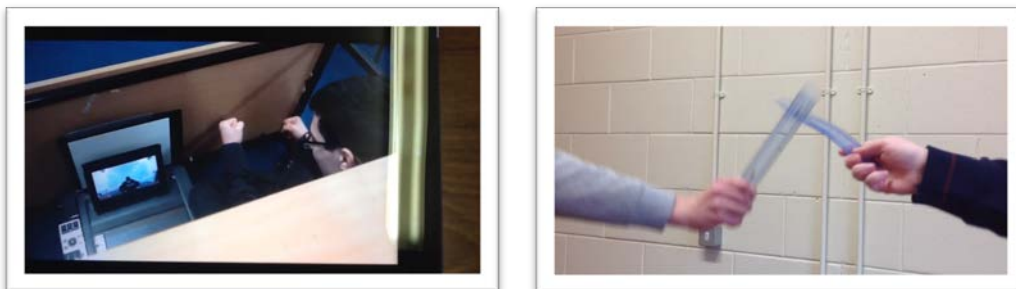
Figure 11.17 - Student in school A creates a car using a desk and a computer; in School B, rulers become swords.

In the examples above it is possible to see how students used objects they found in the school in order to create the scenes for their movies. The work being done here is of *symbolic replacement* (Burn and Durran, 2007, 61); that is, a ruler becomes a sword, and marker becomes a shotgun, and so on. The object used by students 'borrows' the meaning from the object that is absent, and this is only possible due

to the work of imagination, which requires not only the cognitive ability of students but also their cultural repertoire. What turns a ruler into a sword or an earphone into a hospital tube in the movie is not only the physical similarities of these objects – which in these examples are not so similar, by the way – but especially the way they are used by students in the context of the scene. In order to represent their ideas, students play with their imagination, use their cultural repertoire and creatively articulate ideas in order to create meaning.

Figure 11.18 - Characterization as a bully in school A

In the example above, students needed to portray a bully in their photo story. A bully can be characterized in many different ways, especially because there are many different forms of bullying. In this case, the bully was a child abductor who was using social media to try to convince a child to meet him. Students went to the Arts room and took a human head made of plaster. They put the plaster head above one of students' own head, creating a really tall man. As he is a child abductor, it makes sense to represent him as a tall person, in contrast with the small size of the child. Besides, the size of the character, combined with the white face with no expression and the hood creates a monstrous figure. In the photo story students mention that over '800.000 kids are abducted every year' in the world. They

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understand that this is a serious issue, and the way they choose to characterize the bully reflects that.

The examples above show that this construction of meaning through creative processes does not only involve symbolic substitutions through the replacement of objects. Symbolic representation can be much more abstract, which involves putting imagination to work in a higher cognitive level (Vygotsky, 1978). In both cases, the technology available allowed students to express their messages in creative ways. This is even more evident in the first set of examples, where the moving-image allowed students to combine the use of semiotic resources with their own acting, improving their ability to represent their ideas and articulate different meanings.

11.3.3 REWORKING A TEXT

The creative work also involves the ability to take a text or a story and use imagination to give new meanings to that story. In the example below, students create a story where a reader gets really angry with Shakespeare because the author decided to kill Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare says that he sees no problem with killing the characters, so the reader decides that in this case there would be no problem in killing Shakespeare too. He chases Shakespeare around and eventually hits him with a chair, killing him. In this example the students decided to take the story of Romeo and Juliet as a background, and then created a new one where the reader is the protagonist and Shakespeare is the second main character.
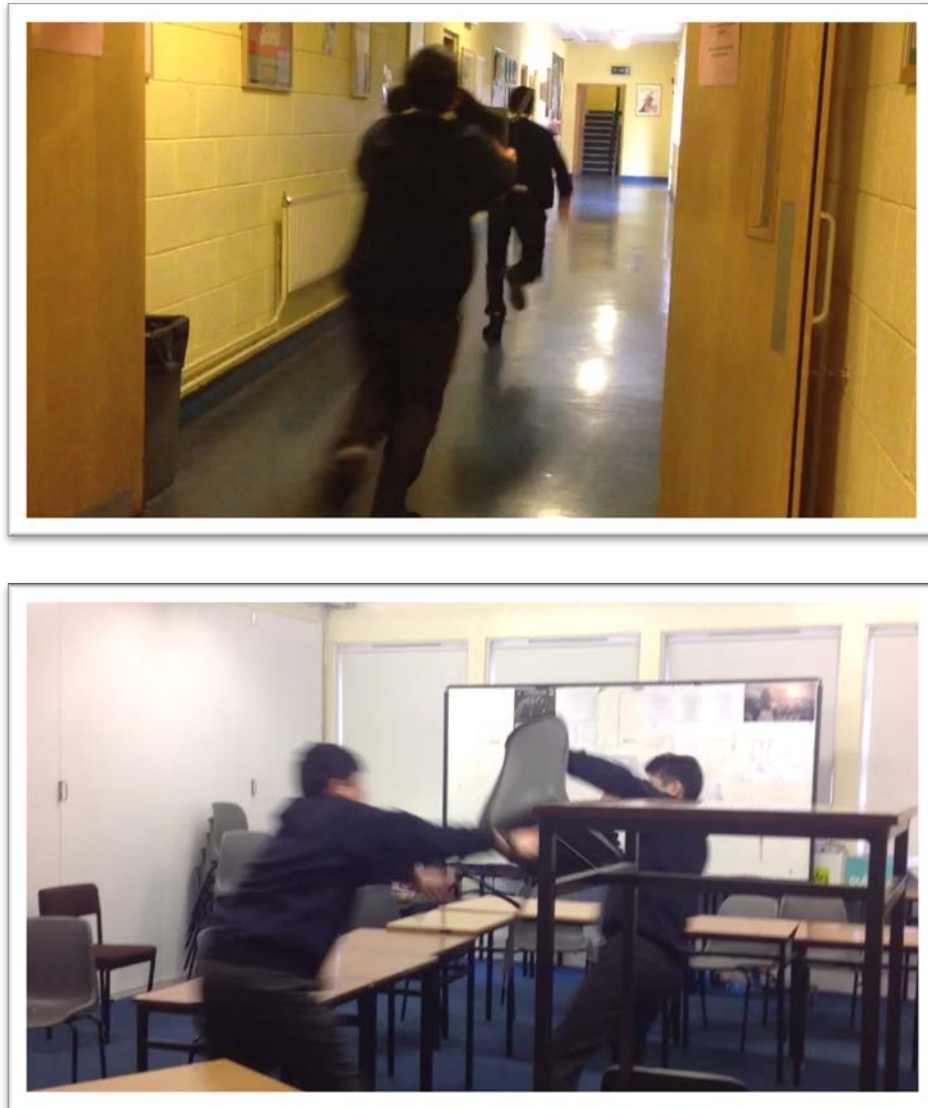
Figure 11.19 – The reader chases Shakespeare, and eventually hits him with a chair.

This example shows an imaginative work where students think about one among many reactions that readers may have in relation to the story, and the way they decide to show this is through questioning the author himself and then giving him the same faith of their characters as a form of retaliation. The creative process here involves understanding the original story and reflecting on the feelings that it might provoke in the audience. Next, it involves the articulation of ideas to create new meanings, finding ways to represent the anger of the reader and the reaction of Shakespeare himself to that. Finally, it involves the action itself, the use of the semiotic resources available and the construction of a coherent narrative.

The digital media product, full of meanings, is materialized through the digital technology available to students, and it is a result of the imaginative work carried out by the participants and the semiotic resources available to them.

11.3.4 ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

During workshop four in School A, a group of students said that they did not want to appear in the movie about Shakespeare. The researcher explained that it was not compulsory for students to appear in the video; they could simply create a video without characters, or even find other ways to tell the story. Students then came up with a very interesting idea: they decided to draw the story on a whiteboard and film it.
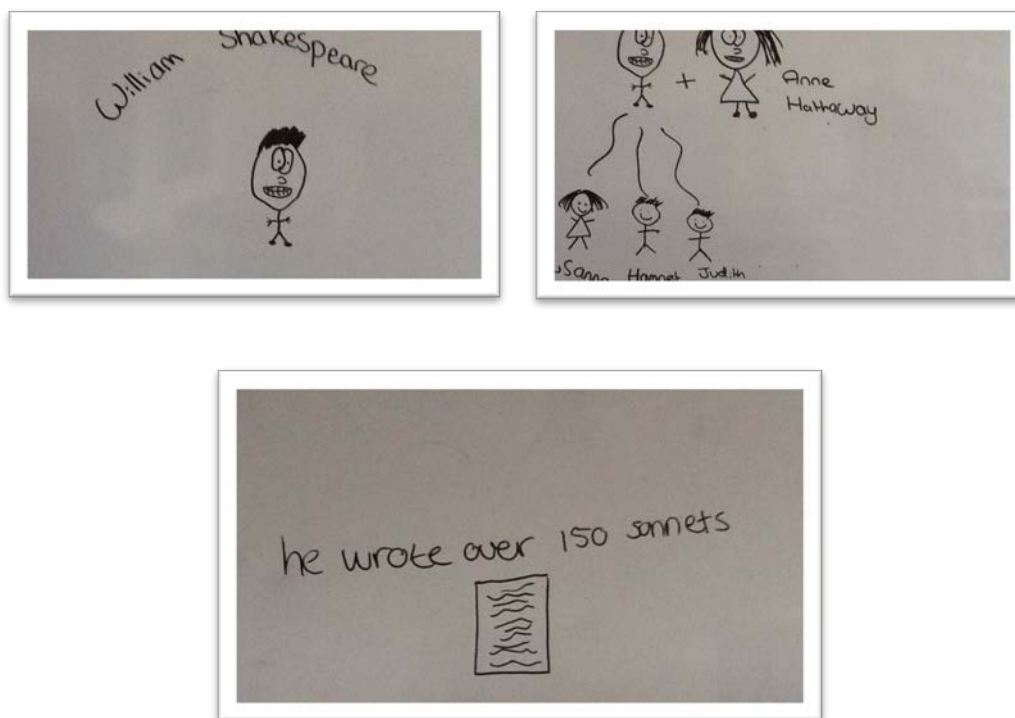
Figure 11.20 - Students create cartoons to tell the story of Shakespeare and film the sequence.

The story they created is a sequence of still images of cartoons drawn on a whiteboard. In order to make this sequence more dynamic, they did not simply take footage of the cartoons, but actually filmed them with the camera moving very slowly. To complete the work, they recorded one of the students telling the story about Shakespeare's life, and inserted the voiceover.

The creative process in this case starts with students understanding that they must find a solution for a problem – they do not want to appear in the movie. They discuss a few possibilities, and eventually come to the conclusion that filming the cartoon would be the best one. The next step is to create the story itself, that is, develop the plot, think about the characters and how they will be represented as a cartoon. Another important task is to reflect on how much information one single cartoon can bear: the narrator will be telling the story, and the cartoon will represent the information told by the narrator, so students must think about how many cartoons will be necessary to cover all the information being described. This has to do with the action of the movie, the sequence of meanings being conveyed.

The result of this imaginative work is a simple but resourceful movie where the story unfolds in a logical way. Students' creativity enabled them to come to a solution for the problem they had, and then create a movie in a distinctive way, taking into consideration both the resources and the technology they had available.

11.4 Conclusion

Paulo Freire (1972) claimed that the starting point of any educational intervention was the learners' cultural and social background. Education, according to him, is an activity that must be always connected with the lives of people outside of the school walls. This idea was also shared by other important figures in the area of education, such as John Dewey and Raymond Williams. In Media Education, the so-called 'progressive movement' in education, which proposed a more horizontal relationship between teachers and pupils and acknowledged the importance of learners' everyday media experiences, had an impact in learning practices since the 1970's, and were materialized in the academic literature especially during the 1990's, with the work of scholars such as David Buckingham (1994; 1998b; 2003).

The data analysis showed that digital media technologies allow students to bring their popular culture references inside the classroom, making the distance between school and lived experience much shorter. Participants had the opportunity to express themselves using their 'own code', their 'own language', which makes the learning activity more appealing and motivating. When reflecting on topics using references that were familiar to them, students could articulate ideas more easily

and comfortably, and the fact that they could relate the topic being addressed to their everyday experiences improved their ability to express themselves.

The digital artefacts produced by students reflected their cultural choices, like the music they selected for a particular scene or the popular figure they decided to use to express their ideas. Participants brought to the artefacts the cultural and social representations they find in their digital lives, such as the way they communicate using Snapchat, for instance. All this created a learning atmosphere in which students shared their everyday references and experiences with their peers, and used these references and experiences to construct meaning using digital media. Even though in this chapter the main purpose is to analyse the benefits of students' cultural references for the learning activity, it is also important to acknowledge that these references can also be *problematized* and looked upon from a more critical point of view, as it was discussed in chapter 10.

In terms of creativity, understood in this project as the ability to put imaginative thoughts at work in order to create meaning in distinctive ways through the resources available, the data analysis suggests that practical, hands-on activities with digital media offer a great opportunity for students to use their imagination and construct meaningful stories. This includes original works, which are a product of people's ability to come up with new ideas, and also the rework of existing ideas to create distinctive versions and adaptations.

Digital technologies offer many resources for students to practice their creativity, especially when they are working in groups trying to find solutions for the task they have to complete. Besides, play and imagination are an intrinsic part of the use of digital technologies in education. Even though this project did not measure the learning progress of students, the data analysis suggests that these practices encourage students to express themselves in unique ways.

Chapter 12

Discussion and Conclusions

12.1 Introduction

This research project aimed to explore how the use of ICT in the classroom can promote media literacy in students. In order to understand the knowledge, skills and practices involved in media literacy, a theoretical model was developed based on previous theories and studies which were analysed and discussed in the literature review. The model was used as the theoretical framework to develop the media literacy programme applied to students, and also to analyse the data collected during the field research. Throughout the study, the main objective was to explore the benefits and limitations in the use of digital media in the classroom to foster a set of knowledge, skills, and practices related to the different stages of the media literacy model. The study demonstrates that the use of digital media offers many possibilities for practical activities whereby students can create media artefacts and articulate ideas around different topics related to media literacy. Discussed in three main themes – meaning-making practices; critical awareness and information literacy; and popular culture and creativity – the results indicate that, guided by a teacher and/or a facilitator, students can use the technology available to explore different forms of self-expression, develop their creative skills and improve their critical awareness in relation to the media.

12.2 Discussion

In this segment, I first discuss the learning experience as a whole, analysing the media literacy programme from an educational point of view. Next, using the Media Literacy Model as a guideline, I discuss the main findings from the data that was analysed in the previous three chapters.

12.2.1 THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In the three case studies, twenty workshops were given to 81 students in three different schools. Each group of students – school C had two participating groups

– spent around 20 hours with me in total discussing many different topics, doing online research, collaborating with their peers, producing digital media artefacts and reflecting on their own experience. During this time with students, as a participant-observer I was able to reflect on the learning experience as whole, assessing each part of the workshops, students' responses and behaviours during the sessions, and my role as a facilitator of learning. Even though the focus of this chapter is on the three main themes that were extensively analysed in the previous chapters, I understand that a reflection on some aspects of the learning experience will contribute to this research project and to future studies.

The first aspect is in relation to differences between the three participating schools. As discussed in chapter 8, schools were diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic status and religious ethos. Despite this diversity, there was no significant difference in the way students engaged with the activities, behaved during the sessions and responded to the topics being addressed. Some charts in appendices L and M with students' answers to the questionnaire they filled out before and after the programme show that there were some differences in the responses between the schools, which suggests that a further investigation could find the elements underlying these disparities. It was also possible to note some peculiarities, such as, for instance, the fact that in school C students were highly involved with the game culture, something that was not as strong in the other two schools; or the fact that students in school A seemed to be more prone to accept guidance and rules compared to the other two schools. However, during the workshops nothing substantial emerged to be acknowledged as an important variance in the way students from the three schools participated in the media literacy programme. This suggests that this kind of practice with digital media could be applied to different educational settings with different characteristics, and student's participation and engagement would fairly be the same.

The second aspect worth discussing in this chapter is in relation to the technology available and how students engaged with it. The idea was to deliver a workshop using a minimal structure in terms of technology – tablets, internet connection and a projector – so that the same experience could be applied in any other school with a basic technological structure (iPads could be replaced by laptops or computer

desktops, and smart phones or digital cameras could also be used to take pictures or shoot videos).

As explained in chapter 8, school A was the best one in terms of the technology structure, followed by school B – where there were occasionally some issues with the internet connection – and School C – where we had to use two separate rooms for the activities due to lack of structure in the TY room, and we had to use the internet signal from another room, which sometimes caused students' work to slow down. As a researcher and facilitator of the activity, I was concerned with the many technological issues that could arise during the workshops, delaying our progress and even doing harm to the learning activity. Part of my job was to make sure that all iPads were charged and ready to be used, projectors were accessible and working properly, and there was Wi-Fi internet connection available for students to carry out their research and download the material for their projects. This is a concern that any educator willing to deliver media literacy courses in schools involving practical activities should have, as the technology is a central aspect of it.

The interesting part of this experience is that, even though some issues did arise and caused some delays, they were very easily managed by students themselves. There were some instances where the projector would stop working, for instance; iPads would failure to record a video; sound would not come out of the speaker; or there was no Wi-Fi internet connection for a short period of time. In most of these situations, instead of asking me for help, students would organize themselves to resolve the problems, checking for solutions, looking up information online, or finding smart alternatives – such as using their own phones to carry out the work while the iPads or the internet was not available. Maybe because they saw me as an 'outsider' or a 'guest teacher' in the school, they would do everything they could to help me out and resolve these issues themselves. This was also evident in Workshop 1, the 'testing workshop', which revealed that students, working in teams of 3 or 4, had no major difficulties in learning how to use applications they had never used before, either by trial and error or watching tutorials they found on the internet

I am not proposing here that these teenagers are 'digital natives' or 'tech savvies' who naturally understand how technology works and are capable of solving its problems easily in any given situation. Not all students were inclined to fix the

problems that emerged, and it was clear that some of them were not very fond of digital technology. However, it does suggest that this kind of media literacy activity can be carried out even with minimal structure, limited resources, technology issues and no technology specialist available.

Finally, the learning experience also exposed some interesting aspects in relation to students' motivations and commitment in each part of the sessions. As outlined in chapter 6 and further explained in chapter 8, the workshops were conceived so as to allow students to work within their groups for the most part of the session. They would brainstorm ideas, discuss the topic of the day, research information, plan their project and work together to create a digital artefact. There was a small part in which I would provide some input in relation to a media literacy topic, but this would not take longer than 20 minutes or so. As the workshops progressed, it became clear that most students preferred the part of the session where they were effectively creating their digital artefacts, instead of the part where they were sitting discussing a topic or doing some research. The hands-on action was a factor of motivation, and further talks with students confirmed that.

The production of video was particularly popular among the teenagers, and they were all very excited about producing and editing their own movie. They had the opportunity to practice their creativity and engage in playful activities with their peers. However, most students did not like the topic being discussed. In workshop 4, for instance, they were mostly excited because they were going to create a movie, but most of them were not happy with the topic 'Shakespeare legacy'. In chapter 8, I proposed the question: can a fun activity promote students' engagement even if they do not appreciate the topic being discussed? The answer is definitely yes. Even though most students did not like the topic, they were fully engaged in the activity, planning, discussing and producing the movie about Shakespeare. The *fun* aspect was present throughout the activity. However, does the fact that students were highly engaged and motivated mean that they learned something or improved their knowledge about Shakespeare at all? This is not possible to answer in this study.

It was clear, for instance, that they were much more concerned with the aesthetics of the movie than with the content itself. They spent very little time doing the research and were not very careful with the quality of information they collected.

On the other hand, they spent most of the time discussing how the movie would be recorded, the scenes, the action, the camera movements and the editing. Students knew they were not being formally assessed, so they did not have to be concerned with the accuracy of the information they collected. In a more structured activity with clear learning intentions being assessed and guided by a teacher, the results could be very different.

It is possible to suggest that activities using digital media, such as the production of a short video, has the potential to contribute to engagement and motivation of students. However, further studies would be necessary to assess students' knowledge attainment in relation to the topic being addressed.

12.2.2 LANGUAGE, MEANING AND REPRESENTATION

According to the media literacy model, language, meaning and representation are the three pillars at the basis of the model that sustain all other practices involved in the use of media by young people. Understanding how languages work as systems of representation and how meaning is created through these system is a very important and fundamental step towards becoming media literate.

Following a theoretical approach that seeks to combine social semiotics and multimodality theory (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2003; Benzemer and Kress, 2016), the study explored how young people communicate using different modes of communication and semiotic resources. The meaning making practices with digital media carried out during the programme reveal the importance of semiotics for the communication process, which confirms the idea that the very nature of literacy is changing from the ability to read and write texts to the ability to create and interpret meaning using a combination of modes such as image, sound, gesture and text (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003; Rowsell and Walsh, 2011). Besides, these modes were used and adapted depending on the technology available, students' needs and their everyday experiences with the media, which is related to their social and cultural background (Jewitt, 2008; Burnett and Merchant, 2018).

The way students engaged with and explained the use of digital media during the workshops reflects the way they use them in their everyday lives. Students'

preferences for video and how they orchestrate different modes within it, for instance, or their preference for text combined with images for quick conversations reveal a great deal about their meaning making practices that can be explored in the classroom. All these practices are literacy practices with the use of digital media and influence the way young people interpret information and express themselves.

The observation of students also revealed how they used the learning space provided in each of the three schools to search for material (or non-digital) resources that would help them express their ideas, and how the digital media affordances allowed them to compose meaningful stories following their own personal preferences and understanding of the function of each mode of communication. This combination of digital and non-digital resources during the learning practices suggests that meaning making is increasingly complex and mixed (Cowan, 2018), and this has implications for the learning process as a whole, especially in relation to new literacy practices.

12.2.3 MEDIA PLATFORMS

The experience with students in all three schools exposed how the changing nature of meaning making and mediated communication in general materializes with the use of digital technologies in the classroom. Participants created digital magazines to critically discuss the refugee crisis; photo stories to express their opinions about vegetarianism or the impact of the food chain on the planet; videos to adapt Romeo and Juliet story in many different ways; and TV ads to reflect on the problems associated to climate change.

Media platforms, another element of the Media Literacy model, offer students the possibility to express themselves in unique ways, making use of the complex combination between digital devices, software, interfaces, symbolic resources and imagination to create meaning. The same message can be conveyed through text, image or music, or even through a combination of all these modes, and the different possibilities of arrangements or orchestrations (Burn, 2013) of these modes will result in different forms of expression. During the activities, most students struggled to articulate ideas around how they combined the different modes of communication to express themselves, for instance, or about their choices to convey a certain idea. This suggests that in most cases their decisions were intuitive,

spontaneous, without thinking through the meaning making process. However, when prompted to reflect on their choices and actions, some of them showed that they can indeed explain, even at a very superficial level, the characteristics of modes and how they affect the message in different ways, such as when they explained the use of colour and its relationship with the topic being addressed, or the use of music to create a specific atmosphere for their movie.

This research found that students prefer some modes over others, such as the case with moving-image – which most of them like – and writing – which most of them do not like as much – and they were able to explain their preferences reflecting on how useful, persuasive or pleasant a mode is, or the function of a mode such as music in the process of meaning construction. Again, this reflection was only possible with the help of the researcher, who was constantly provoking them into thinking about their choices and the meaning of their actions, which suggests that an appropriate guidance can prompt young people to think about the meaning making process involved in their semiotic choices and eventually make them have a better understanding about the communication process.

12.2.4 STORYTELLING

The media platforms available for students offered the semiotic structure or the systems of representation (Hall, 1997) with which they could construct their stories in specific ways, and this is related to another element of the Media Literacy model: storytelling. Part of being media literate is the ability to use media platforms to convey ideas and understand how stories are constructed, and the ICTs play a significant role in that. In line with previous studies with digital animation (Burn and Durran, 2007) and film production (Potter, 2012), the construction of stories during the activities involved collaborative practices which is intrinsic to the production of digital media artefacts. This enabled students to access and use their cultural repertoire to create stories that carry at some level their own identity and style. This process of collective action and negotiation of roles, responsibilities and modes of communication gives students a sense of empowerment as collective authors of a digital artefact that reflects their personal choices. In this sense, this process can be considered the physical materialization of their ideas and imagination. As producers of their own story and consumers of other students' stories, during the activities they would discuss this authorship with their peers,

explaining their choices and intentions, debating possible interpretations, and reconstructing the production process usually with joy and satisfaction. Besides, as storytellers they were given the opportunity to reflect on how media stories are constructed, their fabricated nature and the influence of personal bias.

12.2.5 INFORMATION LITERACY

In some workshops, the artefacts created by students promoted not only collaboration, imagination, and use of different modes, but also the practice of searching, analysing and using information, which is related to the 'information literacy' element of the Media Literacy model. This is a core element not only in media literacy, but in education in general, since the use of information students find online is increasingly becoming part of classroom practices with the use of new digital media, such as tablets, for instance (Haddon and Vincent, 2015). During the learning activities, students demonstrated very little care with the information they found online, usually using Google as the main platform and relying on the first source of information they found – which in many cases was Wikipedia. This does not mean students would not be more careful with information in a different context, such as, for instance, if they were looking for something relevant for their lives, or something that could have an impact on their grades. The discussion with participants and the following reflection on their own practices reveal that the vast majority of them express an understanding about the importance of good quality information and the dangers of using unreliable sources.

However, this awareness did not materialize during the activities. This suggests that depending on the educational practices being carried out, students need strong guidance from a teacher/facilitator in order follow best practices in searching, finding and especially evaluating the sources and information they encounter online. This is especially true if one take into consideration recent studies (Kahne and Bowyer, 2016; Wineburg et al., 2016; Herrero-Diz et al., 2019) which have shown that most young people struggle to make a distinction between real and false information, and reveal the influence that young people's own bias have in the way they interpret news and information.

With classrooms increasingly equipped with digital media devices and the current concern over the spread of misinformation and harmful content online, ICTs in

education become important learning tools for teachers so as they can properly address information literacy best practices across many different disciplines. This study endorses the view proposed by previous research (Burnett and Wilkinson, 2005) that the use of technology in the classroom opens an important and currently indispensable opportunity to promote certain knowledge and skills associated with the search for information, such as the ability to carry out careful online research, make judgements about the reliability of source, and reflect on the suitability of the data collected.

12.2.6 CRITICAL AWARENESS

Young people's ability to find, evaluate and use information also touches on the first of the media literacy model's social functions: critical awareness. Media literacy scholars have long advocated the importance for students to learn how to use their ability to critically analyse media products in order to understand how they work, make informed choices of consumption and avoid manipulation (Masterman, 1985; Buckingham, 2019; Kellner and Share, 2019). From a critical pedagogy perspective (Freire, 2002; Giroux, 2010), it is also understood that classroom practices with media should promote opportunities for students to express themselves, use their cultural capital, question media practices that endorse alienation and misrepresentation, and reflect on their practices as members of a media culture, both as consumers and producers.

During the workshops, all students in the three participating schools had the opportunity to experience these practices. This kind of practices can take place in educational settings without the use of digital media, but what this study shows is that digital media give students the opportunity to exercise their critical thinking in many different ways through different modes and semiotic resources. The data analysis cannot confirm whether or not participants improved their critical awareness in relation to the media, for instance, but it does show that teachers can use digital media to create a learning context that facilitate criticality whereby participants will not only abstractedly discuss critical topics such as Black Lives Matter or the refugee crisis, but also concretely express their opinion and debate ideas through media artefacts that they collaboratively produced, presented and debated with their peers. The analysis of the digital artefacts reveals how powerful they can be for the expression of critical thought through writing, image, moving-

image, colours, sounds and body language, and the discussion with students demonstrates that many of them were highly engaged in the choices they made to construct their stories. Even though this study does not endeavour to measure knowledge attainment, it does demonstrate that the media production process as a whole followed by group discussions enabled students to reflect on their choices as media producers, questioning their own bias and personal references and articulating ideas around how the editing process manipulate meaning and information.

12.2.7 CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Another social function of the Media Literacy Model that could be observed in this study is cultural engagement. The idea that student's cultural repertoire should be valued inside the classroom has long been advocated by progressive educators (Dewey, 1938; Williams, 1961; Freire, 1972) and media education experts (Buckingham, 1998; Richards, 1998; Burn and Durran, 2006; Potter and McDougall, 2017; Burnett, and Merchant, 2018). The workshops were designed so as to allow participants to use their personal, social and cultural references throughout the process, and this was reflected on their digital artefacts. Even though some topics addressed were not immediately related to students' everyday experiences, the way the stories were constructed and debated reveal that participants were constantly negotiating their own references with their peers and using them to explain their ideas and convey the intended message.

The observation of students working in their groups confirmed that they feel more comfortable with and enthusiastic about the activity when they can connect it with their lives outside of the school. They used their 'own codes' and cultural styles to express their thoughts, and the digital artefacts produced by them reflect their own cultural choices – the charterers they want to represent, the music they choose etc., which suggests that students' cultural references can be effectively converted into digital capital (Burnett and Merchant, 2018). This demonstrates that digital technologies are powerful 'vehicles' for cultural engagement in the classroom, in a sense that they offer young people alternative ways of expression through meaning making practices whereby they can articulate ideas and discuss with their peers cultural and social representations they find in their everyday lives. In terms of new literacies, whilst the digital platforms provide the modes of communication with

which young people will create texts in many different forms, the cultural repertoire will provide the references that will shape the content and help crate the digital media representations.

12.2.8 CREATIVITY

Finally, the workshops provided students with the opportunity to exercise their creativity, understood here as the ability to put imaginative thoughts at work in order to create meaning in distinctive ways through the resources available. Participants had to use their imagination on an ongoing basis to come up with ideas for their projects, organize the resources available, decide on modes and formats for their digital artefacts, and construct a coherent story. Working collaboratively in groups, some students decided to plan out their projects in advance, making decisions about the role of each member, the duties that should be carried out etc. However, even in these cases it was possible to observe that improvisation was an important part of their work, leading occasionally to completely unexpected results that had not been previously planned. In line with previous research (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011: 42), this study suggests that by working, playing and improvising together with both physical objects and digital media students were putting their imaginative thoughts at work and practicing their creativity in many ways, such as organizing ideas, suggesting new options, reworking videos from YouTube, playing around with images, colour, sound etc., and actively creating meanings.

12.3 Research questions and findings

The main research question was concerned with a broad approach to how the use of digital media technologies can help promote media literacy in students. In order to explore and investigate the many possibilities in which these technologies can be used in the classroom, a few sub-questions were also formulated, and they have been answered throughout the data analysis chapters and the final discussion in this chapter. Here I present a summary of how they are related to the main findings.

- ***To what extent is the production of digital media artefacts a key component of media literacy education***?
This research project showed that the production of digital media artefacts in the classroom offers many possibilities for students' engagement in meaning-making

practices, collaborative work, creative processes and critical analysis. The production process allowed participants to discuss different media literacy topics within their teams, use different digital platforms and modes of communication to express their ideas and thoughts, and engage in fruitful debates with both the researcher and their peers.

This study shows that the digital media production process offers unique ways for students to articulate ideas and concepts using their own cultural references through both digital and non-digital semiotic resources. This was evident in some examples discussed in this study, such as the critical analysis of the Black Lives Matter movement through the production of a video; the use of colours and images to express opinion and judgement about sensitive topics; and the reflection on one's bias through the production of a digital magazine.

- How the production of digital media artefacts helps promote creativity, cultural engagement and critical awareness in students?

During the media literacy programme students used many cultural references from their everyday lives to construct stories and represent ideas in creative ways. This was particularly discussed in Chapter 11, with a few examples of how they incorporated their digital culture into their work, used their favourite music to add different layers of meaning to a Shakespeare play, and constructed visual stories using comic strips as a reference. In the same chapter I also presented how creativity was promoted throughout ML programme. The use of digital media allowed students to use their imagination to create meaningful stories using the resources available, remake popular texts and make use of alternative media formats to express their ideas.

In terms of critical awareness, Chapter 10 provides some evidences of how digital media can be used to promote criticality in the classroom, allowing students to exercise their critical thinking skills through the production of digital artefacts followed by classroom discussions and critical reflection.

- To what extent do semiotic resources and multimodal communication facilitate students' ability to communicate ideas, explore their own cultural references and perform critical analysis?

This study shows that the new digital media technologies offer many different possibilities for communication and self-expression in the classroom, whereby students can orchestrate different modes of communication combined with physical resources to produce and convey meaning. Chapter 9 discussed and showed a few examples of the many ways in which students used the semiotic resources available to express their ideas and thoughts, and how they articulated ideas around this new multimodal form of communication.

The opportunity to use text, image, moving image, colour, sound and body language to construct a story or an argument increased the possibilities for meaning making during the activities, and the everyday cultural practices of students had a significant influence in the way they created meaning, represented ideas and reflected on their choices. Many students also demonstrated the ability to make critical choices both individually and collectively about how they should represent their ideas.

- How the use of digital media for study and research develop in students awareness about false, manipulated and biased information?

In chapter 10 I discussed how students used the technology available – iPads and internet connection – to research information for their projects. This study suggests that the use of technology *per se* does not necessarily develop in students awareness about false and manipulated information. Even though the vast majority of students claimed that they understand the importance to collect and use good quality information from reliable sources, this awareness did not materialize into practice. During the practical activities, students would normally spend as little time as possible doing the research, not worrying about the quality of the information they were selecting to create their digital artefacts. This suggests that this kind of practice in the classroom should be guided by a facilitator following information literacy best practices.

12.4 The dynamic model

Media literacy is, ultimately, a literacy practice, and literacy practices are socially situated, dynamic and changing. For this reason, I understand that the Media Literacy model developed for this research project is also dynamic and changing. As explained in chapter 5, the aim of the model was to offer some basic media literacy knowledge and skills in the first five stages, which would then be used to achieve the three more complex social functions in stage 6.

More than three years have passed between the design of the model and the conclusion of this research project. The basic principles underlying the conceptual framework remain the same, however it is important to acknowledge that new cultural, social and communicational practices emerging mainly in the context of the internet and the new digital platforms pose some new challenges that require a continuous revision of how the model can be applied to media literacy interventions.

These new challenges involve mainly the understanding of the many aspects involved in online practices whereby young people are now content providers dealing with very complex situations associated with personal privacy, data commodification and surveillance. They also involve a deeper understanding of the many different digital platforms, especially social media networks, and how these new cultural forms are influencing the way young users interpret the world around them and participate in this new media culture.

A new version of the media literacy model would incorporate this understanding in order to provide a broader theoretical conceptualization of the field.

12.5 A new perspective

The media literacy field is very broad, and it offers many possibilities for researchers in terms of topics to be addressed and theoretical frameworks to be used. Over the course of this project I have encountered new media literacy practices, especially the ones related to the online environment, as well as many theories,

concepts and intellectual insights that have progressively shaped my understanding of the field.

If I were to start this project again, I would consider making two changes. The first one would be the inclusion of more learning activities in the ML programme related to online practices, especially social media practices. This research project would certainly benefit from the analysis of data collected during this kind of activities in the classroom other than just online research. Topics to be addressed could include young people's digital identity, online content production, disinformation, hate speech and data privacy.

The second change is related to my approach to New Literacy Studies. In recent years I have become especially interested in studies that see media literacy primarily as a field dealing with many different and complex meaning-making practices in the context of mediated communication through digital media (Kress, 2003; Jewitt, 2008; Rowsell, and Walsh, 2011; Benzemer, and Kress, 2016; Potter and McDougall, 2017; Burnett, and Merchant, 2018; Cowan, 2018). In this sense, I think the boundaries between literacy and media literacy have become increasingly blurred, and I understand that it is not possible to 'read the world' (Freire 1972) in 2020 without considering how literacy practices have been significantly impacted by the new digital media environment. In a new project I would focus more on aspects related to the meaning-making practices that students engage in the classroom, and how this is related to the broader understanding of situated and dynamic literacies.

12.6 Contributions to the field

I suggest that this research project contributes to the fields of Media Literacy and ICT in Education in that it provides some useful insights for the use of digital technology in the classroom to promote knowledge, skills and practices associated with media literacy education. In a time when schools are increasingly investing and using digital media for teaching and learning purposes, and many educators still do not understand all the potentialities of these technologies, this study brings some concepts from Communications, Media Literacy, Cultural Studies and other correlated fields that can help secondary teachers and students enhance their digital

experience in the classroom. The findings reveal that the new technology available in schools can be much more than tools for improving routine educational tasks; it can indeed offer many other opportunities for students to improve their communication skills, critical thinking and new literacy practices. Tablets, for instance, are not simply a digital replacement for traditional books; they are a powerful tool for many forms of self-expression, cultural engagement and creative practices.

This study has provided some important understandings about key topics within the media literacy field, such as the way teenagers deal with information they find online and how they use different modes of communication to express their ideas. From a pedagogical perspective, it revealed some complexities existent in a project-based, student-centred learning activity; it offered some indications of how students take up group and collaborative work using digital media; and how they respond to open conversations and debates that lead to critical reflection.

Specifically for Ireland, this research offers important insights for media educators and media literacy organizations, such as Media Literacy Ireland, in terms of opportunities that the Transition Year programme offers for the implementation of media literacy practices in secondary education. The study also contributes to the general effort of policymakers, tech organizations and educators that have over the past years sought to improve digital literacy in Irish schools through investment, educational policies, and development of best practices in ICT in education.

12.7 Limitations of the research

As an exploratory study, this research project has achieved its goals to provide a better understanding on how digital technologies can help teachers to promote media literacy in the classroom. However, this project has its limitations. The first one relates to the fact that the sample of participants was small (81 students), which does not have a significant impact on the qualitative analysis of the data, but it does affect the consistency of the quantitative data collected through the surveys given to students, as it leads to higher variability. Even though the numbers were important to have a general understanding about the knowledge, habits, opinions and characteristics of the participants of the study, and also provided information

for comparative analysis of pre and post surveys results, they cannot be used to draw statistically conclusive results. Also, as explained in the introduction chapter of the Data Analysis, due to the nature of the Transition Year Programme a few students were absent in some workshops because they had other commitments in the school, and this also affected their answers in the final survey as their experience was not as complete as the other students. For this reason, the quantitative data was used in this research as a complement for the qualitative analysis, and not as the main source of data to draw conclusions.

Case studies are an appropriate approach for studies that want to investigate a particular experience. However, they have some limitations in a sense that they can only demonstrate the findings and conclusions from this particular intervention, and cannot provide solid evidence for how the same experience would take place in a different context (Yin, 2009). The three case studies used in this research project took place in very particular educational contexts, with participants of a specific age group, and designed according to specific pedagogical concepts and frameworks. This means that, even though the study offers a comprehensive insight into the uses of digital technology to promote media literacy in students, the results discussed in this work are valid for and limited to similar contexts, age groups and pedagogical approaches. This research project cannot confirm that the same results would be achieved in different educational settings and contexts, following more traditional pedagogical approaches and younger/older age groups.

Participant observation also has some limitations. First, as a facilitator of the learning activity, I could not focus exclusively on the research during the workshops, as I had to organize the learning activities, make sure students were carrying out their tasks and manage time effectively. This organization was very time-consuming and laborious, and, in some circumstances, it caused some minor problems – for instance, when I had to shorten the time of students' presentations because we were running out of time. Also, students knew they were participating in a research project so I had to strive to create a learning environment where they would not feel they were being observed and evaluated all the time, as this could alter the participant's behaviour (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). Even though measures were taken to minimize this problem (please refer to chapter 8), it is

reasonable to assume that some behaviours were affected by my presence and participation in the learning activities.

The research took place in three different schools, each of them with different socio-economic and gender characteristics. Even though this study provides some indications of similarities and differences between results found in the three schools, from the outset it has never been the objective of this research to focus on these differences. It is understood that a good deal of data collected during the research could have been used to draw important differences between the schools, analysing variances in preferences, tastes, behaviour and knowledge related to students' experiences with digital media, both inside and outside of the school. However, due to the scope of the research and the amount of data to be analysed, and also because the number of students in each school was considerably small, the priority was to analyse the data from a more generic perspective.

12.8 Recommendations for Future Research

This research project is an exploratory study implemented through three case studies in Irish schools, based on a media literacy programme developed by the researcher. This study could be scaled up to make a larger contribution to the field. With more schools and students involved, the quantitative aspect of the study could be further explored, and there would be opportunities for measurements of knowledge attainment and pedagogical efficiency, for instance.

Even though the topics addressed in the programme are relevant to the media literacy field, there are other topics that could be addressed by future researches using the same educational format, such as media representation, social media identities and freedom of expression. Also, the devices, applications and software available can explore other digital formats, such as games, podcasts and animation.

Future research can also examine each topic in more detail. For instance, in relation to information literacy, the challenges posed by the spread of disinformation and fake news is one of the main topics being discussed in 2020. New studies could investigate how students deal with this problem, how the tools available online help

them evaluate sources and distinguish real from fake information, and how they understand the consequences of disinformation for the societies where they live.

As the Media Literacy programme was developed having the Transition Year as a reference, the workshops were designed to last around four hours, which is a format that suits TY students well. New studies can use media literacy programmes with workshops designed for shorter classes – 50 or 60 minutes – so that they could be applied in a more traditional format found in schools. In this way, the programme could be applied and studied using secondary students from different years, not only the Transition Year.

12.9 Conclusion

This thesis investigated a particular media literacy programme in order to explore the benefits and limitations in the use of digital media in the classroom to promote media literacy in students. It followed an opportunity presented by the Irish education system for the implementation of new learning practices: the Transition Year (TY) programme. Even though the TY programme has a different structure compared to the other years of study at secondary level, it allows researchers to test educational experiences and draw conclusions that can be used to design new pedagogies and develop new curriculum subjects.

The programme was applied in three schools with different characteristics in terms of gender, socio-economic status, technology structure and religious ethos. Even though some differences were observed in terms of students' perceptions about the topics being discussed, there were no significant difference in relation to the way the activities progressed and the general results of the investigation. The technology used for the activities – iPads, internet connection and projector – was sufficient for participants to carry out their research, access and collected materials for their projects, and create digital artefacts.

Most students enjoyed the practical activities with digital media, from planning to production to editing. Digital media production was a source of motivation and engagement, which does not necessarily lead to knowledge attainment – a topic for

future research – but certainly creates a positive environment for learning that enables play and experimentation.

This study revealed the huge potential for meaning-making practices in the classroom with the use of digital media. Students were able to express themselves in unique ways through the orchestration of different modes of communication and, with the assistance of the facilitator, some participants could articulate ideas around how each different mode works and how they can have different impact in the process of meaning making. This is a literacy practice, a way of reading (understanding) the world and expressing ideas in an increasingly mediated environment, and schools should no longer ignore that. This research suggests that a truly emancipatory education needs to take into consideration the new ways in which meanings are being created and conveyed through different media.

Finally, this new mediated communication also has implications that affect how young people use their own cultural repertoire to learn, how they express themselves in creative ways, and how they engage in serious topics that require a critical approach to learning. This research provided evidence that all these practices – which are all part of a broader understanding about literacy practices – are affected by the use of digital media in the classroom, with many benefits that can be explored by teachers, educators and policymakers.

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Appendix A

Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent for participant's parents.

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT (Parents)

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS - DUBLIN CITY UNIVERISTY

<u>Researcher</u>: Ricardo Castellini da Silva (ricardocastellini@gmail.com)

<u>Project Title</u>: From Literacy to Media Literacy: a study on the interface between mediated communication and education and its implications for the Irish second-level education.

Your child has been invited to participate in the above research project through a Media Education Course that will be part of the Transition Year Program at *School A.* The aim of the study is to evaluate how students learn about different topics related to media education (*for example: film, photography, advertisement etc.).*

This research will form part of Mr Castellini's PhD thesis, and has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee in Dublin City University. A thesis is a written manuscript, similar to a book which presents the authors ideas, research and outcomes based on studies and research completed over a course of three to four years.

Confidentiality

You can be sure that the identity of all participants in this research will be kept under strict confidentiality, which means that your child's name will not be disclosed by the researcher at any stage of the project. Also, the answers, opinions and thoughts given by your child during the project will not be identified as belonging to him/her. The study will refer to the participants as "students from school A (or any other letter)", mentioning the type of school (mixed, only boys or only girls), the year and the program.

How the student will participate in the research project

Should you agree with your child's participation, your child would be asked to contribute in the following way. We would ask your child to complete a 10 minutes questionnaire, at a time convenient to him/her, before the start of the program. This questionnaire would ask your child to indicate his/her opinion about some topics related to the use of digital media technology. After the end of the program, we would ask your child to complete another 10 minutes questionnaire, also indicating his/her opinion about some topics related to the use of digital media technology.

During the learning activities, the researcher will observe students and make notes about what each group is doing. At the end of each day, the researcher will meet with different student groups to discuss the activities they worked on earlier in more detail (this practice is called *FOCUS GROUP),* and this conversation will be recorded using an audio recorder.

As part of the learning activity, students will also produce digital products such as movies, digital magazines etc. These products will be collected by the researcher so that he can study and analyse them in greater detail later on.

Results and outcomes of the research project

The results and outcomes of this research will be publically available initially in the form of a PhD thesis. This thesis will be placed in the library at Dublin City University so that other researchers, lecturers and teachers interested in the subject area can access it. It is also very likely that the results will be disseminated through academic conferences and academic journals.

How the data collected during the research will be stored and protected

The electronic data will be stored in a folder called "Data Collection" within the Google Drive account of the researcher, which is protected by password and will only be accessed by the researcher. The notes taken by the researcher and any other form of "hard copy" data will be stored in a file at the researcher's desk on DCU campus. The data collected will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. The researcher understands that the best practice in this case is to retain data securely until there is no reasonable possibility that he will be questioned about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained. Once the researcher understands that the data can be disposed of, the electronic data will be permanently deleted from the researcher's Google Drive account, and the samples/notes//hard copy data will be shredded. Please bear in mind that confidentiality of information provided cannot always be guaranteed by researchers and can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your child does not have to participate if she/he does not want to. Your child is also free to change her/his mind at any stage about participating. So if after day one, day two, day three etc. your child does not wish to continue the participation please let the researcher or the TY Coordinator know. Likewise, the child can withdraw any information she/he has supplied as part of the research at any time. The child will not be penalised in any way for not participating or for withdrawing from the study after it has begun. Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Castellini through the e-mail provided, or, alternatively, by calling 087XXXXX.

Informed Consent

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS - DUBLIN CITY UNIVERISTY

Researcher: Ricardo Castellini da Silva (ricardocastellini@gmail.com)

Project Title: From Literacy to Media Literacy: a study on the interface between mediated communication and education and its implications for the Irish second-level education.

Research Objective: evaluate how students learn about different topics related to media education (*for example: film, photography, advertisement etc.).*

I do not anticipate that participating in this research project will contain any risk or inconvenience to your child. Besides, the participation is strictly voluntary and the child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

In order to take part in this research, it is very important that your child make sure he/she clearly understands and agrees with the information that is available in the PLAIN LANGUAGE STATMENT attached to this document. This means that your child should understand that:

- The child's identity (name and any other personal information) will not be revealed in the study.

- The child will be asked to answer two questionnaires, one before and one after the program. The child's activities may be registered by the researcher in a notebook. The child will participate in conversations with the researcher and other students and this activity will be recorded using an audio recorder. The digital products produced by the child (movies, for example) during the learning activities will be collected and analysed by the researcher.

- The child does not have to be in this study if he/she does not want to: participation is voluntary and the child may withdraw from the research at any point.

- All information collected will be used only for Mr. Castellini's research and will be kept confidential. There will be no connection to the child specifically (no one will have access to his/her personal answers, thoughts or opinions) in the results or in future publication of the results. Once the study is completed, the results will be available to the general public through the researcher's PhD thesis.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please ask or contact: Ricardo Canavezzi Castellini da Silva - 087 XXXXXX - ricardocastellini@gmail.com.br.

Permission for a Child to Participate in the Research

As parent or legal guardian, I authorize _____ to become a participant in the research study described in this form.

Child's Date of Birth _____

Parent or Legal Guardian's
Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix B

Plain Language Statement and Assent form for participants.

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT (Participants)

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS - DUBLIN CITY UNIVERISTY

Researcher: Ricardo Canavezzi Castellini da Silva (ricardocastellini@gmail.com)

Project Title: From Literacy to Media Literacy: a study on the interface between mediated communication and education and its implications for the Irish second-level education.

You are invited to participate in the above research project through a Media Education Course that will be part of your Transition Year Program at *school A.* The aim of the study is to evaluate how students learn about different topics related to media education (*for example: film, photography, advertisement etc.).*

This research will form part of Mr Castellini's PhD thesis, and has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee in Dublin City University. A thesis is a written manuscript, similar to a book which presents the authors ideas, research and outcomes based on studies and research completed over a course of three to four years.

Confidentiality

You can be assured that the identity of all participants in this research will be kept under strict confidentiality, which means that your name will not be disclosed by the researcher at any stage of the project. Also, the answers, opinions and thoughts given by you during the project will not be identified as belonging to you. The study will refer to the participants as "students from school A (or any other letter)", mentioning the type of school (mixed, only boys or only girls), the year and the program.

How the student will participate in the research project

Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute in the following way. You will be asked to complete a 10 minutes questionnaire, at a time convenient to you, before the start of the program. This questionnaire would ask you to indicate your opinion about some topics related to the use of digital media technology. After the end of the program, we would ask you to complete another 10 minutes questionnaire, also indicating your opinion about some topics related to the use of digital media technology.

During the learning activities, the researcher will observe students and make notes about what each group is doing. At the end of each day, the researcher will meet with different student groups to discuss the activities they worked on earlier in more detail (this practice is called *FOCUS GROUP),* and this conversation will be recorded using an audio recorder.

As part of the learning activity, students will also produce digital products such as movies, digital magazines etc. These products will be collected by the researcher so that he can study and analyse them in greater detail later on.

Results and outcomes of the research project

The results and outcomes of this research will be publically available initially in the form of a PhD thesis. This thesis will be placed in the library at Dublin City University so that other researchers,

lecturers and teachers interested in the subject area can access it. It is also very likely that the results will be disseminated through academic conferences and academic journals.

How the data collected during the research will be stored and protected

The electronic data will be stored in a folder called "Data Collection" within the Google Drive account of the researcher, which is protected by password and will only be accessed by the researcher. The notes taken by the researcher and any other form of "hard copy" data will be stored in a file at the researcher's desk on DCU campus.

The data collected will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. The researcher understands that the best practice in this case is to retain data securely until there is no reasonable possibility that he will be questioned about either the conduct of the research or the results obtained. Once the researcher understands that the data can be disposed of, the electronic data will be permanently deleted from the researcher's Google Drive account, and the samples/notes//hard copy data will be shredded. Please bear in mind that confidentiality of information provided cannot always be guaranteed by researchers and can only be protected within the limitations of the law - i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. You are also free to change your mind at any stage about participating. So if after day one, day two, day three etc. you do not wish to continue your participation please let the researcher or the TY Coordinator know. Likewise, you can withdraw any information you have supplied as part of the research at any time. You will not be penalised in any way for not participating or for withdrawing from the study after It has begun.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Castellini through the e-mail provided, or, alternatively, by calling 087XXXXXX.

Assent Form

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS - DUBLIN CITY UNIVERISTY

Researcher: Ricardo Castellini da Silva (ricardocastellini@gmail.com)

Project Title: From Literacy to Media Literacy: a study on the interface between mediated communication and education and its implications for the Irish second-level education.

Research Objective: evaluate how students learn about different topics related to media education (*for example: film, photography, advertisement etc.*).

I do not anticipate that participating in this research project will contain any risk or inconvenience to you. Besides, your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

In order to take part in this research, it is very important that you make sure you clearly understand and agree with the information that is available in the PLAIN LANGUAGE STATMENT attached to this document. This means that you understand that:

- Your identity (your name and any other personal information) will not be revealed in the study.

- You will be asked to answer two questionnaires, one before and one after the program. Your activities may be recorded by the researcher in a notebook. You will participate in conversations with the researcher and other students and this activity will be recorded using an audio recorder. The digital products produced by you during the learning activities (movies, for example) will be collected and analysed by the researcher.

- You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to; your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time, even after the program has started.

- All information collected will be used only for Mr. Castellini's research and will be kept confidential. There will be no connection to you specifically (no one will have access to your personal answers, thoughts or opinions) in the results or in future publication of the results. Once the study is completed, the results will be available to the general public through the researcher's PhD thesis, which is a written manuscript that the researcher will complete and place in the library in Dublin City University containing results and outcomes of this research project.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please ask or contact: Ricardo Canavezzi Castellini da Silva – 087XXXXXX - ricardocastellini@gmail.com.br.

By signing this document you are verifying that you have read and understood the explanation of the study (Plain Language Statement), and that you agree to participate.

PARTICIPANT'S NAME _____

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

Appendix C

Approval letter from DCU Research Ethics Committee.

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Mr Ricardo Canavezzi Castellini da Silva

School of Communications

9 November 2017

REC Reference:	**DCUREC/2017/157**
Proposal Title:	**From literacy to media literacy: a study on the interface between mediated communication and education and its implications for the Irish second-level education**
Applicant(s):	Mr Ricardo Canavezzi Castellini da Silva, Dr Miriam Judge

Dear Ricardo,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Dónal O'Gorman
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D

Media Literacy Questionnaire – Before the Programme.

MEDIA LITERACY SURVEY

1. Which of the following social media platforms do you use on a regular basis?

( ) Facebook ( ) Twitter ( ) Instagram ( ) Snapchat ( ) Youtube ( ) WhatsApp

2. Which of the following media platforms is your main source of:

NEWS (   )

A – Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.)   B – TV   C – Radio
D – Magazine / Book / Newspaper E – Websites / Blogs
F - Other _____

ENTERTEINMENT (   )

A – Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.)   B – TV   C - Radio
D – Magazine / Book / Newspaper E – Websites / Blogs
F - Other _____

3. On a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:
A - Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)   (   )
B - Search platforms (Google, Yahoo etc.)   (   )
C - Mainstream Journalism (Irish Times, BBC etc.)   (   )
D - Advertisements (   )

4. How would you best describe the expression "fake news"?
( ) - Biased journalism   ( ) - Fabricated stories   ( ) - Deliberate misinformation
( ) - Politically manipulated stories   ( ) - Sensationalist journalism

5. How would you rate the influence that the mass media (TV, cinema, radio, music etc.) have on people's behaviour and attitudes in the society where you live:
( ) no or insignificant influence   ( ) little influence   ( ) moderate influence
( ) significant influence   ( ) very strong influence

6. Choose from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), or 5 (strongly agree), and explain your choice in a few words.

A. All media messages are "constructed"   (   )

_____

_____

B. Different people experience the same media message in different ways   (   )

_____

_____

C. Media persuasion is bad for society   (   )

_____

_____

D. You always know who the owner of a message is   (   )

_____

_____

E. In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable   (   )

_____

_____

7. Answer YES or NO for the following questions:

A - Have you ever created a digital video using an editing software, such as MovieMaker or iMovie?
(   ) YES   (   ) NO

B - Have you ever manipulated photographs using an editing software such as Photoshop or Gimp?
(   ) YES   (   ) NO

C - Have you ever created an audio artefact using an editing software such as Audacity or Garage Band?
(   ) YES   (   ) NO

D - Have you ever created a website or a blog   (   ) YES   (   ) NO

8. When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:

A - Text (   )   B - Image (   )   C - Emoji (   )
D - Video (   )   E - A combination of 2 or more modes of communication (   )

Why? _____

_____

9. If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why:

A - Written article (   )   B - Photographs (   )   C - Video documentary (   )
D - Radio program / Podcast (   )   E - Physical performance, such as dance or a play (   )

Reason why: _____

_____

Appendix E

Media Literacy Questionnaire – After the Programme.

MEDIA LITERACY SURVEY

1. Which workshop of the Media Literacy Program was the most useful for you, and which one was the least useful? Why?

Most Useful

_____

Least Useful

_____

2. Using the scale 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree) and 4 (strongly agree), how do you rate the Media Literacy Program (MLP) in relation to the following learning outcomes:

A – The MLP has improved my understanding about why I must be aware of false information online and that I must always check the reliability of my sources (   )

In case your rate is 1 or 2, please tell the reason why:

I already knew that (   ) / The MLP did not help me to learn that (   ) / I was not interested in this topic (   )

(   ) Other _____

B – During the MLP I have learned how I can use different modes of communication (text, image, sound etc.) to create and express meaning (   )

In case your rate is 1 or 2, please tell the reason why:

I already knew that (   ) / The MLP did not help me to learn that (   ) / I was not interested in this topic (   )

(   ) Other _____

C – The MLP has helped me to have a better critical understanding about both good and bad effects that the media can have on people's behaviours and attitudes (   )

In case your rate is 1 or 2, please tell the reason why:

I already knew that (   ) / The MLP did not help me to learn that (   ) / I was not interested in this topic (   )

( ) Other _____

D – The MLP has helped me improve my communication skills using different digital media applications ( )

In case your rate is 1 or 2, please tell the reason why:

I already had that (   ) / The MLP didn't help me to improve that (   ) / I was not interested in this topic (   )

3. On a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:
A - Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)   (   )
B - Search platforms (Google, Yahoo etc.)   (   )
C - Mainstream Journalism (Irish Times, BBC etc.)   (   )
D - Advertisements (   )

4. How would you best describe the expression "fake news"?
( ) - Biased journalism   ( ) - Fabricated stories   ( ) - Deliberate misinformation
( ) - Politically manipulated stories   ( ) - Sensationalist journalism

5. How would you rate the influence that the mass media (TV, cinema, radio, music etc.) have on people's behaviour and attitudes in the society where you live:
( ) no or insignificant influence   ( ) little influence   ( ) moderate influence
( ) significant influence   ( ) very strong influence

6. Choose from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), or 5 (strongly agree), and explain your choice in a few words.

A. All media messages are "constructed"   (   )

_____

_____

B. Different people experience the same media message in different ways   (   )

_____

_____

C. Media persuasion is bad for society   (   )

_____

_____

D. You always know who the owner of a message is   (   )

_____

_____

E. In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable   (   )

_____

_____

8. When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:

A - Text ( )   B - Image ( )   C - Emoji ( )
D - Video ( )   E - A combination of 2 or more modes of communication ( )

Why? _____

_____

9. If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why:

A - Written article ( )   B - Photographs ( )   C - Video documentary ( )
D - Radio program / Podcast ( )   E - Physical performance, such as dance or a play ( )

Reason why: _____

_____

10. If you have any comments or suggestions, please write them down.

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU!

Appendix F

Guide Questions for Field Observation

INFORMATION LITERACY (5 workshops)

How do students perceive the difference between information and knowledge?

How do students evaluate the impact of fake news in their lives, and how they see the responsibility of media corporations in that?

How do students' criteria for searching for information online interfere negatively or positively in the results?

How does students' bias play a role in their analysis of controversial issues?

How do students react when confronted with information that goes against their beliefs?

To what extent the information students collect online during the research reflect their understanding of the main issues related to the topic?

ACTIVITY 1 – 'Testing Workshop'

How do students research for information without any supervision / guidance? How they select their sources?

How easy/difficult is it for students to learn how to use digital media by themselves or through online tutorials?

How much guidance / aid do students need from the teacher in order to create their digital artifacts (blog, photo montage, movie and tv ad)?

What kind of communication techniques students use to create their digital artifacts?

How and in what circumstances are students pop culture / media references brought into the activity?

In what ways students' creativity can be observed during the activity?

In what ways students' critical thinking can be observed during the activity?

ACTIVITY 2 – Digital Magazine

How do students perceive the different modalities in human communication and to what extent they understand the differences between them?

How the process of replacing traditional forms of language (written, spoken) for other semiotic resources (image, symbols, music) interferes in students' communication?

How do students discuss within their groups the use of different semiotic resources to convey information?

How does the process of selecting, gathering, organizing, synthesizing and presenting information take place and reflect students' understanding of the topic?

How and in what circumstances are students pop culture / media references brought into the activity?

In what ways students' creativity can be observed during the activity?

In what ways students' critical thinking can be observed during the activity?

ACTIVITY 3 – Photo Story

How is the concept of 'photo manipulation' received and understood by students? Is it view as something positive or negative, and in what circumstances?

How do students critically analyse the manipulation of pictures by journalists and advertisers?

How do students perceive their role as photo manipulators, especially in social media platforms?

How does the process of creating a photo narrative take place? How is the creative process during the experience? Do students first write up the story (maybe a script)?

In semiotic terms, to what extent do students have the ability to explain their communication through images?

How and in what circumstances are students pop culture / media references brought into the activity?

In what ways students' creativity can be observed during the activity?

In what ways students' critical thinking can be observed during the activity?

ACTIVITY 4 - Film

How does the process of creating a movie help students understand how stories are constructed and manipulated?

How do students create meaning through film and to what extent they are fully aware of their role as 'meaning creators'?

To what extent do students succeed in representing their ideas through moving images?

How and in what circumstances are students pop culture / media references brought into the activity?

In what ways students' creativity can be observed during the activity?

In what ways students' critical thinking can be observed during the activity?

ACTIVITY 5 – TV Ad

How do students articulate the difference between advertising and propaganda?

How do students perceive themselves as targets of the advertising industry?

How do students use semiotic resources in order to sell an idea? How do they combine different communication modes in order to achieve that?

What are the advertising techniques most common to students? Which ones they prefer to use in their ads and why?

How and in what circumstances are students pop culture / media references brought into the activity?

In what ways students' creativity can be observed during the activity?

In what ways students' critical thinking can be observed during the activity?

Appendix G

Guide Questions for Focus Group

ACTIVITY 1 – 'Testing Workshop'

Tell me what you think about the activity today. What did you enjoy the most about our activity? What you didn't like?

Which one do you prefer to use in your school: a tablet or a computer desktop? Why?

Tell me what you understand by the term "media".

How do you relate the term media to other terms such as "language", "communication" and "representation"?

Did you find the information you were searching online? Do you think you can fully trust that information? How many sources did you use?

Tell me about any difficulties you had while doing your online research. How do you think these difficulties had an impact on your digital artifact?

Tell me about your experience learning how to use a digital media software (easy/difficult).

Which one do you prefer to use in your school: a tablet or a computer desktop? Why?

ACTIVITY 2 – Digital Magazine

Tell me what you think about the activity today. What did you enjoy the most about our activity? What you didn't like?

Tell me about any difficulties you had while doing your online research today. How do you think these difficulties had an impact on the content of your DM? How many sources did you get? Do you think it was enough?

Do you trust the information you find online?

If you want to learn something, what is your favorite format/platform to have access to the content?

If you are looking for entertainment, what is your format/platform to have access to the content?

Tell me how you understand the differences between the many modes of communication that we learned today (which one is more effective? which one is your favorite to express yourself?)

Do you think that text and image convey information in the same way? If not, what are the main differences in your opinion? Do you think they can be combined/worked together?

ACTIVITY 3 – Photo Story

What did you enjoy the most about our activity today? What you didn't like?

Tell me about any difficulties you had while doing your online research today. How do you think these difficulties had an impact on the content of your photo story?

Do you think photographs are a good means for communication? Why?

Do you use photographs in order to communicate with other people (Facebook, WhatsApp etc.)? How does it work?

Do you think it is right to manipulate photographs in any circumstances? Comment on that. (mention propaganda, advertising techniques, journalism etc.)

Have you ever been cheated by a photograph? Do you think that people use photograph manipulation in order to deceive other people? How can you avoid that?

Do you think that some people become someone else on social media by the way their edit their content? (using pictures to construct their identities, for example).

Tell me how the process of creation / production of your photo story was.

ACTIVITY 4 - Film

What did you enjoy the most about our activity today? What you didn't like?

Tell about any difficulties you had while doing your online research today. Did you find the information you were looking for? How do you think these difficulties had an impact on the content of your movie?

Tell me about the creation / production process of your movie. Which of the stages (planning, storyboarding, shooting, editing) do you think was the most important and why?

When you were creating your film today, did you use any other film as a reference?

To what extent do you think the editing process is important to create meaning and convey a message?

Do you think the experience we had today help students to understand how media messages are constructed and manipulated? Why?

Do you think that videos can be used to deceive people?

Do you think it's easier to express yourself through film, text or photographs?

ACTIVITY 5 - Ad and Propaganda

What did you enjoy the most about our activity today? What you didn't like?

Tell about any difficulties you had while doing your online research today. How do you think these difficulties had an impact on the content of your TV ad?

Do you see any difference between your experience doing online research today and the ones you did in the previous days?

In terms of techniques and objectives, what are the main differences between advertising and propaganda?

Do you see yourself as a target of the advertising industry? In what ways and in what circumstances?

Tell me about the process of creation / production of your TV ad. How did imagination and creativity play a role in that?

What were the main persuasion techniques you used in your TV ad and why?

Appendix H

Sample of Artefact Analysis

School B - Day 1

Group: The foreigners (Photo story)

Topic: Celebrities and Trends

Pop culture: Girls created a photo storytelling about what happened in the media trends in 2017. Use of hashtag in every photo.

Representation: Representing #eyebrowsonfleek (student with a big eyebrow drawn on her face; #dabbing (student imitating a dabbing movement; #kiliejenner (students with big lips drawn on their faces), #floorislava (stickers of fire and students embrace themselves in panic).

First picture is a lady with a binocular to represent them looking back to 2017

Multimodality: Use of picture, with facial expression and text (hashtag). Use of stickers in one picture as well.

Critical Analysis: Last picture: "One does not simply stay in 2017". Everything passes, they are just trends. New trends will come. Trends are ephemeral, the media hype use these trends to catch people's attention, but they are not really important.

Creativity: Students use exaggeration to show what they mean.

Appendix I

Sample of Students' Presentation (Transcription)

School A - DAY 2
Presentations

1st group

RESEARCHER– Great, so… Tell me what was your first idea, I mean…

S1 – Erm… Just, like, the refugee and migrant crisis… in Ireland.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so you decided to talk about refugee and migrant crisis?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Both together?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Ok. In Ireland?

S1 – No, just in general. Our first idea was in Ireland, but…

S2 – But then it didn't work in Ireland.

RESEARCHER– Why it didn't work in Ireland?

S1 – Because we have more information to talk about.

RESEARCHER– Ok. So, just tell me what exactly you did.

S1 – So, we defined what refugee is, and said, like, the reasons why they would, like, seek asylum somewhere else. Like, why they are leaving their country.

RESEARCHER– Ok. And usually why are they leaving their country?

S1 – Due to, like, war or natural disasters, lack of water… stuff like this.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 - And, erm… how Ireland is open to refugees, to take refuges and then… 50 % of them are coming from Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

RESEARCHER– This is in Ireland?

S2 – No.

S1 – Oh no, fifty per cent of all refugees in the world come from these three countries.

RESEARCHER– Ok. Come from Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Ok. Erm… "we think we should accept asylum seekers in our country". Is this your opinion or…?

S1 – Yes, but Ireland is open to taking refugees into the country anyway, so…

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – But that's our opinion.

RESEARCHER– Good.

S1 – Then we have two infographics but, like, the top 10 countries that accept refugees, and then… the second one has, like, just, like, more facts about the top

countries that have taken in refugees, and the top origin of, like, where the refugees come from.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – Then we talked about Syria, 'cos that's one of the most… that's the top country where refugees come from. And then they go to, like, Turkey, that's the one that has the most refugees in it. Yes…

S2 – That's it.

RESEARCHER– Good, good. Let me ask you one thing. Erm… Ok, so in terms of content you focused on refugees, right? Erm, in terms of the layout, in terms of your choices, just can we go back to the other pages… so you have infographics, you have the first page… and you decided to use colours.

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Tell me about your decision to use colours.

S1 – We just, like, used cold colours, 'cos it's just like, erm… it's not really a kind of happy subject. (*inaudible*) – 3:07.

RESEARCHER– Ok, great. Erm, as I can see your magazine is a very traditional magazine, we could say. We have text, and image. Erm… So, any reason why you didn't want to use, like, for example, video, or audio, or more interactive resources?

S1 – If we had more time we'd have put that in, but we were just, like, focusing on the facts.

RESEARCHER– Ok. So if you had more time, what would you have done?

S1 – Maybe put in videos, or like, sounds. Like an interview with a refugee.

RESEARCHER– Ok. Erm… so, can we go to the other page? Infographics, all right. Do you… where did you get this information from? Which were your sources?

S1 – BBC I think so.

RESEARCHER– Do you have your sources?

S2 – Yes. Infographics are from weforall.org.

RESEARCHER– And do you trust this source?

S2 – (laughs) – I don't know.

S1 – Yes, 'cos Turkey is the top host country…

S2 – Yes, 'cos, like, everywhere they said the same in relation to it.

RESEARCHER– Ok. What is the other source?

S1 – We did cross-checks.

RESEARCHER– Did you cross-check?

S2 – Yes. Everywhere said that Turkey was the main host and then…

RESEARCHER– Ok. What other sources?

S3 – unrefugees.org and bbc.co.uk.

RESEARCHER– Do you think BBC is a good source of information?

All students – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Why?

S1 – Because they cover a lot of, erm… the refugee crisis… and a lot of, like, this kind of stuff.

RESEARCHER– Ok. Do you think the opinion… do you think the information here on the magazine reflects the opinion of the group? Or not necessarily?

S1 – Like… on having refugees in our country?

RESEARCHER– Yes, I mean… the information you put here in the magazine, I mean… you have a summary of the refugee crisis. Right? So, for example, I am reading this magazine now, so I go to the first page, I learn about refugees and so on… there's a lot of information in there. The information that is there, do you think it reflects your opinion? I mean, do you agree with everything that is in there?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Yes, so could we say that your magazine is biased in some way? (SILENCE)

RESEARCHER– Or could you say you are not neutral?

S1 – We are more kind of, like… (long pause) Yes, actually we are a bit biased (laughter).

RESEARCHER– What?

S1 – We are a bit biased.

RESEARCHER– No problem. I mean, you made a magazine that reflects your opinion, that's what I am asking. Do you think that, as a journalist… You are not a journalist, so it's fine, you can be biased, this is just a presentation, but do you think that as a journalist it's ok to be biased? To make a magazine that reflects your opinion?

S1 – It depends on, like, the story. Like, if you are talking about something, like this, it could be controversial, it could like… different people's opinions can, like… (long silence). I don't know. I think journalists shouldn't be biased, but, like, sometimes it happens, erm… Like in our magazine. We thought it was for a good reason, though.

RESEARCHER– Yes, sure, no problem, I know it was for a good reason. I am not complaining; I just want to know your thoughts on it. Thanks anyway.

2nd group
(9:35)

RESEARCHER– Let me know what was your idea…

S1 – Idea was the Syrian refugee crises.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so you focused on the Syrian refugee crisis.

S2 – Yes.

S1 – So, in our first page we spoke about the origins of how refugee started. So, yes, it's pretty much it. So, "the Syrian refugee crisis is the largest refugee…" (*Student reads what's on the magazine*).

S2 – Erm, these are just the European countries that are accepting Syrian refugees. It is estimated that there's 65 million refugees in the world.

RESEARCHER– Wow.

S2 – Yes. A lot. And we have a video… that is supposed to explain. (*She tries to play the video*). The link is not working.

RESEARCHER– How did you upload the video?

S2 – We just copied and pasted the link.

RESEARCHER– Oh no, it doesn't work. Now you have to…

S2 – Record it.

RESEARCHER– No, you have to save… No, no, it doesn't work. It doesn't work. (*they play the video on YouTube*).

RESEARCHER– Ok, go back to your magazine. So you have a video about the refugee crisis.

S2 – Yes, And that's it.

RESEARCHER– And that's it. Can you go back to your cover… So, you have information, you have the origins of the Syrian crises, and then you have information about how many people died, and how many people fled the country. And on the next page is about the countries that accepted refugees… Do you think… What more information you think you could have included in there?

S2 – Erm… (*silence*)

RESEARCHER– I mean, do you think you have covered everything?

S2 – Well, no. Erm, we could have said, like, specifically what amount of refugees each country has taken in. And how many they are allowed to take in. Like, how many they are letting come into the country. 'Cos, like, all the European countries have, like, a limit on how many they are willing to take. And, each limit isn't enough, like, for all the refugees to find somewhere.

RESEARCHER– So you could have talked about the debates that are going on, the political debates, and so on.

S2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– In terms of your choices about what we learned today, in terms of the modes of communication, tell me about your choices.

S2 – We did…

RESEARCHER– Oh, this is an audio, is it?

S1 – No… it's not working.

RESEARCHER– But it was supposed to be one?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– About what? What was the audio?

S2 – I'll let John (*fake name*) to explain that one.

S1 – Erm… it was just a song.

RESEARCHER– So put the song on.

(Everyone laughs)

RESEARCHER– Ok, so tell me about your choices in terms of modes of communication.

S2 – Erm, we chose blue 'cos it's a colder colour, 'cos this is more a serious topic.

S1 – The blue meant, like, go to sea…

RESEARCHER– Ok. Thank you guys.

3rd group
(16:30)

RESEARCHER– Ok, so what's the story? What are we going to see there?

S1 – Erm… We did on refugees.

RESEARCHER– Sorry?

S1 – Refugees in Syria… That come from Syria.

RESEARCHER– From Syria? So you focused on Syria as well, ok.

S1 – Erm… We did first what is the difference between refugee and migrant.

RESEARCHER– And what is the difference?

S1 – Migrant is more planned out, and, like, they can, like, have a job, and like, go back to, like, their country, if they want to. And refugees… erm, it's like, erm…

S2 – They are kind of more forced to leave their country because of war, natural disaster…

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– So a migrant would be, like, his choice or her choice to leave, whereas a refugee is fleeing some kind of war. Ok.

S2 – We kind of just focused on where the refugees come from. So there's many that come from Syria and Turkey, and the main refugees (*inaudible*) 17:38.

RESEARCHER– Sure. And then there's an infographics over there.

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– And this is a video.

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Where did you get this video from?

S1 – Erm… National Geographic…

RESEARCHER– And what is this video about? I mean, no problem to… Just to show what you are doing.

S1 – It's just, like, their, like, journey.

RESEARCHER– Ok, Ok. So this page is very interesting, like, you have texts explaining, and then you have infographics, and videos, and different colours… why did you choose these colours? Or it was just random…

S1 – Erm… I don't know, it was more, like, the brown was more like a colder colour.

RESEARCHER– Ok. Is there another page?

S1 – Yes. There it is explaining why the Syrian is fleeing, there's, like, war, and… it's pretty unsafe. And children are going home without a medication. Erm… yes.

S2 – And then we just got a text on how we can help them and stuff.

RESEARCHER– Ok. And what about the sources of information? Where did you get the information from?

S3 – Erm, mainly from, like, the Irish Times, and the Guardian.

RESEARCHER– The Guardian. So you looked up in mainstream media mainly, I mean… Big Journals, big newspapers. Is that so?

S3 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– So you think that if we published this online, because we can publish, like, this online… If we published this online, do you think it would be a good source of information about the refugee crisis?

S1 and S2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– And do you think it reflects your opinion? Do you think there's a lot of your opinion in there or…

S2 – Yes.

S3 – I think so.

RESEARCHER– So this is like… your point of view about the refugee crisis?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Ok, good. Erm… if you had more time, what would you have done differently in terms of the modes of communication that we learned today?

S2 – We could put more images in it, like…

RESEARCHER– Images?

S2 – yes.

RESEARCHER– Do you think images, they work more like illustration or you think you can actually get information from it?

S2 – I think you can get a lot of information from images.

RESEARCHER– Ok. That's good, thanks.

4th group
(21:03)

RESEARCHER– Ok, so what are we going to see?

S1 – So we mainly focused on the refugees all around the world. So the first one is "what is a refugee". And it's a person that is forced to leave the country. It's, like, natural disasters, or, what was it? The war, that is happening in the country.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – And if you look down, there are different type of seekers and refugees, then on the other page "why they are leaving", it's mostly because of violence, because of the war, like, there's a lot of the war happening over there now. I thought it is ended over there now, but there's, like, still a bit going on. And then… collapsed infrastructure… erm, cause half of the kids aren't going to school.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so you looked for the reasons why they are leaving.

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Great, good.

S1 – When they go off to, like, different countries, like, it's a bit difficult going to school.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – And the last one is, children are in danger and distress, 'cos erm… a dangerous environment, 'cos there's a lot of war going on. There's a lot of people dying. And… That's pretty much it. And then we have infographic, oh no… yes, we do, on the top left, and it's mostly where they are coming from. That's the number of refugees per one thousand habitants in 2014. And… what was the most was… I don't know where that is. And that's 232 out of 1000 people.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – And then, where are they going. Erm… Germany last year took in a lot of refugees, and now they have 32 thousand refugees. Probably more now, it was not included this year.

S2 – Erm… so, what are the refugee's greatest needs, so they are leaving everything behind, erm, they, like, have those needs in the countries that they are going to, so they need, like, reliable supplies of clean water, sanitation facilities and children need a safe environment. And we have a video of children talking about the effects of war on them. Can I play it?

RESEARCHER– Yes, just a little bit.

(*we start watching the video*)

RESEARCHER– The effects of the war?

S2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Ok, great. Ok, we have to move on. (laughter). We can't watch all the videos unfortunately, but we'll have 2 workshops only on video, so don't worry about that.

S2 – So, erm… "A change for the better". The government has a new bill that will enable more refugee families in Ireland to reunite. So, they won't allow the separation of children under 18, that's good so families can stay together. And these are some of our sources where we got our information from.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so… "citizen information", "Wikipedia"… Do you trust information of the sources in the same way, or you think they are different?

S2 – Erm… Yes, I trust them.

S1 – Well, like, Wikipedia… and, like, the newspaper.

RESEARCHER– Ok. Good. So in terms of your choices about what we learned today, the modes of communication, tell me why you decided to do what you did, I mean…

S1 – 'Cos we kind of, like, wanted to, like, cover, like, cover nearly every part of the refugees, if we had more time we would've covered, like, more. But we wanted, like, to cover the main reasons, why are they leaving, and where they are living.

RESEARCHER– Ok, And… can we go back… I can see you used a lot of pictures and infographics, so there's a mix of modes of communication, you were not only using text, or images… Tell me a little bit about that, why did you decide to do what you did? Or… why did you decide to combine text with images and videos?

S2 – We thought it would be more, like, eye-catching and, like, the infographic show very clearly the amount of refugees who had to leave the countries… compared to each other. You kind of, see it visually rather than just writing.

RESEARCHER– Ok. That's good. That's good, guys. Thank you.

5th group
(26:40)

RESEARCHER– Ok, so tell me what we are going to see here.

S1 – We decided to go more for, like, a magazine tailored for refugees, like, tell them the news. (*students were laughing*).

RESEARCHER– What do you mean?

S1 – Like, erm… We, like, made a kind of fake newspaper for refugees. (*students laughing*)

RESEARCHER– So you have a magazine for refugees, so if you are a refugee you are going to read this newspaper.

S2 – It's for news about refugees.

S1 – So, on the first page we have, like, the differences between a migrant and a refugee and, like, on the pictures we have different audios explaining the differences.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so you click on the picture and...

S3 – And then pictures have audio.

RESEARCHER– The voices are your voices?

S1 – No, erm… TED talks.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S1 – Yes, so… this page is just defining what is the difference…

RESEARCHER– And now we have a technical problem.

(*I fix the problem*)

RESEARCHER– Good.

S2 – So these are just some stories… about refugees.

RESEARCHER– I didn't see, sorry. Stories about refugees.

S2 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Where?

S2 – This is in England.

RESEARCHER– England, ok.

S2 – These two are both from Ireland. And… the information sources are Daily Mirror, Irish Independent and the Irish Times.

RESEARCHER– Ok.

S2 – That's it.

RESEARCHER– Can you go back please… So you decided not to use too much colour, it's not really colourful, any reason for that?

S2 – Most newspapers are just, like, white.

RESEARCHER– Ok, so you decided to go for, like, very plain newspaper, like most of them, yes?

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER– Good. Yes, I like white, basically. Erm… and, you chose a few pictures… Erm, tell me about your choices of pictures, like, what kind of information you wanted to convey? With the pictures…

S2 – You can talk about how the refugees are more, like, being forced to go somewhere from the photo (*inaudible 29:52*).

S1 – It also kind of shows, like, how, there's, like, a lot of closed borders, with the fences and all, and like, the ones in the news stories are just meant to convey what the story is about.

RESEARCHER– Ok. That's good. Thank you, guys.

6th group

(31:40)

RESEARCHER– Ok, so… What are we going to see?

S1 – We focused on the Syrian refugee crisis. Erm… So our first page is about what's happening in Syria at the moment.

S2 – Because it's, like, the most current thing to talk about.

S1 – Our second page is about, like, what… how the war, the civil war started. And then we have, like, the reasons why Syrians are fleeing their homes.

RESEARCHER– Good.

S1 – So… violence, collapsed infrastructure, and children in danger and distress. We have then where the Syrian refugees are going, some of the countries and… some of numbers of how many are in each country.

RESEARCHER– Ok. And the video is about what?

S2 – It's an explanation of…

S1 – Yes, it's like a little story just to, erm… it's sort of an animated story. (*student play the video*).

RESEARCHER– Good, Ok. So, erm… tell me what was your… I mean, I know your group, you know, you were in 4 and out of sudden you were in only two… But in terms of your choices, in terms of the modes of communication, tell me a little bit about that. Why you decided, I mean, again, you decided to go for a white magazine, more text than pictures, so… Why you decided to…

S1 – Erm… Not really sure, we just, sort of…

RESEARCHER– Do you think pictures could be, I mean, if you had more pictures it could be more visual and more interesting…

S1 – Yes, yes.

RESEARCHER– You know, more appealing.

S1 – Yes, if we had more photos and maybe some graphics about it… it would be more interesting.

RESEARCHER– Ok, thank you.

Appendix J

Sample of Focus Group (Transcription)

School A - DAY 2
Focus Group

(35:45)

RESEARCHER – Ok, so tell me about what you think of the activity of today, in terms of group work. Do you think it worked as a group?
S1 and S2 – Yes
S1 – I thought it was good.
RESEARCHER – Hum?
S1 – I thought it was good.
S3 – I thought it was a little bit better than last week because we had, like, erm… more, structured topics. We didn't just, like, picked ourselves.
RESEARCHER – All right, like yesterday, erm, last week it was more loose, right?
S3 – Yes.
RESEARCHER – So you had to choose, and… It was more structured this week.
S3 – Yes.
RESEARCHER – Ok, erm… a couple of questions. So which one do you prefer in school, do you prefer a tablet or you prefer a computer desktop?
S2 – I like using a tablet but for things like that I think a desktop computer is better.
RESEARCHER – You prefer computer?
S2 – Because for, like, copying and pasting and for photos, and getting videos from youtube…
RESEARCHER – It's easier.
S2 and S3 – Yes.
S4 – There's restrictions with the ipad.
RESEARCHER – Restrictions with the Ipad… Yes, like, you can't download a video, for example, or to communicate between ipads, sometimes it can be, erm… so some activities you prefer with on desktops, do you agree John (*fake name*)?
S1 – Yes.
RESEARCHER – Ok. Erm… Tell me about any difficulties that you had doing your research online today. Did you find the information you were looking for, or it was difficult to find… tell me a little bit about that.
S5 – It was easy to find on refugees because it's a big topic, other things might be harder.
RESEARCHER – Ok, What else?
S2 – We didn't know any information without looking it up.

RESEARCHER – It was difficult for example… because when you say "refugee" it's a very broad topic, right? So how did you decide what kind of information you needed to get? How was this decision made, I mean, in your group?

S3 – That is, like, narrowing down until, like, one or two topics that we want to focus on. We just picked whatever we… were most impressed with.

RESEARCHER – Ok. Erm… so tell me one thing. Do you trust the information you found? Everything that you found online, do you trust that? Yes? Based on what? You don't… Why you don't?

S2 – Because, most of it is either, like, most of it, like, on the side of refugees. So they are exaggerating as much as they can to make people agree with them.

RESEARCHER – Hum… Ok. Anyone else? Did you trust information you found online?

S4 – Erm, some, like, from news articles and stuff, I trusted them. But others, I don't really know the names of the website and can't find them… So it just doesn't…

RESEARCHER – Ok, so if you go to a website and if you don't know that website you cannot… I mean, you are not 100% sure that you can trust that information.

S4 – Yes.

RESEARCHER – Erm… so, in terms of the modes of communication. If you want to… If you want someone to learn something, you were creating a magazine, so let's imagine that I am going to use this magazine to teach other people – I am not going to do that – but let's say that I was going to do this kind of thing, do you think they prefer to have text on the magazine, do you think they prefer more pictures, they prefer videos, I mean, people of your age, what do you think about that? Do you think the magazine that you made today… would it be exactly what they are expecting to read, or you think you could use different modes of communications? What are your thoughts on it?

S5 – I think pictures and videos are better 'cos erm…

S1 – I prefer pictures.

RESEARCHER – You prefer pictures. Why?

S1 – I feel like… reading use too much effort. Videos, some videos are too long to watch all of it and you get bored half way through.

S2 – Yes, that's true.

RESEARCHER – And what about text?

S2 – You have to concentrate to read.

RESEARCHER – You have to concentrate to read text.

S2 – (*inaudible*) 40:37

RESEARCHER – Ok, ok. What about you?

S6 – I think when people see, like, big loads of writing they are, like, I don't want to read it. They kind of, like, ignore it. A video is more appealing to them.

S1 – Yes.

RESEARCHER – It's more appealing. Ok, good, yes, sometimes it's… erm. So, Some people say that if you want to learn something more in depth, you go for a text. Because then, even though you have to concentrate more, you have the information there, it's more… it's more formal. Do you think that, for example, for entertainment, ok… do you think that videos are better for entertainment or you think text is better for entertainment?

All students – Videos.

RESEARCHER – Videos are better for entertainment. Why?

(*Long silence*)

S2 – Because they are better…

S1 – I think you can't compare a video with a, say, a text or something like that. There's a lot of things going on at the same time, like, it's more, like, quick… No, not quick, erm… Like…

RESEARCHER – Dynamic?

S1 – Yes, dynamic…

S3 – More modes together.

RESEARCHER – What, sorry?

S3 – The modes, like… how do you call them?

RESEARCHER – The modes of communication?

S3 – Yes. You have, like, many things together, everything going on at the same time, like…

RESEARCHER – Ok, I see. And what about pictures? Are they also better for entertainment?

All students – Yes.

RESEARCHER – Because…

S2 – They are more appealing.

All students – yes.

RESEARCHER – Ok. Erm… Now, a question that is a little bit tricky, but… You think that videos and photos they are more appealing, but in terms of how they convey information, ok? Let's say that I want you to know something about the refugee crisis. Do you think that pictures show and convey information better than text? What do you think about that?

S5 – I think that if the picture is an infographic, then it has a lot of information. But if it's just taken people might take in different ways, and they are not sure what it could mean.

RESEARCHER – Ok, Ok. Good. And now the final question is: do you think that, for example, the topic of today was refugee crisis, right? This involves a little bit of history, involves a little bit of geography… Do you think that this kind of activity, and I want you to be honest, remember… you don't need to say anything just to make Ricardo happy… This kind of activity, do you think you can learn things with this kind of activity, I mean, this practical activity, we had a little bit of theory, and then we had practical stuff, you guys were doing on your own, you were debating and talking and doing some research, do you think that this format of activity where you were using an iPad, using apps and doing research online, do you think that this is a good way to learn and why you think that, if you do? You, you are very quiet so you are going to wrap up the…

S6 – Yes, I think it's a good way, 'cos, like, you sort of, like, it's more interesting instead of just sitting and listening to, like, a teacher, 'cos like…

S2 – I think... Sorry.

S6 – Sorry. You can find out yourself.

S2 – I think we could, like, if it was more a topic that, like, we could relate to, we would be more interested in finding more about it.

RESEARCHER – Ok. What about you?

S4 – I agree with them.

RESEARCHER – You agree. What about you?

S5 – I think it's good, because, like, when you are putting the project together, you are using different modes of, like, whatever that is… (laughter).

RESEARCHER – Communication. (*laughter*). Whatever that thing, you know, you talked about… Oh yes, I see your point. What about you?

S1 – Yes, I think it's more fun than just sitting on the table and writing. When you are actually doing the research yourself, not just writing down what teacher has up on the board.

RESEARCHER – So do you think that the action is good for learning, I mean, it's better… And do you like group work? Or do you think group work sometimes can be…

S1 – I like group work better.

S2 – It's more fun with group work.

S4 – Yes.

S1 – You don't have to do everything yourself.

S2 – Yes, it's easier. If, like, if everyone, like, helps then it's easier.

RESEARCHER – Ok. Thank you guys.

Appendix K

Sample of Field Observation (Transcription)

School C - DAY 3
Field Observation

15 students, 4 groups
- Most students responded well to false information and controversial information, but they were not sure about 'bullshit' or careless information.
- Discussion about types of images is going well, they seem to be warmed up.
- Heated (again) and very good discussion about the difference between images. "Photos represent what we see". "Painting can convey information better, you can highlight details in the painting". "Painting has more artistic value".
- Most students receive the idea of 'photo manipulation' as something bad.
- O.J. Simpson magazine: Very good discussion. "Both magazines were edited. The one on the left made O.J. Simpson stand out, the numbers as well". "One magazine put the title behind the photo to show O.J. better; and Time put him behind the title, kind of hiding him".
- Nobody mentioned racism (there are 3 black students in the class)
- "They darkened his picture to portray him as a criminal". Other students mentioned "darkened picture", but not "darkened skin".
- I mentioned "racism" and then they started discussing the racist aspect of the magazine cover. Apparently they were not comfortable to say anything about that before I did.
- Students agree that it is not good to manipulate pictures like this. Some students pointed that little manipulation is ok, if the meaning remains the same.
- Practical Activity: 3 groups are working fine, one is not.
- Groups are talking about the design of the photo story.
- I told the groups to do the research first and then start the photo story. They are following this (apparently).
- Most groups are doing well. The 3 with strong leaders are doing better.
- The research bit did not take long. After 10 minutes they were already taking pictures.
- 2 groups asked for assistance. They wanted me to explain better what they were supposed to do. This didn't happen with the magazine.
- Called team leaders (3, cause 1 group was out taking pictures). The 3 are on track. The topics have been chosen and they are now working on the pictures.

- They are not taking this activity as seriously as the previous one (magazine). They are playing a lot with the pictures, making fun of each other.
- One of the groups was editing and assembling the pictures at the same time.
- 3 groups are working well. 1 is really poor (Luke).
- around 40 minutes have passed and they are almost done.

Appendix L

Charts used in Chapter 9 (for each school)

School A

8. When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:
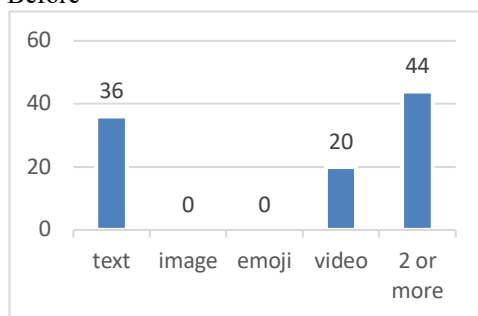
Before

After
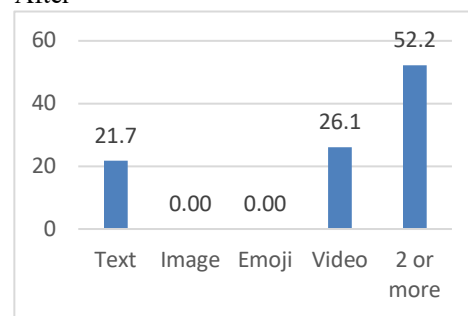
9. If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why:
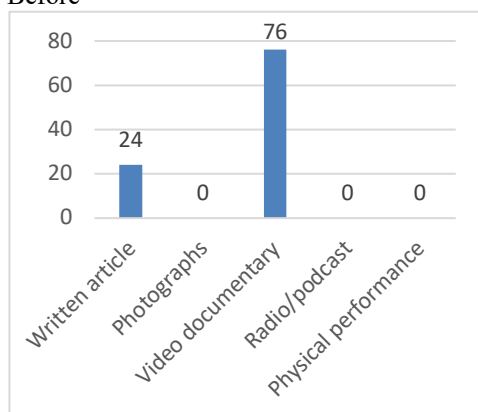
Before

After
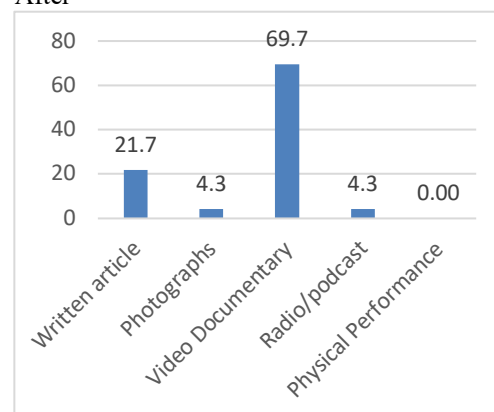
School B

8. When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:

Before

80	
60	47.1
40	35.3
20	11.7 5.9
0	0.00
	Text Image Emoji Video 2 or more

After

80	66.7
60	
40	
20	16.7 11.1 5.5
0	0.00
	Text Image Emoji Video 2 or more

9. If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why:

Before

80	
60	
40	43.8 37.5
20	12.5 6.2
0	0.00
	Written article Photographs Video documentary Radio/podcast Physical performance

After

80	
60	64.7
40	
20	17.6 11.8
0	5.9 0.00
	Written article Photographs Video documentary Radio/podcast Physical performance

School C

8. When you are chatting with your friends on social media, the most efficient way to get a message across is through:

Before

	Text	Image	Emoji	Video	2 or more
	50.0	5.9	0.00	5.9	38.2

After

	Text	Image	Emoji	Video	2 or more
	28.6	0.00	0.00	10.7	60.7

9. If you were assigned with the task of informing or explaining a very important issue to the general public, which of the following formats would you choose and why:

Before

	Written article	Photographs	Video documentary	Radio/podcast	Physical performance
	17.1	14.3	54.3	11.4	2.9

After

	Written article	Photographs	Video documentary	Radio/podcast	Physical performance
	7.1	21.4	60.8	7.1	3.6
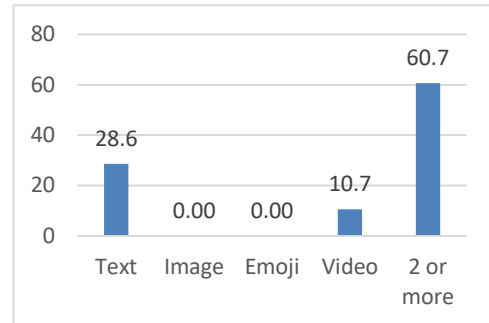
Appendix M
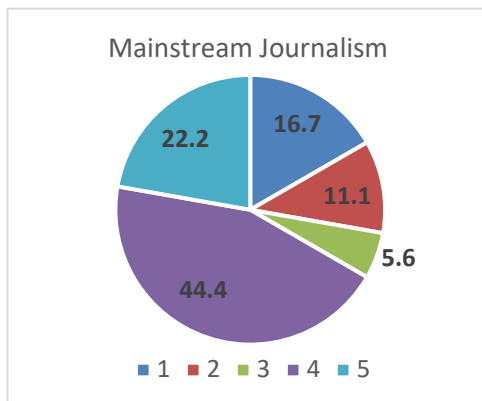
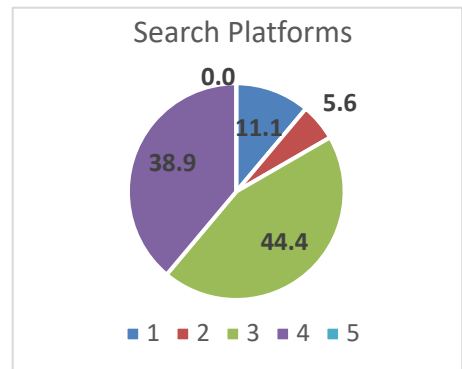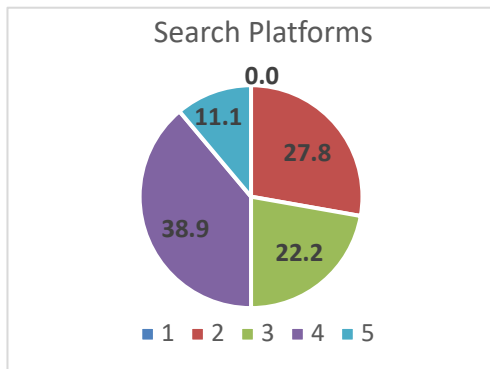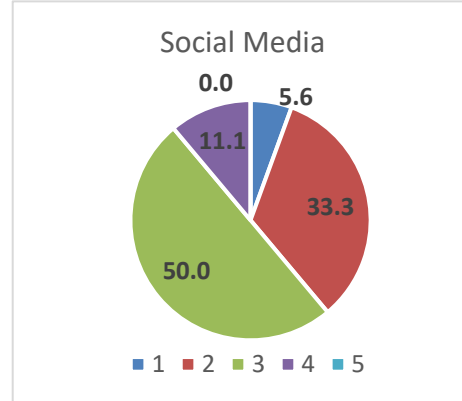## Charts used in Chapter 10 (for each school)

School A

3. On a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:
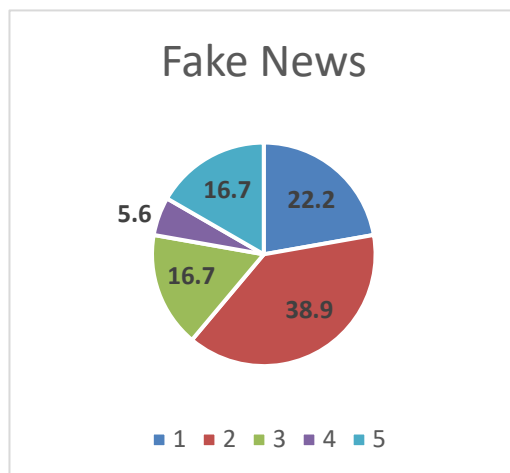
Before the ML programme

Social Media
- 0
- 4
- 0
- 40
- 56
- 1 2 3 4 5

Search Platforms
- 0
- 4
- 8
- 40
- 48
- 1 2 3 4 5

Mainstream Journalism
- 0
- 0
- 12
- 28
- 60
- 1 2 3 4 5

Advertsiment
- 0
- 8
- 12
- 24
- 56
- 1 2 3 4 5

After the ML programme

Social Media
- 0
- 0
- 12.5
- 50
- 37.5
- 1 2 3 4 5

Search Platforms
- 0.0
- 0.0
- 8.3
- 41.7
- 50.0
- 1 2 3 4 5

Mainstream Journalism
- 8.3
- 0.0
- 8.3
- 12.5
- 70.8
- 1 2 3 4 5

Advertsiment
- 0.0
- 8.3
- 25.0
- 25.0
- 41.7
- 1 2 3 4 5
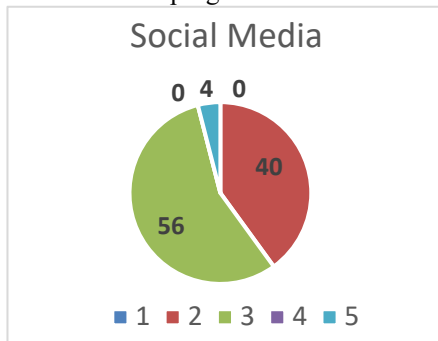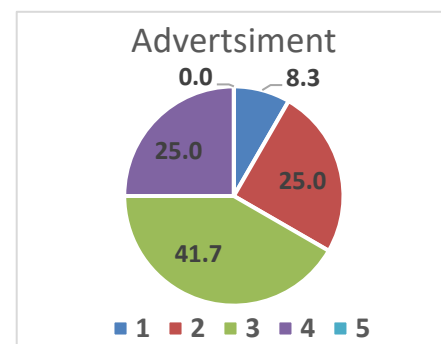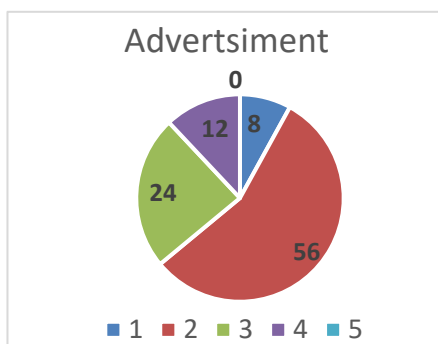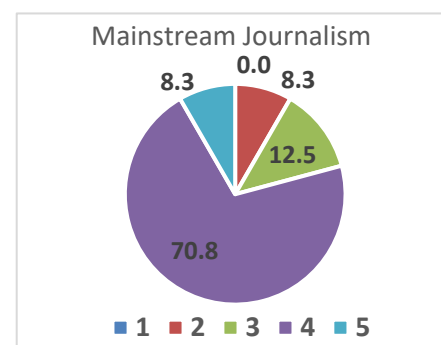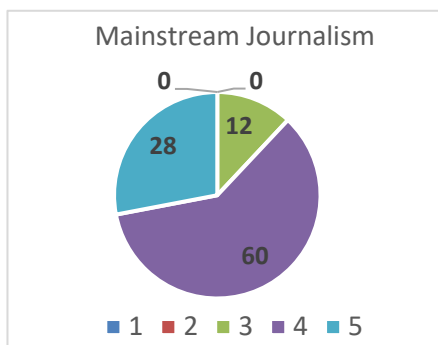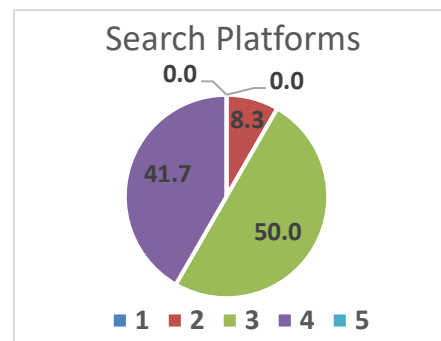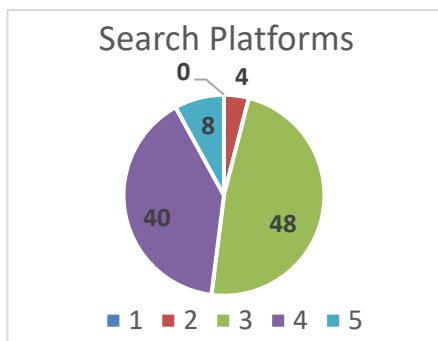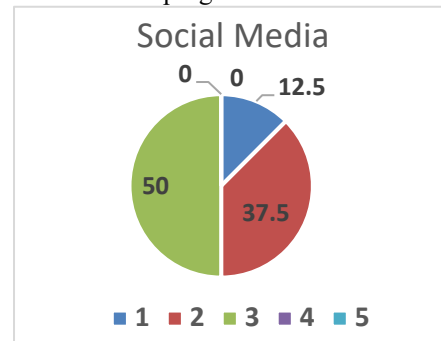
4. How would you best describe the expression "fake news"? Biased Journalism (1); Fabricated Stories (2); Deliberate misinformation (3); Pol/ Manipulated stories (4); Sensationalist journalism (5)

Before the ML programme
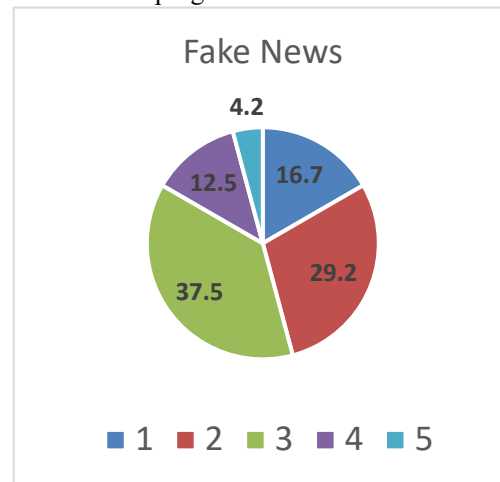
Fake News

After the ML programme

Fake News

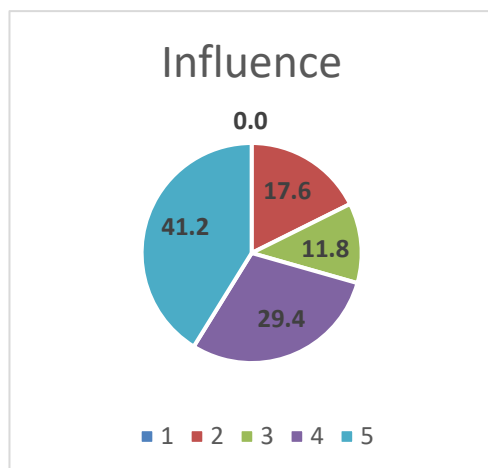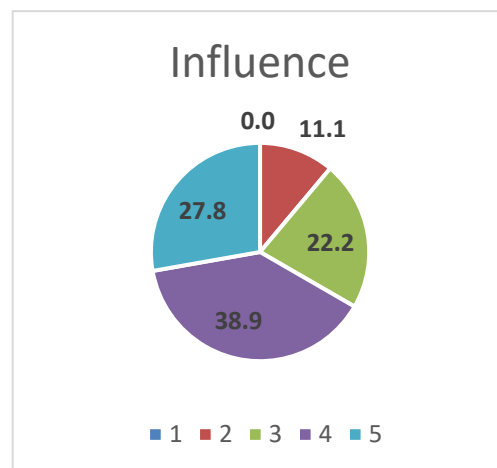**5. How would you rate the influence that the mass media (TV, cinema, radio, music etc.) have on people's behaviour and attitudes in the society where you live (from no or insignificant influence [1] to very strong influence [5]):**
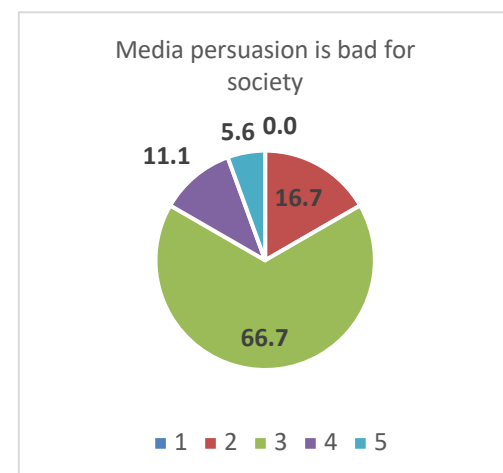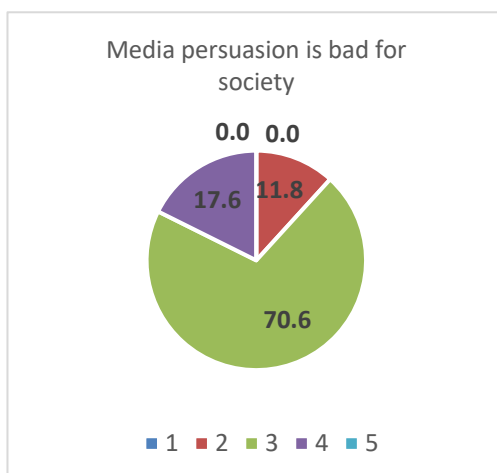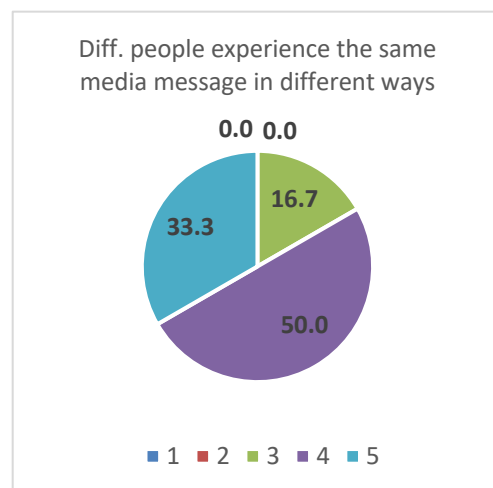
Before the ML programme

Influence

After the ML programme

Influence

6. Choose from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), or 5 (strongly agree), and explain your choice in a few words.

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

all media messages are constructed

0 4
32 28
36

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

All media messages are constructed

4.3 0.0
26.1 26.1
43.5

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

4 4
8
4
80

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

0.0 4.3
4.3
21.7
69.6

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Media persuasion is bad for society

4
8 4
36
48

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Media persuasion is bad for society

0.0 4.3
13.0
34.8 47.8

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

M3

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

You always know who the owner of a message is

40
44
4
4
8

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

You always know who the owner of a message is

4.3 0.0
8.7
39.1
47.8

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable

4
8
24
28
36

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable

0.0
8.7
21.7
21.7
47.8

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

M4

School B

3. On a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

Social Media

Before: 0.0, 5.6, 16.7, 66.7, 11.1 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

After: 0.0, 5.6, 33.3, 50.0, 11.1 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Search Platforms

Before: 0.0, 27.8, 22.2, 38.9, 11.1 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

After: 0.0, 5.6, 44.4, 38.9, 11.1 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Mainstream Journalism

Before: 16.7, 11.1, 5.6, 44.4, 22.2 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

After: 5.6, 11.1, 27.8, 33.3, 22.2 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Advertisement

Before: 16.7, 50.0, 5.6, 16.7, 11.1 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

After: 22.2, 38.9, 22.2, 11.1, 5.6 (legend: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

M5

4. How would you best describe the expression "fake news"?

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

Fake News

16.7 | 22.2
5.6
16.7
38.9

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Fake News

11.1 | 27.8
16.7
22.2 | 22.2

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

5. How would you rate the influence that the mass media (TV, cinema, radio, music etc.) have on people's behaviour and attitudes in the society where you live (from no or insignificant influence [1] to very strong influence [5]):

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

Influence

0.0
17.6
41.2
11.8
29.4

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Influence

0.0   11.1
27.8
22.2
38.9

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

6. Choose from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), or 5 (strongly agree), and explain your choice in a few words.
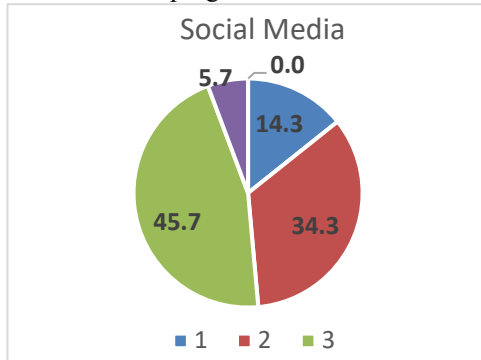
Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

all media mess. are constructed

all media mess. are constructed

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

Media persuasion is bad for society

Media persuasion is bad for society

M7

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

You always know who the owner of a messege is

0.0 0.0
5.9
41.2
52.9

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

You always know who the owner of a messege is

0.0
11.1
11.1
33.3
44.4

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the <u>news industry</u>, manipulation of information is never acceptable

6.3 6.3
12.5
37.5
37.5

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the <u>news industry</u>, manipulation of information is never acceptable

17.6
23.5
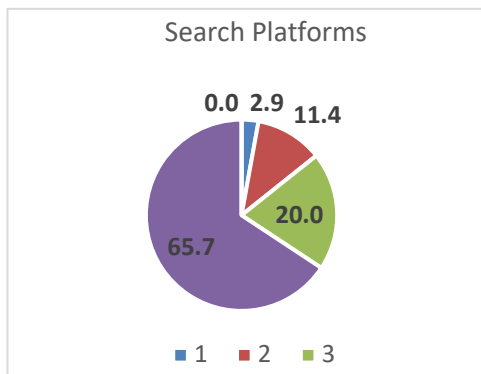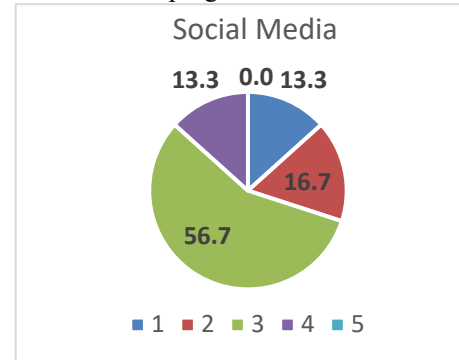5.9
17.6
35.3

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

School C

3. On a scale from 1 (don't trust) to 5 (completely trust), how would you rate how much you trust the information you find on:
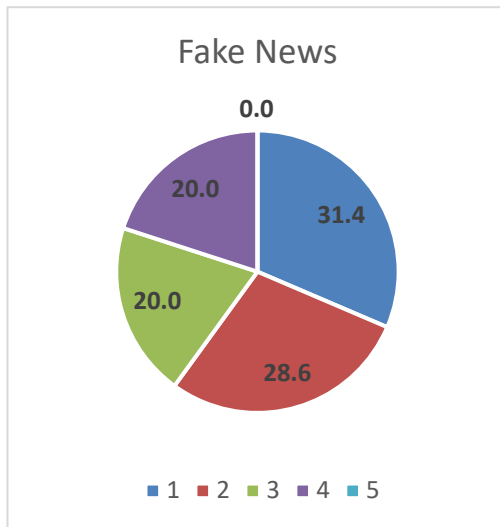
Before the ML programme

Social Media

5.7 0.0
14.3
45.7 34.3

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

Search Platforms

0.0 2.9 11.4
20.0
65.7

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

Mainstream Journalism

2.9 11.4
31.4 17.1
37.1

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

Advertisement

8.6 2.9 11.4
34.3 42.9

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

After the ML programme

Social Media

13.3 0.0 13.3
16.7
56.7

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Search Platforms

10.0 3.3 0.0
40.0 46.7

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Mainstream Journalism

6.7
10.0
16.7
50.0 16.7

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Advertisement

0.0
6.7
20.0
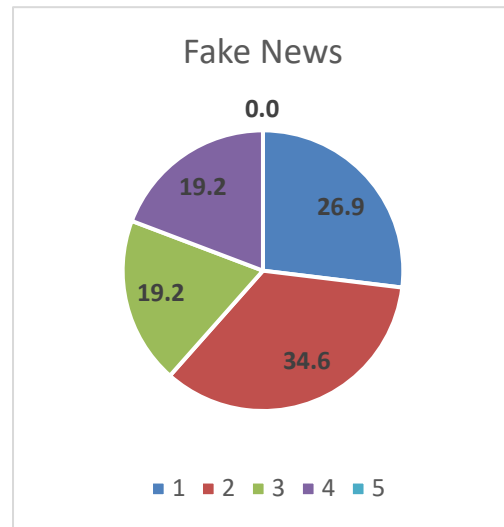40.0
33.3

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5
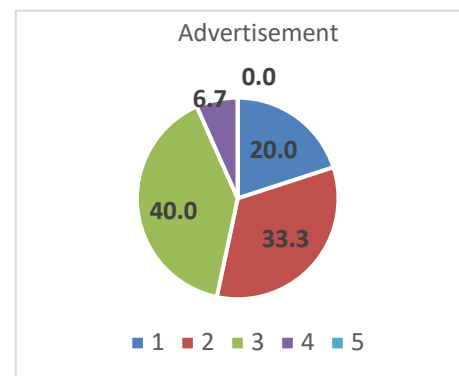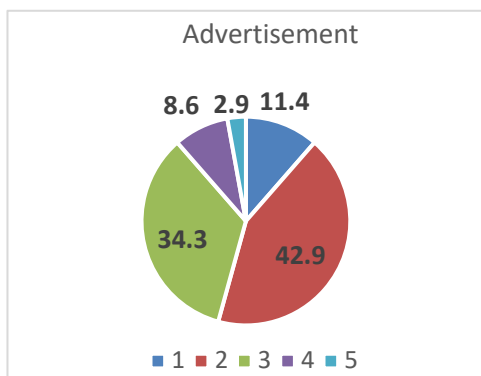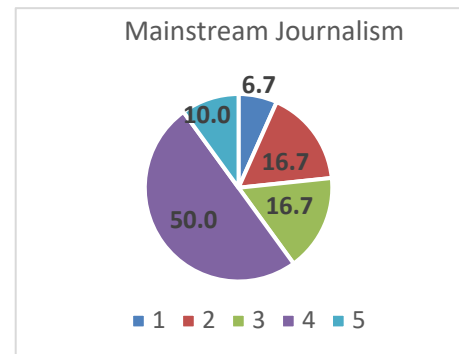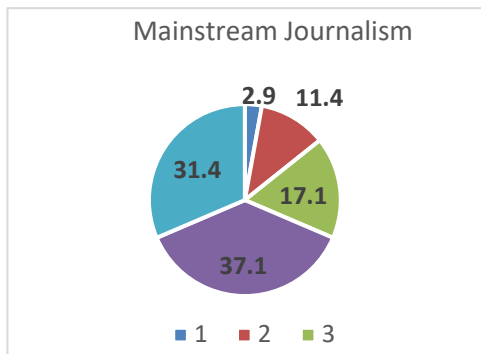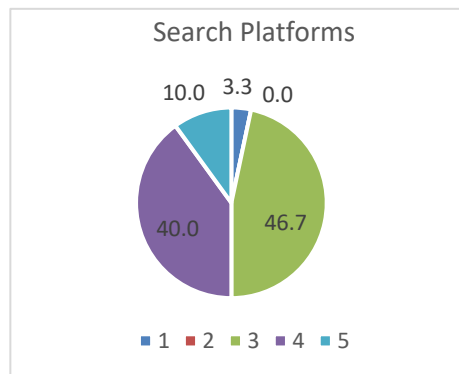
4. How would you best describe the expression "fake news"?
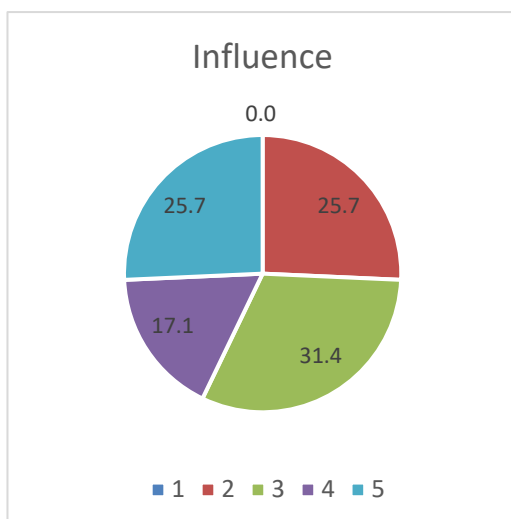
Before the ML programme
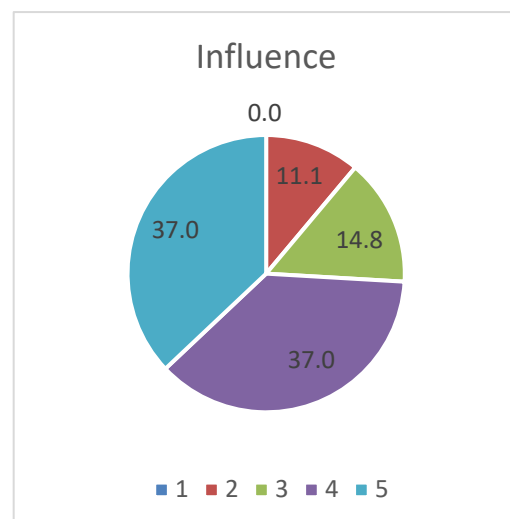
After the ML programme

5. How would you rate the influence that the mass media (TV, cinema, radio, music etc.) have on people's behaviour and attitudes in the society where you live (from no or insignificant influence [1] to very strong influence [5]):
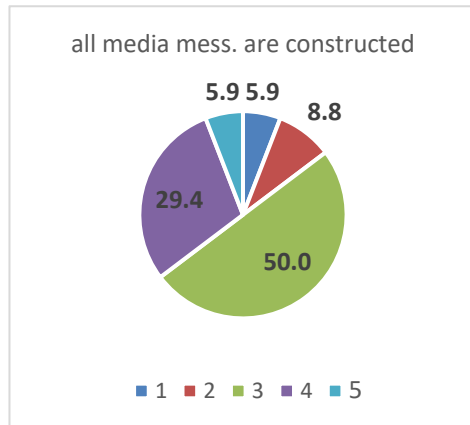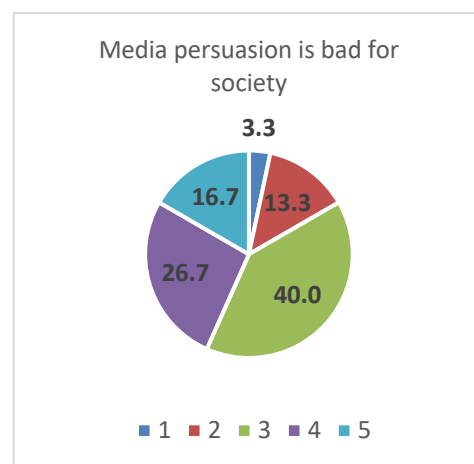
Before the ML programme
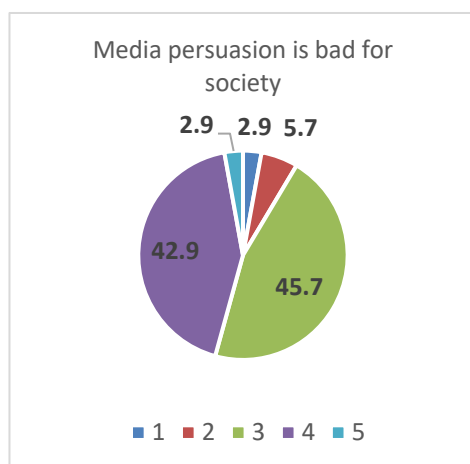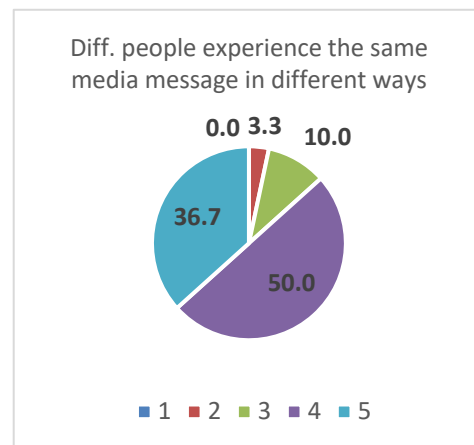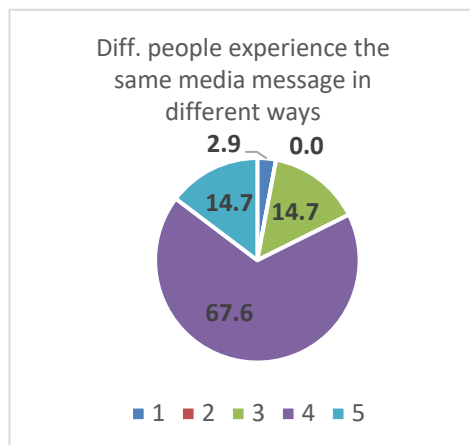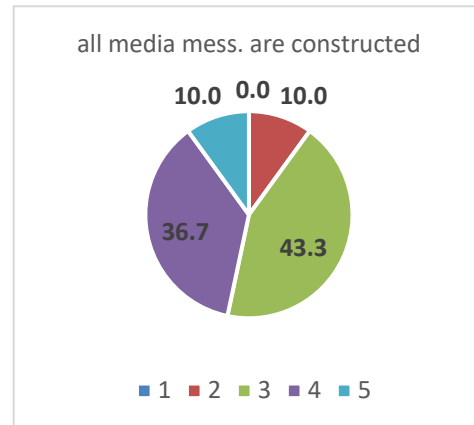
After the ML programme

M10

6. Choose from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), or 5 (strongly agree), and explain your choice in a few words.

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

all media mess. are constructed

5.9 5.9
8.8
29.4
50.0
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

all media mess. are constructed

10.0 0.0 10.0
36.7
43.3
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

2.9 0.0
14.7 14.7
67.6
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Diff. people experience the same media message in different ways

0.0 3.3 10.0
36.7
50.0
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Media persuasion is bad for society

2.9 2.9 5.7
42.9
45.7
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

Media persuasion is bad for society

3.3
16.7
26.7
13.3
40.0
■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

M11

Before the ML programme

After the ML programme

You always know who the owner of a message is

11.8
23.5
8.8
17.6
38.2

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

You always know who the owner of a message is

0.0
10.0
30.0
16.7
43.3

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable

2.9
32.4
17.6
23.5
23.5

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

In the news industry, manipulation of information is never acceptable

10.0
23.3
30.0
26.7
10.0

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5

M12