

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) & Educommunication: Sharing tasks!

Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI) y Educomunicación: ¡Compartiendo tareas!

Alfabetização midiática e informativa (AMI) e educomunicação: compartilhando tarefas!

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Abstract: This article examines the relationship between Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and Educommunication, two approaches that share the goal of fostering critical media interaction skills but differ in their methodologies. While MIL focuses on critical media analysis, Educommunication has a political commitment to social transformation and the creation of democratic communication ecosystems. Through a comparative analysis, the article highlights the convergences and divergences between both practices and their implementation in Brazil, especially in light of the Brazilian Media Education Strategy.

Keywords:

Media Literacy, Educommunication, Media, Brazil, Social Transformation

Resumen: Este artículo examina la relación entre la Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI) y la Educomunicación, dos enfoques que comparten el objetivo de fomentar habilidades críticas para interactuar con los medios, pero que difieren en sus metodologías. Mientras que la AMI se enfoca en el análisis crítico de los medios, la Educomunicación tiene un compromiso político con la transformación social y la creación de

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ecosistemas comunicativos democráticos. A través de un análisis comparativo, el artículo destaca las convergencias y divergencias entre ambas prácticas y su implementación en Brasil, especialmente a la luz de la Estrategia Brasileña de Educación en Medios.

Palabras clave:

Alfabetización Mediática, Educomunicación, Medios, Brasil, Transformación social

Resumo: Este artigo examina a relação entre Alfabetização Midiática e Informacional (AMI) e Educomunicação, dois enfoques que compartilham o objetivo de promover habilidades críticas para a interação com os meios de comunicação, mas que diferem em suas metodologias. Enquanto a AMI se concentra na análise crítica dos meios, a Educomunicação tem um compromisso político com a transformação social e a criação de ecossistemas comunicativos democráticos. Através de uma análise comparativa, o artigo destaca as convergências e divergências entre ambas as práticas e sua implementação no Brasil, especialmente à luz da Estratégia Brasileira de Educação Midiática.

Palavras-chave:

Alfabetização Midiática, Educomunicação, Mídia, Brasil, Transformação social

1. What are we talking about?

Looking at a possible comparative dialogue on specificities and scopes of Media and Information Literacy and Educommunication processes, this paper starts taking a glance on the usual definitions attributed to each one of these concepts.

According to UNESCO, the **Media and Information Literacy (MIL)** is presented as:

A set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies and practices that allow effective access, analysis, critical evaluation, interpretation, use, creation and dissemination of information and media products using existing means and tools in a creative, legal and ethical manner. It is an integral part of the so-called “21st century skills” or “transversal competencies”. (Grizzle et al., 2013)³

³ UNESCO, at the beginning of its guidelines on Media and Information Literacy: Policy and Strategy (2013), refuses to give the term MIL a specific definition, choosing instead to present it as a “composite concept” (p. 15). In chapter two of the same guidelines UNESCO adds: “Within a broader framework, MIL policies and strategies should demonstrate the convergence of several interrelated policies that address issues of information, communication, technologies, media in the process of achieving freedom of expression, quality education,

The term **Educommunication** – once identified as an emerging practice in Latin America – began to be defined in the late 1990s as:

Guiding paradigm for actions inherent to the planning, implementation and evaluation of processes and products that aim to create and strengthen open and democratic communicative ecosystems, through the full exercise of freedom of expression, promoting human coexistence and social transformation. (Soares, 1999)⁴

From the statements, it is possible to observe the pursuit of common goals, namely: obtaining knowledge on how to analyze and produce media and encouraging the ethical use of communication resources. However, the terms used in the definitions point to two different methodologies: Media Education, which prioritizes the acquisition of skills for critical evaluation, and Educommunication, which emphasizes the political commitment present in the concepts of “democratic communicative ecosystems” aimed at “promoting human coexistence and social transformation”.⁵

2. About MIL and Educommunication relationship

The relationship between AMI and Educommunication has been the focus of debates when experts seek theoretical/methodological references to facilitate the search for answers to the incidences of social communication and the new information technologies in the people's everyday lives. This is what happened in October 2023, when the Department of Digital Rights and Media Education, linked to the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic (SECOM), launched the Brazilian Media Education Strategy.

The federal government officially informed that Educommunication was being called to contribute to the Media Education policy, taking into account that its theory and practice add to SECOM's goals in the sense of guiding, politically and pedagogically, media education actions from the focus on decolonizing thinking, based on the possibilities of intervention, contestation and (r)existence, in the fight to guarantee the right to communication for

development, citizenship, cultural diversity, memory and pluralism that define contemporary human conditions around the world” (p. 68). Finally, on page 180, the book shows a series of descriptions attributed internationally to the concept.

⁴ In 2021, the Brazilian Academy of Letters decided to include the neologism “Educommunication” in the lexicon of the Portuguese language, allowing the use of the term in public policy programs. Information available at: <https://bit.ly/3z45sfl>

⁵ Based on these clarifications, Educommunication can be understood as an area of knowledge and practice aimed at meeting the major political goals proposed by the UNESCO perspective. On the other hand, the practice at the base of society has demonstrated how useful UNESCO's guidelines in the field of media and information literacy have been for educommunicational proposals.

everyone, with special attention to historically marginalized groups (SECOM, 2023, p. 10-11).

To understand the meaning attributed to the term by SECOM experts, we believe it is interesting returning to the moment the educommunicative approach was the theme of one of the papers presented in the program of Seminar on Media, Information and Literacy, held in May 2018, at the Coimbra University, Portugal (Soares, 2020).

The paper addressed the basic differences that specified the two currents: On the one hand, the acquisition of skills for an adequate coexistence of citizens with the spectacle's and information's society (*Media Education*); and, on the other hand, a nascent area of interface, proposing, essentially, an intervention in reality, from the overcoming of the functionalism of the communication processes, in favor of the free exercise of speech (*Educommunication*), a practice recognized by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1948.⁶

The document further highlighted that, as a simple, solid and immediately understandable reference, Educommunication had already been introduced into the formal educational system of Latin America, through projects that aimed to simultaneously promote media analysis and support dialogical communication practices in formal basic education (Soares, 2018). Examples of this success can be found in the education system of cities like São Paulo.⁷

Furthermore, according to the article, another space that has benefited from educommunication has been the environmental one, in different parts of Brazil,⁸ uniting young people from indigenous communities and rural workers who live on the banks of the country's main rivers in the same activism. In similar circumstances, the paper also recalls that WWF-Brazil, an international NGO committed to nature conservation, had already opted for Educommunication in its provision of services in defense of the environment in Brazil.⁹

Finally, the document concluded that research on Educommunication in Brazil, from

⁶ Article 19 of the UDHR states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Information available at: <https://bit.ly/3XhKxE0>

⁷ For information on educommunication practices in São Paulo, look at: <https://bit.ly/3X2Ky93>

⁸ It was in 2005 that the Ministry of the Environment adopted the concept of Educommunication. One of the first applications occurred in the implementation of Children and Youth Environmental Conferences, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, involving 12 million children and young people from all over the country. In 2008, the guide “Socio-environmental Educommunication: Popular Communication and Education” was published. More information is available at: <https://bit.ly/46YLoba>

⁹ “Educommunication action for WWF-Brazil projects”, available at: <https://bit.ly/471mJTU>

the beginning of the new millennium, contributed, over the subsequent 20 years¹⁰, to a rapid dissemination of its practice, with the adherence to its references by a growing number of educators, communicators and managers of social programs, consolidating itself, in some places, as public policy.¹¹

3. The multiple modalities of Media Education

The practice of Media Education associated with Educommunication was one of the thematic objects of the 5th Brazilian Meeting of Educommunication, held in São Paulo, between September 19 and 21, 2013, when the modalities through which training practices for critical reception of media messages has proliferated in Latin America were put up for debate (Soares, 2014a).¹²

One of the issues in focus was the lack of a single model for promoting Media and Information Literacy. In fact, the initial implemented programs were affiliated to different protocols, understood as sets of concepts and standards that guaranteed the identity, coherence and public acceptance of media education practices. In this case, the aspects identified with the themes inherent to “Morals” and “Culture” initially gained prominence, to which, at the turn of the millennium, a protocol identified with a profound sense of Citizenship would be added.

The moral perspective was supported by groups of Catholic and Evangelical religious leaders from the 1930s onwards, who were concerned about the harmful effects of cinema on their viewers.¹³ This perspective was reinforced in the 1960s by the view disseminated by North American researchers such as Laswell and Schramm (1964), for whom the effectiveness of the communication process was guaranteed by the “theory of effects”, that is, by the prevalence of the sender over the receiver, in all media. UNESCO mobilized its efforts against this reductionist and defensive view, believing in the possibility of expanding and strengthening the “media skills” of the new generations. To this end, it disseminated the manual Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers (Wilson et al., 2011). With

¹⁰ According to the Ministry of Education, a total of 511 master's and doctoral theses on educommunicative theory and practice were produced in Brazil between 2000 and 2024, involving postgraduate centers from 133 higher education institutions across the country. <https://bit.ly/4e9OLi5>

¹¹ The topic was addressed by the II International Congress on Communication and Education, held in São Paulo, in 2018, which resulted in the e-book entitled: “Trajectories of Educommunication in public policies” (Soares & Viana, 2021).

¹² The theme was also included in a book published in the same year by the Ministry of Justice, reinforcing its program on Media Education (Soares, 2014b).

¹³ In 1936, the Vatican produced a document, the encyclical *Vigilanti Cura*, which dealt with cinema. In its introduction, Pope Pius XI praised the “Legion of Decency,” a movement launched by the bishops of the United States against what they considered “bad films.” <https://bit.ly/4cNIUhq>

this measure, the Cultural Aspect of Media Education was definitively established, involving media educators from countries such as England, France, Spain, Portugal, Canada, Australia and the United States.

With the arrival of the new millennium, the cultural perspective has taken on new contours, linked to the program called *Media Literacy Education*, instituted by the Media Education Lab at Rhode Island University (USA). As a justification, its promoters began to adopt what they defined as an *Expanded View* of the traditional MIL version (Hobbs & RobbGrieco, 2013). Such new perspective of Media Education is linked to communication theories and cultural studies, as well as to approaches aimed at understanding the power, techniques, contexts and effects of the media industries, their texts, audiences and users. This is exactly the perspective encouraged by UNESCO in its book *Media and information literacy: policy and strategy guidelines*, published in the same year, 2013.

The *expanded aspect* of Media Education is linked to communication theories and cultural studies, as well as to approaches aimed at understanding the power, techniques, contexts and effects of the media industries, their texts, audiences and users. It is also well aligned with approaches aimed at educational reforms. It observes and analyzes issues of access to technology and points to the skills necessary for student engagement and motivation, along the lines of authors such as John Dewey (on learning theories), Lev Vygotsky (on social learning) and Paulo Freire (on education as a communicative action).

Regarding Brazil, recent research has concluded that, although the country has made progress, it is still, in general, out of step with international concepts of critical education for the media (Sene, 2021). Regarding these advances, it is important to note that they occurred, at local levels, due to the mobilization of institutions such as MULTIRIO – Municipal Multimedia Company, maintained by the Department of Education of the city of Rio de Janeiro¹⁴. More recently, effective and coordinated action has been observed by organizations such as the TV station Canal Futura (*Age Media* program)¹⁵ and the Palavra Aberta Institute, responsible for a training program in the area, called *Educamídia*¹⁶. As a result of such efforts, Brazil has just adopted a public policy, at the national level, focused on the subject.

¹⁴ See on the topic: <https://bit.ly/4eORXgp>. On Rio de Janeiro's media education policy, see Costa (2018).

¹⁵ *Age Media* program is available at: <https://bit.ly/4dBZa6i>

¹⁶ *Educamídia* is accessible via the link: <https://bit.ly/4dACT8F>. It is important to note, in connection with institutional efforts, a renewal of theoretical and methodological supplements in the area, as recently demonstrated in the books by Alexandre Sayad (2023, on Artificial Intelligence) and in the article by Mariana Ochs (2023, on algorithmic literacy).

This is the Brazilian Strategy for Media Education, launched on October 31, 2023, by the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Federal Government (SECOM, 2023).¹⁷

4. Brazilian public policy brings AMI and Educommunication closer together

With this document, SECOM (2023) decides to promote an approximation between the concepts analyzed in this article by stating that the Brazilian Media Education Strategy “takes as one of its conceptual references the historical field established at the interface between education and communication, which has critical participation as its central axis: Educommunication”, adding:

As a transformative social practice, educommunication joins the Strategy in the sense of guiding, politically and pedagogically, media education actions based on a focus on decolonizing thinking, based on the fight to guarantee the right to communication for all, with special attention to historically marginalized groups.

From what we have just described, AMI and Educommunication are now seen, even in official documents, as paradigms that complement each other, enabling the sharing of practices and dreams, among which the desired articulation of media educators and educommunicators appears to face a battle that civilization has ahead of it, against everything that represents the imposed silencing and the forged manipulations, resulting from the inappropriate and often criminal use of information resources.

We add to this innovative perspective that in order to win the war it is necessary to call on those who have arrived on this planet last – children and young people – so that, based on media-educational and educommunicative procedures, they may unite in a great, supportive and shared clamor for what is most important to everyone at this time: technical and cultural access to all forms and possibilities of expression, and to place them at the service of citizenship.

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¹⁷ See also: <https://bit.ly/4g22mJS>

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