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Is there a role for the news industry in improving news literacy?

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Keywords: news literacy, young people, news media, democracy

Abstract

We argue that improving news literacy demands considering news producers and their potential contributions. This is an especially relevant issue in countries where the news industry faces major sustainability challenges and does not have a tradition of leading and implementing news literacy. We present the results from an analysis of 11 semi-structured interviews with journalists, news editors and former ombudsmen. According to the results, traditional journalists consider it their responsibility to practice good journalism but not to foster news literacy. The interviewees were not at ease defining media literacy. They were aware of the role of journalism in media education but did not view it as a concern in the daily life of the newsroom.

Introduction

In this article, news literacy is considered to be an important source of guidance in daily life. The news industry regards new content and techniques as crucial tools to engage individuals in practicing citizenship and understanding the news. This view is highly relevant as it enables the news industry to perceive media literacy projects as investments in education and the development of the skills of news citizens and news consumers, especially young consumers (Patterson 2007). The question is whether the news industry itself can play an effective role in the promotion of news literacy projects. France, the United States and the United Kingdom have provided more funding for advanced media and news literacy programmes in comparison to, for instance, Portugal, as we will see.

In Portugal, two negative historical occurrences have influenced media literacy. During the first half of the 20th century, Portugal was ruled by a dictatorship that compromised democratic thought and consequently all type of literacies (Pinto, et al, 2011; Brites 2015; Pinto 2015). During the subsequent period, focused on the development of democracy, the

country faced various economic crises. The most recent one, which still affects the country, also compromised the reinforcing role of the news industry in building democracy, as some interviewees in our case study stressed.

In Portugal, training in media literacy, especially in news literacy, remains poor for both end users and professionals (e.g. teachers, librarians, educators, journalists). Media literacy is not and never has been a discipline in the official school curricula. The lack of interest in the subject among public policy-makers and authorities has contributed to its low visibility in the public domain (Pinto 2015; Brites 2015; Tomé 2016). We can say that there is a gap between the individuals and organizations that regard media literacy as highly relevant and the endemic factors that undermine interest in the subject. Looking at the media literacy panorama in Portugal, we find a history of diverse initiatives which, unfortunately, have had limited impact (Pinto, et al, 2011).

One of the oldest, pioneering initiatives is *Público na Escola/Público at School*, a news literacy initiative promoted by the reference newspaper *Público* to produce and disseminate school newspapers. School journalism initiatives, despite their limits, are among the most successful and long-lasting opportunities, and we explore them more later in the context section of this article. However, some journalists tend to resist becoming involved in news literacy projects. Journalists point to the need for media literacy projects but have difficulty describing the leading role of journalists and journalism in the process. Journalists are not aware of these opportunities, and there are no other specific spaces to foster a learning context in which the public interacts with the news and learns about the ways journalists work, their idiosyncrasies and the processes through which the final news products are made. After the Carnation Revolution (1974), that ended the dictatorship, the high school curricula, if only in the humanities, had journalism courses. Although there was no intention to create news literacy as a discipline, these courses were targeted at young students who wanted to be journalists.

Among long-term stable projects, far from the Portuguese context reality, an interesting case is the French Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Médias d'Information (CLEMI), founded more than 30 years ago to connect schools and news media. We can also highlight the US News Literacy Project aimed at young people and BBC projects in the United Kingdom. A common characteristic of these projects is that, like *Newsround* (Carter 2014), they evolved with new technology models. The newspaper is no longer solely a newspaper but a medium with numerous interrelations and connections to other platforms. This step has not been completed in Portugal, as explained in the analysis section.

Alan C. Miller, president of the News Literacy Project and a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist with the *Los Angeles Times*, contends that the news industry can take a key action by providing young people with tools that equip them to 'sort fact from fiction in the digital age'. In contrast to what happens in the Portuguese reality, Miller considers journalists important actors in news media literacy projects who know the field and relevant techniques and can improve project quality. From students' perspective, journalism courses taught by journalists have high credibility. The results of the News Literacy Project demonstrate the relevance of combining all these elements. As stressed in regards to the navigation of the social structure of journalism, laypeople are familiar with the news and its structure, and such programmes can educate them about newsroom perspectives. A Fairfax County 12th grader who participated in the News Literacy project described its outcomes: 'It was useful information that people aren't generally taught. It went in depth about how to find specific facts and how they can be manipulated'. Strengthening relationships between young people and the news industry and between project participants and journalists is important and can serve as a strategy for the industry to engage more news consumers (Bazalgette, et al, 2008). Schools can be good locations to work on news literacy, but the news industry itself can also take a leading role, as has happened in such nations as the United Kingdom, France and the United States.

Intrinsic connection of news literacy to daily democratic life

These projects can have long-term influence if we add the component of lifelong learning to the concept of a news-literate citizen. We agree with Renee Hobbs (2011) that news literacy programmes, regardless of who promotes them, must aim to build diverse critical-thinking and creative communication skills in learners (Hobbs 2011). Reading and understanding the news stimulates intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning (Hobbs 2014), and education and literacy are lifelong learning processes in which individuals and groups have certain responsibilities to achieve their own empowerment. Frau-Meigs (2008: 173) argues that 'the definition of empowerment can be added to [the] definition of education: it is a process, related to lifelong learning in different contexts, a "journey to empowerment", but that cannot morally be put on the sole responsibility of the adult or the child'.

Knowledge, particularly a certain degree of literacy and valid civic knowledge, provides a starting point for participation in society (Dahlgren 2009). Throughout the media space, journalism still plays a relevant role in connecting individuals with society, so news literacy is imbricated in citizenship literacy. For various reasons, it is difficult to participate in society if one is not an informed citizen. Journalism then has a highly democratic role:

‘The practices of journalism are central to the everyday operations of democracy, and it can be said that engagement with the news media—in some form—is a first step towards civic engagement’ (Dahlgren, 2015: 3).

Lewis (2006) suggests that informed citizenship is a news value and that it is extremely important to consider the implications of news for citizenship. Beckett (2008: 157) contends that ‘media journalism studies should be renamed media literacy’. In this view, news literacy and citizenship have an intrinsic connection. Considering young audiences in particular, Dahlgren (2015: 3) calls attention to the ‘impact of the ever-denser media environment on young people’ and shows that ‘in various parts of the world—not the least in Portugal—[there have been] launched versions of media education in an effort to help develop young people’s media literacy’. Earlier, Dewey (1968/1938) and Freire (2010/1996) stressed this intimate relationship of education, experience and daily life citizenship, which more recent research has also supported (Mihailidis 2014; Brites 2014, 2015).

Although this relationship is certainly not new, changes in news media and public media access, use and production have resulted in media fragmentation and created an even greater need to understand and modify news practices. Journalism, as the process of selecting, processing and disseminating information of public interest, is a powerful tool to promote education and community empowerment. Journalism and media literacy, thus, have an intrinsic association with citizenship literacy (Milner 2009; Moeller 2009; Mihailidis 2012; Hobbs, Geltner & Landis 2011; Brites 2010, 2014, 2015; Pereira, et al, 2014). Consequently, journalism can be a democratic model for publics, including younger citizens.

Researchers in different fields have described this relationship between journalism and democracy (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010; Mihailidis 2012; Levine 2014). According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010), news literacy consists of competence at reading the news, and certain news literacy competences are directly related to civic literacy. Mihailidis (2012) states that news literacy has the potential to connect the worlds of journalists and audiences which have grown increasingly separate. Consequently, ‘the role of the journalist in contemporary democracy is perhaps more important than ever’ (Mihailidis 2012: 15).

News literacy courses should focus on teaching not only news practices and history but also the skills to think critically about the news. There is a growing need to educate citizens about the new models of making news developed in the digital era. ‘The news literacy educational movement is premised on exploring how to best prepare journalists and citizens for lives of active and participatory citizenship in information societies’ (Mihailidis 2012: 8).

What are the best forums to implement such programmes? Hobbs (2010) argues that digital and media literacy programmes ought to be created with the intention to construct learning environments where publics can learn how to ask more critical questions, listen well, use collaborative multimedia tools and establish connections between their close environment (the school) and the wider world. News literacy, thus, falls under the umbrella of media literacy (Mihailidis, 2012; Hobbs, 2014; Ashley, et al, 2013) and takes a part of the huge environment of media literacy. Notwithstanding, we contend that paying particular attention to the expression of news media literacy is relevant due to certain issues in the vast media landscape. In this regard, one needs to take into account not only media professionals but also citizens who consume and produce news. News literacy cannot be understood fully without considering the other implied media spaces, especially in today's reconfigured media space. Even so, it should be noted that, in the present paper, news literacy and media literacy are sometimes used as synonyms as news literacy cannot be understood independent of the vast, surrounding environment of media literacy.

According to Mihailidis (2012), news literacy supports the development of new, practical ways to address the possibilities and pitfalls created by the blurring lines between journalism, citizenship and technology. Ultimately, the aim of news literacy is to equip citizens with the power to exercise their right to the free expression, to defend their access to information and to make their voices heard (Moeller, 2012). This field, however, has barely been defined and remains fragmented, especially the definition of news literacy and its relation to media literacy (Hobbs, 2010, 2014). In the era of networked journalism, 'we do not need to turn every citizen into a journalist. But in an information economy and policy, every person has a right to access. In a more connected environment people need a sophisticated set of skills to exercise that right' (Beckett, 2008: 147). Historically, the ability to read a newspaper was considered an indicator of high media literacy, but this standard has become a too simple view of the changing media and its role in civic life (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Other indicators, such as the ability to use different media in multiple ways, are more relevant (Brites, 2010, 2015).

Considering the importance of news literacy in school, as stressed, Hobbs (2010) identifies factors worth examining in the context of the relationship of the school and the wider community, including the news media. Young people who are exposed to news in the school setting read more news than those who are not. Hobbs (2010) points out that the benefits of using news in school curricula have received little attention. It should be noted that Hobbs (2010) refers to the North American context, which has seen greater investment in this specific type of news literacy programme than other countries, such as Portugal, where these topics are rarely addressed and kept far from the centre of the

educational system. An exception to this general state in Portugal is the Media Education Benchmark, which was approved in 2014 by the Portuguese Ministry of Education after public debate, includes a chapter on the contemporary context and pays attention to events in the world. This approach, however, relies on the voluntary efforts of schools and teachers. The inclusion of news literacy in school curricula, therefore, is a recurring topic in countries, such as the United States, where a debate on the importance of news literacy is on-going. However, as pointed out, in countries, such as Portugal, which have a history of intervention in media literacy (Pinto, et al, 2011), the specific topic of news literacy has been thrust outside the debate, curricula and field of news media interventions.

The Portuguese context: the news industry and news media literacy projects

The Portuguese context is relevant as the country lies in the Iberian Peninsula of Europe, which have suffered a massive, years-long economic crisis that has negatively affected the media sphere. The Portuguese situation has recently captured the attention of European media outlets, including *El País* ('El periodismo portugués, en peligro de extinción'/Portuguese journalism in danger of extinction', 2 January 2016). Low levels of newspaper readership and media literacy have long existed not only in Portugal but also other nations, especially in southern Europe (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Although these challenges might seem to be Portuguese specific, they are representative of the results of the economic crisis that has and continues to affect European countries.

In Portugal, the news media has created the ground-breaking *Público na Escola* project supported by the reference newspaper *Público* (1989–; public: students through secondary school; investment in the project has declined in recent years); Media Education Project in the Castelo Branco district, supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and the regional newspaper *Reconquista* (2007–2011; public: students through secondary school); MediaLab, supported by the national newspapers *Diário de Notícias* and *Jornal de Notícias* (public: children, young people, adults, families and students; won the World Young Reader Prize 2011/World Association of Newspapers in the category of Making News); and, most recently, the Journalism at School project by Setúbal da Rede (public: students and teachers up to secondary school; investment in the project has declined in recent years).

In addition, Portugal, like we have pointed before, has a rich tradition of the production of school news media which has to be taken into account. In some cases, this production work is considered to be part of curricular teaching and learning activities. Hobbs et al. (2011) draw attention to an incipient practice of helping young people to understand the news and feel engaged in the media. After the Carnation Revolution, school newspapers initiatives (Pinto et al. 2011) were heavily promoted, and school newspapers were published

in a freer environment than prevails today. At present, students sometimes work on school newspapers but generally consider them to be a space to deliver high-quality texts mostly produced in Portuguese classes (Brites, 2015). Schools and teachers regard the news as a useful didactic tool for other disciplines, such as Portuguese and history, instead of viewing it from the more critical perspective of journalism and its processes. These news literacy projects are closely focused on the school space and separate from journalistic environments. Most are more student- than citizen-centred, similar to other, more developed programmes in the school context (Brites 2015). This situation also prevails as the school is the site of the daily formation of young citizens, and it is easier for the news industry to find support for news media projects. Nevertheless, this situation reflects the early stage development in this area; otherwise, the projects could be focused on children and young people excluded or at risk of exclusion from school. Ultimately, the school is an important but not the sole component of society. It is also relevant to consider non-formal and informal media literacy projects outside the school environment (Brites et al. 2015).

Methodological approach

This paper is part of a larger research project aimed at more deeply understanding news audiences (young people, families and educators). This first stage of the project (2015) focused on the production dimension, following Buckingham's (2008) advice to adopt a holistic view connecting production, text and audience. The news industry was investigated to better understand how media professionals perceive the definition of news literacy, the connections between news literacy and media literacy and how the news media relate to its publics. In 2015, 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists, news editors and former news ombudsmen. Due to their expertise, the selected interviewees were considered to be good informants (Höijer 2008) for these objectives. The interviewees are or were connected with news media projects or had performed news media work with a relevant presence in Portuguese society. The sample was recruited based on these objectives and taking in consideration participants' diverse backgrounds: journalists, news editors and former news ombudsmen from various traditional and non-traditional media, radio, online, newspapers and television (naturally, some platforms are juxtaposed). The interview transcripts and their quality were analysed using NVivo software.

The literature review has a focus on Anglo-Saxon bibliography, not only because of US and UK experiences, but also because in Portugal this is still an embryonic subject in academia. The references include discussions of the role of journalism in democracy (Lewis 2006; Beckett 2008; Dahlgren 2009, 2015), especially among young people (Dahlgren

2009, 2015; Brites 2010, 2014, 2015); the objectives, position and possibilities of news media literacy (Hobbs, 2010, 2011, 2014; Mihailidis 2012; Moeller 2012); and the possibility of positive economic change for news organisations from strengthening citizens' connection with the news (Patterson 2007). Following Patterson (2007), we also take into account news literacy proposals and projects which could be effective in newsrooms, some of which have operated for several years in other countries, including France, the United States and United Kingdom. In this paper, we study what defines news literacy in the context of the news-making industry and whether the industry is aware of its role in news media education (in this case, the possibility of leading or participating in news literacy projects).

The industry and news literacy: definitions

First discussing possible definitions of news literacy, the interviewees working as journalists or new editors at the time of the interviews considered validation and accuracy to be the core standards of journalism, as well journalists' role as intermediaries between facts and people. Maintaining these core standards is, according to the interviewees, journalists' most appropriate contribution to the improvement of news literacy.

Interviewees were not sure if a different approach to news literacy, for instance, using specific programmes, would attract more consumers. From interviewees' perspective, it seems that news literacy is not an important topic of discussion, as anticipated based on the review of literature in the Portuguese setting.

Interviewees' definitions of news literacy are related to the promotion of good news production and mostly focus on the ability to understand the news and facts, decode complex ideas, identify what is most relevant, and acquire skills to make associations between different ideas: '[pause] It's the capacity to transform complex issues into simple information but with the deeper insight required by the journalistic information; it's a definition similar to the one provided by Wikipedia [smiles]' (newspaper editor).

This answer from one interviewee is very similar to other journalists' responses. They mostly offered definitions of news literacy close to the guidelines and rules of the journalism profession formulated like encyclopaedia definitions, as seen in the preceding quotation. At the time of the interviews, some interviewees had responsibilities in editing and directing newsrooms. One pointed to the preconditions of citizenship and democracy in this equation, in line with previous authors concerned with issues of citizenship (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2010; Mihailidis 2012; Levine 2014). This interviewee stated that, before thinking about issues of news literacy, one needs to consider issues of citizenship. The interviewee believed that, to understand news, one must first be aware of citizenship, and only with that knowledge can one distinguish soft news from hard news. This interviewee,

who had been a journalist for more than 20 years and worked outside Portugal, worried that political subjects are no longer stressed in school curricula and believed that doing so could lead to better news literacy contexts.

Slightly differently, ombudsmen who were former journalists, a journalist who worked closely with educational activities and a journalist who reported for a citizen news platform argued explicitly for the responsibilities of journalists and the news industry on this issue. They also pointed to the economic difficulties faced, especially in Portuguese newsrooms when compared, for instance, to news media literacy projects with huge budgets in French, US and UK newsrooms. Despite these difficulties, these interviewees cited reasons why news literacy produces better citizens more interested in the news. The interviewees pondered the situation in relation to the learning of specific competences through self-education ('the apprenticeship of specific competences by autodidact or that new readers could learn at school', former ombudsman and journalist), reflection and critical thinking ('the ability to be critical of the news', former editor of a collaborative website with a volunteer community) and critically scrutinising different news platforms ('identify the differences between several news products and to be able to understand the news conditions of production and its impact', public-service online, television and radio journalist).

Two ombudsmen talked vibrantly about news literacy before being asked and saw it as important to consider in the context of the media environments, where journalists should think more about citizens. One stated that citizens should be provided with opportunities to learn about how news is done and about its life cycle, from 'A to Z', from the event phase to publication, to understand what lies behind the public content. This former ombudsman believed that, far from only looking at news content, it is necessary to also understand the historical, social and political contexts of the news: 'the reader must understand that what he is reading involves choices'.

The discussion of what news literacy is encounters greater difficulties in the digital era, but the majority of participants did not view it as a vital or a pressing issue. This point was stressed mostly by ombudsmen; journalists were more preoccupied with changes in the profession and the need to adapt to different media platforms, instead of the changes facing consumers that make their decisions more challenging. One ombudsman, who had been a journalist for approximately 20 years and was connected with a news literacy project, contended that it is important to look at media literacy in the context of traditional media, social media and other new elements of digital society, in line with Mihailidis's (2012) advice. In the same vein, it is urgent to use these new environments to foster critical thinking in daily life (Hobbs 2010).

According to several interviewees, supporting these literacy skills entails (1) equipping people with mechanisms to use and understand the media system; (2) understanding the life of the news on social media, which undergoes changes from initial publication throughout its life cycle; (3) 'giv[ing] them tools to understand those things that even for us are complex to understand' (former ombudsman); (4) considering that 'news literacy is dependent on the paths of a news. It is not the literacy of the origin of the news but instead the origin and also the end of their path' (former ombudsman).

The industry and news literacy: roles in news media education

Interviewees did not recall having established contact with news literacy projects, except mostly for those in which they had already participated. This finding reveals a certain fragmentation and lack of visibility of what has been produced in Portugal on this issue so far, although there are few systematic programs, as seen. Interviewees stated that newsrooms could support news literacy projects in relevant ways, but they also stressed that financial and staff cutbacks the industry has suffered, especially in recent years, do not allow using money needed to make news on a daily basis to undertake these projects which are not the core business of the news media. Interviewees argued that these projects can be conducted outside the newsroom and that schools, primarily high schools, are the best environments to take on this responsibility. This view runs against the positive need for connections among journalists and participants in these projects (Bazalgette et al. 2008).

As to the possibility of a debate about news and media literacy in the Portuguese media industry, interviewees' opinions ranged, on one hand, from recognising the importance of news literacy and attempting to understand whether it is important for the media to host those projects and have access to initiatives underway to, on the other hand, believing that the news media already contribute to news education by performing their journalistic role of impartiality and accuracy.

The relationship between news literacy and a critical view of the world, as indicated in the literature review (Hobbs 2011; Mihailidis 2012), was associated by interviewees with the role of journalism and news literacy principles and definitions. A link was clearly established between critical consumption and reading of the news and a better understanding of the world. A former editor of a collaborative website run by volunteer community described the relevance of such projects and the opportunities that digital media and the Internet can offer but also stressed that technological knowledge is not enough and should be supported by critical thinking (Brites 2015; Brites et al 2014). 'This is positive so that as many people as possible can be aware if they have access to tools that allow them to convey efficient messages. For that purpose, it is necessary to go through a

process of critical learning as the most common case is that, with little media literacy, we all tend to be passive consumers' (Former editor of a collaborative website of volunteer community).

Although the national newspaper which has a more than 20-year-old news literacy project is very proud of its technological innovation and investments, it has not made similar investments in the literacy project. The newspaper ostensibly regrets this and justifies it by the lack of resources. However, the newspaper project appears incapable of using new, more accessible, less expensive technologies to improve the literacy project and make it more economically effective. As well, the newspaper is proud of its historical technological developments but, despite numerous financial difficulties and suggestions, has not abandoned the print version. The traditional elements of the business are still believed to reinforce its credibility. Factors, such as the financial crisis and lack of resources, are cited out as the causes for the investment on the news literacy project. The editor also regretted not having sufficiently brought the news literacy project into the digital world. The editor did point to relevant efforts the newspaper has made to use digital technologies to do journalism and to reinvent ways of doing journalism on digital platforms so that readers like it and have access to quality online news. 'We haven't yet managed to use the potential of the digital to make it [the news literacy project in schools] more interesting. It is not too difficult. This is one of my main frustrations in 2015; it really is. This is one of our roles' (newspaper editor).

Interviewees acknowledged that these projects also serve the aim of cleaning up a 'poor' image of journalists. The industry could benefit if these projects conveyed a positive view of journalists and journalism. The lack of in-depth knowledge, a social debate and realistic views of these projects' potential advantages also underline the gap identified between, on one hand, the will to implement these projects and realise their value and, on the other hand, the failure to consider them the responsibility of the news industry: 'I don't mean to say that the rest [news literacy programs] is not important, but this [the daily work of journalists separating facts from opinion] is at the basis', according to the national radio station deputy editor.

The public-service online journalist and two ombudsmen also stated that even journalists ought to learn more about media and news literacies in this era of new media, with its highly fragmented environment and multiple platforms. This need was reinforced by the notion that news itself sometimes reflects mistakes made by journalists, as was stated: 'The importance of literacy ... in a sense, we work for that every single day, when we raise a topic and stress that this is an opinion, not the news piece; it is an opinion about that matter. In a sense, you're thus working for that, but you're not when you open the

newspaper and see articles that are published as news pieces, and these news pieces are full of opinions, and every other word is an adjective. This confuses people!' (national radio station deputy editor).

Among the interviewees close to projects discussed in the context section, we note a positive view of these projects but of different degrees and approaches. We found some differences in the way interviewees referred to these projects, their relationship with them and the newsroom, their economic effectiveness and their relation with the community.

The longest-running project in Portugal, discussed earlier, has struggled to survive in recent years, and the newspaper, which has implemented salary cuts and staff redundancies, even so, describes it as a priority they want to maintain due to its relevance to doing good journalism: 'It is sometimes challenging, but we keep on sponsoring it for the interest that it raises. More should be done, but we can't do more due to our own limitations. But we should take into account that many of the jobs that we do in our daily life and many of the approaches that we adopt are just that, media literacy' (newspaper editor).

For other projects, we held interviews with two journalists or editors for each project and found that the interest in media literacy expressed by the person in charge also determined the investment and interest in the project. The two interviewees associated with one project run in two newspapers expressed different visions of it. One looked at it as a project completely outside the newsroom and connected exclusively with the marketing department. This interviewee had very little knowledge of the project, even when participants have contact with the newsroom: 'Sometimes they [the visitors/participants in the project] came to the newsroom, but with all the work we have, we don't talk with them. When I started in the profession, I remember that the youngest journalists used to show the newsroom to the visitors. Nowadays, it is another department' (newspaper editor).

The other interviewee emphasised the tradition of consumer visits to the newsroom and regretted that they could not do more to improve the quality of the project and relate it more to the newsroom and journalists. Despite these differences, both interviewees believed that the problem goes deeper as people buy fewer newspapers, and even after participating in these projects, young people return to homes where their parents do not have the habit of buying newspapers.

The literacy project run by the regional online newspaper is dependent on one journalist, who conceived of the idea of a news literacy project that would ground schools, young people and their parents in civic culture. After two years, though, he went abroad, and the interviewee who took charge of the project does not see the same relevance in it. Consequently, the project is in standby phase.

So far, we have noted that existing projects are focused on young people and schools, in line with journalists' view that schools should take a prominent role in the execution of news literacy projects. When asked whether media literacy projects are relevant to the media themselves, interviewees pointed to different aspects of these projects, arguing that they promote (1) better citizenship ('Ultimately, we're raising better citizens and better readers', newspaper editor); (2) better knowledge of how news processes work ('We nowadays feel that many readers ignore how a newspaper is produced I used to give that example of corruption. [They would ask us to] unveil all the corruption in Portugal! This is typical of someone who doesn't read the newspaper. This is not possible', newspaper editor); (3) tools to distinguish facts from opinion; (4) better media consumers ('The objective is to have better news consumers and readers with more knowledge and more critical skills', regional online news editor/promoter of a news literacy project); (5) the quality of school journalism; (6) interaction with schools to encourage interest in future consumers and their parents; and (7) better citizens' understanding of the nature of the news ('People expect that media give a portrait of reality, but news media can only propose a reading of reality. [There is n]othing better than to work with youngsters to promote an education of media languages', regional online news editor/promoter of a news literacy project).

Regarding the specificities that information can have in the context of young people, the interviewees agreed that they did not consider that public in their daily work (neither by producing news specifically for young people nor by using young people as sources or producers of contents). Nevertheless, the traditional-media interviewees, at some point in their journalism careers, have attempted to encourage and even implement projects targeting young people, such as a school journalism project and a proposal to create a radio station aimed at a young population and broadcasting contents produced by young people. However, all the active journalists and the ombudsmen stated that they did not think specifically about young people when they were doing their jobs: 'No [we don't have a particular concern about young people.] Our target is increasingly established at 35–55s; we have had only a few experiences to try and attract a bigger female audience!' (national radio station deputy editor).

We highlight two points. One, there is a certain ambivalence between stating that projects should be aimed specifically at young people and, at the same time, not viewing them as actors in these processes and not considering them when running a newsroom. Second, some professionals called attention to the need to also consider adults and families in an integrated news literacy education process.

Final remarks

In the global context of various financial crises, declining numbers of (paying) consumers and constant, on-going technological changes that questioning the role and the effectiveness of the skills of the news media, it is important to look at the process of news literacy education and to understand the possible relevance of news literacy and how it can be promoted. Almost all the interviewees who were active journalists experienced some degree of difficulty in defining news literacy and thinking about different questions related to the topic. They recognise the relevance of projects designed especially for certain publics which can expand their knowledge and foster a more positive view of journalists. They see this type of project as relevant—but not relevant enough to increase profits. This view, along with budget limitations, leads to news literacy projects being treated as secondary priorities. They believe that, if journalists do their job well and verify accurate facts, this is sufficient—or at least highly relevant—to promote news literacy. Especially in periods of crisis, this view justifies strategic choices.

However, they pointed different positive aspects of education on news literacy. Such as to promote better citizenship, better knowledge of how news processes work, tools to distinguish facts from opinion, better media, the quality of school journalism, interaction with schools to encourage interest in future consumers and their parents and, at last, better understanding of the nature of the news. They argued also that this is not a matter in which journalists or the news industry should take the lead; instead, schools should. These interviewees say that school would be considered a place to take a lead of the education and in that sense contribute to this equation by creating spaces for learning how to understand the world, the news and journalism. In this regard the strategy would be to bridge journalists with school activities and projects. These connections could be done inside school walls (for instance by promoting visits of journalists) or by promoting visits to the news media.

These preliminary results reveal aspects of this issue that could be considered in future research: 1) developing projects that reach beyond the public of young people and that address young people in the contexts of their daily lives and families; 2) organising and promoting training for journalists who wish to learn about media and news media literacy so that they can better understand which audiences do not—but could—know about news literacy and how educating them is a complex process that provides the basis for doing good journalism; and 3) investigating more deeply various publics to find forms of dialog between journalists and citizens. Connecting the roles of journalists and other actors, such as schools, public founding's opportunities and programs for families, is certainly a (good) challenge.

Footnotes

1. These interviews were part of an ongoing news literacy project, ANLite: Audiences, News and Literacy (2014–): SFRH/BPD/92204/2013, funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (see <http://anlitemedial.com>).
2. The News Literacy Project, <http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/about-us/partner-news-organizations> (accessed 10 April 2015). ‘The News Literacy Project (NLP) is a (...) national educational program that teaches students in middle school and high school how to know what to believe in the digital age. It does so by creating original lessons and working with educators and seasoned journalists to deliver them in classroom, after-school and digital programs’ (<http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/about-us/mission-and-rationale>) (accessed 10 April 2015).
3. BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/o/>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround> (accessed 10 April 2015).
4. The Washington Post, ‘Schools demanding news literacy lessons to teach students how to find fact amid fiction’, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/schools-demanding-news-literacy-lessons-to-teach-students-how-to-find-fact-amid-fiction/2013/04/15/e67b9c26-963d-11e2-9e23-09dce87f75a1_story.html (accessed 15 April 2015).
5. The News Literacy Project, http://thenewsliteracyproject.org/sites/default/files/NLP_2013-2014_Key_Assessment_Findings.pdf (accessed 15 April 2015).
6. The News Literacy Project, http://thenewsliteracyproject.org/sites/default/files/NLP_2013-2014_Key_Assessment_Findings.pdf (accessed 15 April 2015).
7. The accumulation of digital capital and techno-capital is relevant to preventing (mediated) social exclusion (Brites 2010; Rojas et al. 2011). Jesús Martín-Barbero (2003/1987) notes that a strategic challenge in the information society is to consider its relationship with social exclusion. Gradations of exclusion are sometimes considered less when thinking about literacy skills, abilities and contexts.

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