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A Brief History of Media Education in Chile

Pablo Andrada and Cristian Cabalin

Introduction

This chapter offers a brief historical review of media education in Chile, highlighting the main milestones occurring over the past 50 years. The analysis identifies five main periods, giving an account of both epistemological and historical moments and paying special attention to a Chilean approach called *active reception*. It concludes with an evaluation of the current status of media education in Chile.

Chile is a country with high levels of media penetration, especially in regard to television and the internet, but this has not been reflected in the official curriculum. With the ubiquitous adoption of computing and mobile telephony, there have been a series of public policies designed to provide computer and internet connectivity within schools in order to reduce access gaps to information technology. However laudable their intentions, these efforts have largely resulted in the development of a reduced version of media education focused on the use of digital technology without an overall conception of media as a subject in and of itself.

The Era of Freire: His Seminal Role in Edu-communication

It was the miracle of a live sportscast and the mass appeal of the 1962 broadcast of the FIFA World Cup that heralded the beginnings of television in Chile. At the time, there were only three university television channels, each based on a commercial broadcast model. More significant to the growth of media education in Chile was the arrival of Paulo Freire in 1964, under whose influence Chilean media education began to take root. Based on his work in adult literacy, Freire wrote his seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Chile (Freire 2005); the first edition was published in 1968. Before living in Chile, Freire had been arrested twice by the right-wing Brazilian dictatorship in response to his revolutionary approach to education. He came to Chile with the purpose of implementing his educational philosophies free from governmental interference. The central thesis of his most important work is that education is a practice of freedom, which entails the liberation of the subject through a process of conscientization, making conscious the structures of power and enabling the subject to begin to imagine what may lie beyond them. Freire's concept of conscientization suggests that the subject is socially constructed and can only be developed through critical consciousness. For Freire, only the critical subject may become a social actor, able to overcome their oppressed condition and, therefore, to liberate themselves. Due to the cultural conditions in Chile in the 1960s, subject to American imperialism advocated through their cultural industries, the process of everyday conscientization required that social actors could engage in a critical reading of American mass media monoculture. As such, Freire's liberational ideas deeply penetrated both thinking and research in Chilean educommunication. The importance of dialogue to Freirian methodology required the researcher to engage with people's everyday lives (Fuenzalida 2005). Likewise, the impetus to overcome Freire's concept of the uni-directional "banking" – or transactional – approach to education elevated audiences to the level of subjects worthy of being listened to and studied.

Another key contribution to the Chilean critical reading of media emerges from the iconic publication *How to Read Donald Duck* (Dorfman and Mattelart 2005), published during the period of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government (1970–1973). Communication and education were imbued with the effervescence of the period, buoyed by a sense of the possibilities of Chilean socialism. At the Quimantú Publishing House, Armand Mattelart began to develop the idea of critically analyzing Disney comics. He says, "The workers came looking for us saying: 'It's very curious, we keep printing magazines that shock us; we would be interested in understanding what is behind all this.' And we started working with them" (Mattelart 2003, p. 14). His contribution to media education was to examine the ways in which ideology and values may be transmitted via the texts and productions of the cultural industries. Mattelart worked to connect academic research with people's actual interests (Zarowsky 2010) and to interrogate the