

BODY AND MEDIA

Media Education at School

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate how the messages from media (TV, web, radio and so on) influence our choice, in term of look, diet, dietary habits and sport. In particular, the work that we present is focused on the use of Media Education to promote a new awareness in adolescence about the influence that the messages from media have on our behaviours. In this way, we can promote new competences about comprehension and production of communication both by face-to-face way and both by media. Moreover, we can promote a new and more functional image of body in adolescence.

1 INTRODUCTION

As results from many researches, the messages that we receive from media, old or new, have a big influence on the dietary habits and on choices of look and sport of subjects in developmental age. In fact, we receive every day messages, from advertising, TV or web, about low-calorie diet food versus hyper-calorie foods. In particular, the second one are called “The Big Five” and they increase the strength of persuasion of advertising on our dietary habits. They are sweets, snacks, soft drinks, fast food, cereals (Buijzen, Shuurman, Bomhof, 2007).

As Gotmarker shown (1996), the probability to become obese is 4, 6 times higher for children who watch TV for 5 hours a day than a children who watch TV for 1 hour a day.

Moreover, Halford (2004) has shown that children with obesity eat more than children not-overweight, after watching food advertisings.

On the other side, on TV, we watch a lot of spot that shown dietetic foods and techniques for weight loss:

Therefore, these messages are incongruous and so they have an influence on our behaviours and on our choices (Hastings et al, 2003).

Moreover, we receive a lot of messages about the importance of take care to our body in an aesthetic way, for example with diet, cosmetics and sport. These messages don't show good habits of take care our body, for the achievement of a good image of himself.

Above all in adolescence, it's simple to find boys and girls with body disaffection, dieting and eating disorder, dietary risk behaviour. So, on one hand, it is important to improve their knowledge about correct dietary habits and good habits of exercise and sport. On the other hand it is important to work to promote self-esteem and self-efficacy in order to improve their competences to cope anxiety related to the experience of their body and its changes in adolescence.

Media Education seems to be a good strategy to achieve these purposes: in fact Media Education promote the competences about decoding false messages from media and creating communication. In this way, Media Education allows to reflect on body and on the influence of the messages about body on their life and on their behaviors. (Yari, O'Dea, 2008).

Our research, from a comparative analysis of research already present on the ground on these issues, aims to: observe the influence that media

messages have on the construction of self and body's image; verify the effectiveness of training, focused on the analysis and production of media messages, to increase the awareness of young people about the influence that the media play in the construction of our habits, dietary or not; encouraging reflection in children and adolescent about the body and its significance, in order to prevent the assumption of dietary risk behaviours and/or eating disorders; increase the skills of young people as regards the decoding and the production of media messages, using the logics and the techniques of media industries. We can say that through the methodology of Media Education we want to achieve two main purposes: improve the communication's competences of young people both in comprehension of messages and both in production of messages, using technical tools and logics of the media industry.

2 PARTECIPANTS

The research has involved five classes of junior high school of two schools near Pavia, for a total of 107 subjects. The research was conducted by two psychologist and a nutritionist.

3 METHODOLOGY

The project is articulated in three steps: 1) Context analysis; 2) Training; 3) Post training analysis. In the Context analysis, the purpose was the analysis of the ideas about media and their messages (pleasure, use, habits of use, reliability).

In particular, the analysis was focused on messages from TV, radio and web. Moreover, the purpose was to investigate the importance that the adolescent give to their body and beauty and how they take care to their bodies (diet, sport, cosmetics, look).

The analysis is divided in two steps: 1) focus group and 2) questionnaire.

The focus group provided the psychologist the necessary information for developing a questionnaire, as a tool for evaluating the beliefs about media and body and the real habits about the use of media and body's care.

In particular, as we can find in literature (Buijzen, 2008), we want to investigate the knowledge about advertising (Bijmolt et al., 1998) and the scepticism (Obermiller e Spangeberger,

2000)

The questionnaire provided an individual profile for each subject, in which we can observe what students think about media (pleasure, scepticism, knowledge) and about the importance of body and what they do for their body and they look.

The individual profile gives an idea about the congruence or the incongruence of beliefs and habits of the students. In this way, we can observe how much subjects are influenced by media messages on their behaviours about diet, sport, look and how much they are aware of this influence.

The training is articulated in five meetings with students and teachers. These meetings are focused on: decoding of a advertising spot (slogan, jingle, message, the representation or the image of body and beauty); analysis of how we can take care to our body, for example with correct dietary habits and sport with a nutritionist; production of spot about body by using technical tools and logic of media; analysis of the psychological effects of a negative image of your body with a psychologist.

As we know from the literature, for improving the awareness about the functioning of media is important to show how they work and how we can work with them in order to product information and communication (Buckingham, 2007).

During the encounters the classrooms are divided in four groups, working with cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, 1994).

During the research the group can attend a web chat-platform, in which they can find information about body, exercise, sport. Moreover, they can chat with the experts for counselling on line. (Carling, Andersson, 2006). At the end of the project the groups can share their product (video spots) with the other classrooms.

The Post training analysis is focused on the administration of a questionnaire, that wants to evaluate the efficacy of the training to improve the awareness about media and their messages, in particular about spots and their influence on our choice about body (diet, sport, food) and look.

4 RESULTS

The research is articulated in pre and post test analysis with a questionnaire that it is administrated before and post training.

The results has shown an improvement in awareness of the experimental group about the potential influence of media messages in defining

the dietary habits and preferences of choice about look and sport. Most of those, after the training, recognizes the potential of false advertising and the logics underlying the creation of them. After the training, in particular, is increased: the knowledge about media industries, the percentage of students who are skeptical about the positive features of some products; the percentage of student that recognize the logics of advertising.

The majority of participants have also demonstrated their ability to distinguish between food habits and management of their bodies in order to promote individual well-being and, instead, those dysfunctional.

In fact, also for example, after the training is increased the percentage of students that recognize the correct dietary and sport habits.

5 CONCLUSIONS

For the future, we want to replicate this research. In particular, we think that it is important to improve the research, working with the web and its messages. In fact, from the literature, we know that, the web have a big influence on the adolescent's behaviours (for example, sites that inform us about sport, diet, eating disorder, sites pro "ana" and "mia").

It's important to analyse with adolescent the messages that we receive from web, in order to observe how these messages are reliable and based on scientific bases.

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