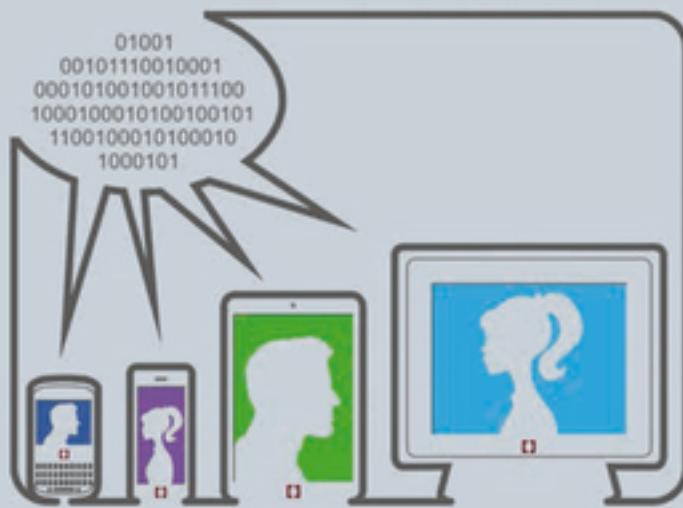Ileana Cristina Rotaru

Virtual Communication

The Impact of the New Informational and Communicational Technologies in Contemporary Educational Space

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Introduction

Virtual communication and the impact of "virtuality" in all domains of contemporary social life conditions, through the new media and the new information and communications technologies, a series of challenges and the identification of adequate answers. These answers are underpinned by the concept of *media pedagogy*, education being responsible for formulating, theorising and putting them into practice.

Based on the socio-cultural arguments present in the postmodern paradigm, we attempt to demonstrate the necessity of introducing media pedagogy, both epistemologically and praxiologically, in communications science research. Media pedagogy assumes, as study topic and scientific activity, to effectually establish new information and communications technologies (NICT) within the instructional and educational process; to mark out the teaching staff's developing and exerting media and information competency; to develop adults and young people's media literacy skills by special training programmes introduced in the school curricula; to make use of the new media as study topics and means of teaching specific to our contemporary society.

Another track of this book aims to turn the concept of "virtual communication" operational, as a specific element to contemporary cultural space with stakes and implications in all domains, including the educational one, which is under scrutiny in this analysis.

From the point of view of the undertaken methodological research, the topics dealt with referred to: marking out theories and debates on "virtuality" as a communicational space within the postmodernist framework; identifying elements specific to virtual communication; identifying the relation between the new media, communication and education; bringing about a scale of rating teaching personnel's media competency as an instrument of improving professional performance; and, consequently, advancing a long life training programme in the field of media pedagogy to improve the teaching personnel's professional activity taking into consideration the composing dimensions of media competency.

The present work aims to identify some features of the impact of the new media in the educational space, in the paradigmatic context of the contemporary theoretical debates. Among the topics dealt with, there is to be found "virtual space",

teacher and student as virtual subjects or members of the virtual community. At the same time, the concept of "virtuality" triggers interpretations and re-interpretations of *communication* within the trend of postmodernist thought. Virtual communication or the one pertaining to the cyberspace knows re-definitions that have, as nodal point, visions at least different if not antagonistic. Within this theoretical framework, there are two perspective frameworks, specific to postmodernism: the first one has its origin in the ontological criticism of Jean Baudrillard and points out dissonant elements and worries present when confronted with an exacerbated technicism and "mediated communication", emptied of meanings and humane feelings, in the works by Paulo Virilio; the second one is mostly present, as a moderate answer to the problems exposed by the first perspective, to which creative, pragmatic elements are added, necessary transformations of our contemporary reality and of humankind's evolution, in the points of view expressed by Pierre Lévy and Sherry Turkle.

The concept of virtual communication is analysed as a new form of manifestation of communication in the postmodern paradigmatic context. We present forms of virtual communication, its modalities of manifestation, the advantages and disadvantages of its usage, as well as the relationship between virtual communication and computer mediated communication (CMC). We highlight the idea that the emergence of a new form of communication (such as the virtual one) is determined by the social, informational and technological context.

In the second part of this book, we deal with the topic of the "means"; we approach the problem of the "new media", of the means of mass communication and information. From the perspective of society's development, we noticed profound mutations determined by every emergence, respectively development of the means of communication. The history of the means of communication demonstrates the existence of these processes. That is why we considered that there must be accentuated the idea according to which contemporary society (characterised by metaphors such as "cyberspace", "global village") is profoundly influenced by the emergence of the new media and the convergence of the means of communication. Consequently, in this chapter we approach aspects related to the emergence of new media, the convergence of media, their features and forms of manifestation due to the creation of the virtual space as well as of its interactive dimensions.

In the third part, we analyse the relationship between the new media and the educational space. From the theoretical perspective undertaken, of the mediated communication, we highlight the organic transformations that the educational systems witnesses in turn: changes of the perspective of the pedagogical theory

regarding the role of the teacher in the instructional-educational process, the introduction of the new media as teaching means inherent to the didactic process, the growing influence of non-formal education, of media content on the learning process and the didactic content. At the same time, the major modifications noticed at the level of the student are caused by: The transformation of the teacher's status and role (his becoming a possible and alternative source of information), the emergence of the "informational paradox" and, implicitly, of the excess of information and communication, the evolution proper of the contemporary society. The student becomes an actor in itself in the mediatic space, being caught, without the necessary competencies, between Lucien Sfez' "tautological technicism" and the impossibility of using technical devices, between the uncontrolled excess, missing the adult's orientation, and the absence due to the lack of resources or the excessive control. The orientation of the research intends to identify the school's and, implicitly, the teacher's adequate answer, as a rational modality of reducing the existing gap and as a form of efficient usage of the communicational elements (new media, communicational technologies, mediatic content, etc.).

In the next chapter, we define and characterise the concepts of "media pedagogy" and "education for communication and mass media". Moreover, the concept of "media competency" is made operational by creating a system of communicational and informational competencies specific to the teaching personnel. To this end, the Mixed Standard Rating Scale (MSRS) is elaborated to rate and assess the media competencies of the teaching personnel of the secondary education. Our research points to three correlated aspects: defining the composing elements of the media competency; creating an instrument of rating and assessing; and elaborating a long life training programme addressed to the teaching personnel to develop and exercise media competency. The scale was drawn up and applied on a sample group made up of teaching personnel from the counties of Caraş-Severin, Hunedoara and Timiş.

We considered the utility of the scale rating media competency would be demonstrated by the adequate use of the types of communicational interventions in the space of virtual education and that of the "traditional classroom"; it would determine a raise of the level of performance of the main communicational actors (students and teaching personnel).

Therefore, school would be able to correlate the answer to the necessities of the information and communications society, achieving "media literacy" essential to the student as a constant and untrained user of the mediatic space by the media competencies of the teaching personnel.

I made use of deductive reasoning to demonstrate the impact of the new information and communicational technologies on the actors of the educational process. Likewise, I proposed adjusting modalities such as research instruments (Mixed Standard Rating Scale – MSRS) and long life training programmes in the field of media pedagogy and of the education for communication and mass media. I consider that within the research, these are the answers identified against the challenges of virtuality and against the constant mediatic and informational pressure.