Editors' note : communication, education and new media

PDF erstellt am: **06.08.2024**

Lorenzo Cantoni & Peter Schulz

EDITORS' NOTE
COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND NEW MEDIA

As one of the most influential researchers in the field of semiotics and education – Augustine of Hippo – stated in his De Magistro, every act of communication is also, from a certain point of view, an act of education. According to Charles S. Peirce, we can say that a communication act is effective if it yields an habit change, that is: after the communication has taken place, involved persons are somewhat different, they have access to a (shared) slightly different world of meaning, their Weltanschauung has somehow changed.

In education, all the involved actors (stakeholders) share and negotiate explicitly the intended habit change, so as – from this perspective – we can say that educational communication is the archetype of every communication, showing its own inner nature. That is why a School of Communication can not avoid to face the educational issue, but has to meet it both from the point of view of its macro processes: how the culture (semiosphere) is built and changed through a continuous sharing of meanings among and between cultures and generations, and of its micro processes: how a given society/community/organisation shapes the paths to enter into it, and to move and grow inside it.

As Walter Ong has taught us, human communication uses many technologies of the word: from written language to press, from mass media to electronic media; technologies of the word have been very often developed, and always used in the educational field, which has provided one of the main test-beds for them.

Electronic media (are they still "new media"?) are not an exception to this rule: they offer new educational opportunities, as well as new challenges, and require fresh efforts and strategies to develop new concepts and to adapt the old ones in order to understand them in detail, and to integrate them in sound communication/education strategies. Education (and communication) are sometimes in danger to enter an endless "pendulum" movement, from welcoming new technologies and new methods (or what seems to be a new one) as the definitive solution to all the com-

munication/education problems, and to fear them as being just threats to the Communication/Education with capital letters.

Thus, the overlapping area among communication, education and their technologies is not just a fashionable area, where market and research are attracted and mesmerized; it is, on the contrary, at the very core of a research in communication sciences, the area where this journal wants to offer research contributions linking different scientific disciplines and research traditions.

Context

In 2000 started the graduate school NewMinE – New Media in Education, an activity promoted by the University of Lugano in collaboration with several Swiss Universities and other institutions, funded by the SNF, the Swiss National Science Foundation[1].

At about twenty doctoral students – coming from very different disciplinary backgrounds but focussing on the same subject of eLearning[2] – worked together, both attending residential seminars offered by the involved institutions and collaborating online.

The activities done in the framework of the NewMinE graduate school have been greatly appreciated both by members and by the various speakers who contributed to the school bringing their research and experience contribution: leading scholars and people from the industry provided elements to better understand the reality of eLearning, as well as the opportunities and the challenges (sometimes also menaces) it brings.

Building on this experience, it seemed to be wise to offer to other interested researchers some of the contributions made to the NewMinE school, as well as a short description of the research activities done by the students enrolled in this program.

Content

The issue is divided in three sections: 1) Papers, 2) Best practices & case studies and 3) PhD research in progress.

---

[1] More details can be found in the following website: www.newmine.org.
[2] There is an endless list of terms meaning the use of new information and communication media in education, we did not do any effort at all to make the contributions similar from this lexical point of view; on the contrary, we think that the wide spectrum of terms can help better understand a continuously changing reality.

In the first section, the contribution by Weinberger & Mandl is devoted to offer a clear map of the computer-mediated knowledge communication, a map not only intended to understand a complex and multifaceted territory, but also to guide sensible adoption and integration practices, having in mind the pedagogical purpose when choosing the adequate technology, and not vice-versa (as it happens, unfortunately, quite often). Schulmeister presents the issue of interactivity showing and discussing its many levels: new media are not simply interactive by definition, but their use can be placed on a continuum from low to high interactivity features. Moreover, while interactivity is usually an added value, the kind of interactivity is to be chosen – again – moving from the educational goal.

Many studies have shown that while eLearning is deeply entering the educational field, its main focus remains on technologies and teacher training; evaluation activities are not always given a relevant role, maybe because of a lack of widely accepted methodologies and/or because their being quite expensive. A comprehensive review of evaluation strategies and proposals is provided in the article by Eppler & Mickeler, who help identify the different aspects to be assessed, as well as the different purposes of an evaluation activity. Back & Bursian present the results of an analysis of eLearning implementation in different corporate settings, showing pros and cons of various strategies.

The area of eLearning is attracting researchers from many different areas and research traditions, and still needs a great effort to co-construct a common ground, upon which only a fruitful discussion and collaboration can start, avoiding misunderstandings, or just dialogues where everybody speaks but none listens… The article by Cantoni & Rega constitutes a first effort to study this issue: a quantitative research on the referenced literature in an international eLearning conference shows the lack of "fixed stars" in the field, at the same time starting a pars construens, showing a few ones or "would-be" ones.

In the second section, some relevant eLearning experiences are presented.

The use of new information and communication technologies as means to enhance teacher-learners communication in courses with a large number of students is discussed by Friedlander, while Murphy presents her experience in adopting an online platform to complement a face to face university course, and to enhance students' learning experience.

Lambolez & Perret Clermont present a project involving secondary

school teachers and students, and discuss the experience from a psycho-pedagogical point of view, stressing the fact that teachers change their roles when incorporating new information and communication technologies into their teaching practices.

Rezzonico & Lepori present first results of the EDUM – Educational Management project, a project aiming at studying how eLearning initiatives are managed and implemented at the institutional level inside the Swiss Virtual Campus initiative. A project belonging to the same Swiss Virtual Campus – SwissLing: a Swiss Network of Linguistics Courseware – is presented by Rocci & alii, discussing organizational and pedagogical issues, and briefly presenting first results of field test.

In the third section research projects by students enrolled in the NewMinE graduate School are sketched, offering a picture of the wide spectrum of research interests involved in the eLearning area.