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## **EDUCOMMUNICATION PRACTICES: HOW TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT PROCESSES FOR EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS MEDIATED BY COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

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### **Communication technologies in educational projects**

The use of communication technologies in education was a natural step when we consider the context of digital media and their adoption by society for various purposes by people of all ages, social classes and both genres and how it has led to deep changes especially in the way people relate to each other. Martin-Barbero (2005), Jenkins (2009) and Castells (2003), among others, reflect that the digital media are transforming the relationships among people, mainly the new generations who are more exposed to the use and effects of these tools in a daily basis. And the adoption of these tools by formal education put focus on the necessity of a better knowledge about the communication management for educational projects mediated by technologies.

As a matter of fact McLuhan (1996) has reflected about the importance of knowing the communication processes as that every new medium development modifies the mankind relationships and creates a new human environment. He commented about how fascinated we are with every sort of technology and that the reason for this is that the media are extensions of human body.

The process started with data processing courses for children and teenagers to develop their basic competence with first digital tools. Over the years the rapid development of communication technologies has made them increasingly collaborative and much more complex practices have emerged and are now called pedagogical-communicational practices.

The more communication technology has been embraced in the classroom, the more pedagogical practices have been debated, as resources have become increasingly collaborative and have brought in deeper reflection on the need to update pedagogical practices and to develop those competences that are critical for students' effective functioning in a highly technological society as today's. But to understand this context only from pedagogical or technical view is not enough. We must understand that we are talking about technologies which are making education possible by making specific communication processes happen.

Martin-Barbero (2005) argues that culture changes as soon as the technological mediation of communication becomes structural and is no longer instrumental and claims this is a turning point in human history as the type of technology we have today is the one to constitute the structural component for developing a true communicative ecosystem. He claims that computers enable the processing of raw data such as abstractions and symbols resulting in a new relationship between the brain and information which replaces the traditional body-machine relationship.

So, we must emphasize that we are not talking about pedagogical practices only but mainly we are talking about focusing our classroom dynamics planning mainly in the communication processes needed to reach educational objectives aimed. Classroom actions require more reliance on communication assumptions as digital tools allow integrated use of various languages within one single learning environment – be it face to face or distance education. There is today an evident need to more effectively manage this specific communication by taking great care to prevent practices from getting static and encourage teacher's and students' reflection and problem –solving (Soares, 2014).

This brave new world requires rethinking communication processes from the perspective of the new languages that are promoted by digital technologies so that classroom participants feel encouraged to (re)construct their own ways to interact with multi- or hypermedia technology and other classroom participants (Mello & Assumpção, 2012; Soares, 2014). According to Hattie (2009), unplanned use, choice and integration of digital communication tools in learning environments or not considering the specific competences that are aimed to be developed and the educational objectives aimed to be achieved may even prevent the achievement of such objectives. Therefore, communication processes must be facilitated by educators' planning and managing activity implementation in learning environments by using one or more technologies, taking into account learning objectives aimed at (Costa & Lima, 2002). Throughout these processes, educators will be responsible for mediating student-student, student-medium and student-language interactions within the learning environment, as well as for encouraging and strengthening dialogue and pluralism between all participants.

Soares (2014) adds that managing communication in learning environment tackles planning communication processes and the use of communication technologies as communicative ecosystems with interrelations of their own and upon a democratic and creative basis. The learning environment must be framed from a dialectic view between people and their reality, where dialogue is built through exchanges of individual arguments in the search for consensus. Throughout this process, all the participants stand on an equal basis – they are all issuers and receivers of interactions, at the same time.

## **Educommunication**

Considering this context, from 1997 to 1999, a group of researchers from Centre of Communications and Arts (NCE), School of Communications and Arts (ECA), University of Sao Paulo<sup>1</sup> (USP, Brazil, coordinated by PhD Ismar de Oliveira Soares, developed a study with 176 Latin American, Spanish and Portuguese specialists on educational projects mediated by communication technologies. The results had pointed to the emergence of a new field of study they had called Educommunication and which reflects a convergence between the areas of Communication and Education as well as among all areas of the humanities. Its main goal is the social transformation of people in order to prepare better participative citizens for this new technological society.

The researches about the interrelationships among people and on the identification of new pedagogical methodologies for educational practices mediated by communication technologies. It emphasizes the dialectic interaction between people and their reality, where all the agents of the process are transmitters and receivers at the same time throughout the mediation process of communication technologies (Soares, 1999).

*“Educommunication is a set of actions focused on the creation of communication ecosystems and creative education spaces, favoring both the dialogical relations between people and groups as well as creative appropriation of communication technologies along the processes of cultural production and knowledge dissemination. The new field seems to be interdiscursive, interdisciplinary and mediated by information technology”*  
(Soares, 2002, p.91).

Martin-Barbero (2002) alerts for the fact that one of our big challenges is to establish a communicative ecosystem at schools based on diversified culture experiences, the surroundings of new information and communication technologies, and still provide education as the place where you have a learning process that preserves its enchantment. For him there is no way to have real transformation of learning structure, methodologies and practices without a transformation of the current school mentality.

Previous researches have shown that this new field can be studied from the following areas of social intervention: communication management for education mediated by technologies – presence and distance education; media education; technological mediation at education; pedagogy of communication; epistemological reflection of the new field. Also educommunicative practices must be planned mandatorily considering the development of some specific competences as leadership, dialogue, autonomy, problem solution and decision making.

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<sup>1</sup> Núcleo de Comunicação e Educação, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo

Specifically about the communication management for education, between the 1920s and 1930s, Freinet (2004) built the case for communication management processes oriented towards education in learning environments lying upon what he called 'education as the expression of ideas' – all those involved in the educational process, educators and students alike, sending and receiving messages, alternatively playing the role of issuers and receives so as to develop the exchange of ideas and hence strengthen the competences that were aimed at.

However, along the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century the most widely practiced approach has been what Freire (2002) called 'banking education', in which learners were viewed as passive recipients ideas that were expected to be acquired by memorizing rather than by reflecting on them. The introduction of communication technologies not only recaps on propositions for active and collaborative learners but also makes the record of such collaborative and reflective practices (as well as of their outcomes) available at both face to face and distance education. This new set of possible applications and results has been responsible for deeper reflection upon reviewing, replacing and updating teaching and communicational practices as new media also allow checking the effectiveness of the communicational approaches embraced.

Paulo Freire (2002) claimed for emancipation through education in the early 1970s. For him, education means dialogue, that is, communication: "not knowledge transfer, but an encounter of interlocutors seeking negotiation of meanings" (Freire, 2002, p.69 – free translation). He has reflected on the emancipation of education by arguing that education is dialogue, is communication: "... it is not just knowledge transference but a meeting of interlocutors who look for the meaning of meaning" (Freire, 2002). The learner must be respected as a thinking person with previous knowledge and internal references and who is able to reflect on and discuss about a specific topic based on previous experiences and knowledge. For this author the dialogue is established only when there is an adjustment of signs and so that those involved can discuss about a particular object for the construction of new meanings.

The legitimate dialogic process happens only when the contributions among participants are real and authentic, with real intent of exchanging views and consequent joint reflection without any manipulation intention from any participant, with no room for oppressor or oppressed, just the same interaction for the joint construction of knowledge about a specific theme. The current posture of many educators must be reviewed in order for them to assume more a mediation posture than a mere transmission of content or even an oppressive posture, imposing their points of view with no room for contributions and true reflections.

Also Bohn (2008) explained that dialogue is a process of thinking together. It is a joint reflection and cooperative observation of an experience and it happens when there are meanings flows being shared between and through people, which are the glue that holds people and society together. We are talking about listen, watch, pay attention to the actual process of thought and to the order it happens. And we are focused on the perception of the difficulties of a group to really think together besides all their conflicts and incoherent thoughts.

## **The Interrelationship Communication and Education – Implementing Communication Technologies in Education**

Dealing with the dialogic texture of communication, we observe that the individual, as a social human being, interacts and is interdependent of other individuals. He or she communicates in otherness, and this individual suffers the mediation of many factors when he or she communicates, which influences the final reception of the original message once sent. There is a fragmentation of cultural *habitat* that Martin-Barbero (2002) calls “*destiempos*”<sup>2</sup> situation composed by a large cultural diversity developed along different times, in past, residual and emerging cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to ask for the ways that people get together, how they recognize each other in a context full of communication media options which offer many contents to different consumer profiles.

According to Martin-Barbero, that fragmentation: “reinforces an older and more structured social division that is the division between the ones who take over in some ways or have information to make decisions – and we know that today power is information – and the population to whom the media are addressed” (Martin-Barbero, 2002, p.45).

Back to the discussion on interrelations between Communication and Education, Communication is still reduced to a mere instrumental dimension and there is not a strategic thinking of the society’s communicational processes and their relations to education. The big challenge here is to induce the arising of a new educommunication culture that adopts the new communication and information technologies, and takes longer on planning how to merge all different narratives, writings, representations and languages to transform the perception, which means changing one’s perception, knowledge and feelings (Martin-Barbero, 2002).

Actually, the emergence of digital media has contributed to bring up new knowledge sources for everyone, meaning that school no longer plays the main role as knowledge source. There is a call to think of new educator’s job description and educational methodologies, in order to change pedagogical practices from a one-way to a two-way communication model, supported by Freire (2002) and Martin-Barbero (2005) among others, to establish meaningful relationships for learner and teacher, for teacher and learner, and among learners.

The mutual interaction and dialogue take key roles in the process of knowledge and critical thinking development. The educator ceases to be a content transmitter, and becomes a questioning developer, introducing more complex issues to his or her students. There is a huge challenge on the horizon of knowledge construction as we face a very fast exchange of information across the network, as compared to the knowledge that teachers have about technology and their ability to be up to date on this subject. That seems to cause a decrease of teacher’s power as the only holder and transmitter of a student’s knowledge. More than ever,

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<sup>2</sup> Coexistence of different political-social-cultural aspects which emerged at different moments in a society under different historical contexts.

the adoption of new technologies demands that educators learn how to dialogue with their learners, how to mediate an exchange of arguments for the critical thinking development.

The findings presented here indicate an urgent need of investing on planning of communication processes in order to organize the use of several media adopted to reach the educational goals.

Communication management consists on thinking of communication as a process in which the agent responsible for the management will mediate the relationships in a specific environment to promote dialogue and pluralism (Costa & Lima, 2009). When we talk specifically about communication management in educational spaces, we mean to work on planning and conducting achievement for programs and projects articulated in the context where the interrelation Communication / Information / Education happens, creating and implementing communicative ecosystems (Soares, 2002).

It is important to think of reviewing educator's approach, as this agent must really understand the way the media adopted can be used for educative purposes, and understand the kind of interaction they let him do with the learners, in order to intensify the educational process. First of all, educators must be taught about the importance of communication for education and about the influence of each factor that affects the mediation process, depending on the medium adopted when they are using digital media to teach. These educators must understand the new pedagogical approach, which means that they are responsible for the learner's transformation, and not only for transmitting content to this one. Educators must learn how to stimulate and encourage learners to reflect about a content compared to their previous knowledge, in order to confirm or update that knowledge, independently of their age. More than that, they must learn how to mediate these communication processes in educative environments.

As mediators they should be responsible to think of activities that stimulate a student to argue about a content previously introduced to his or her colleagues in a present or virtual classroom, focusing on positive provocations and collaboration among all participants. Both as mediators or communication managers, they must consider their practices to aim the knowledge construction process based on a consistent dialogic communication. They must know and make good usage of technologies adopted to mediate communication processes by developing strategic plans that hold a detailed description of all educational goals, as well as the respective communicational actions that must be present to reach them.

Based on Orozco-Gómez (Baccega, 2002), that specific training might cover critical and multidisciplinary aspects, including research and management planning, in order to help the communication manager to be

*“a professional able to build not just an instrumental commitment, but also a political, cultural and educative commitment to society, based on communication and culture of his/ her time” (Baccega, 2002, p.13).*

The communication manager is:

*“a professional that thinks of his/her activities as a creation of dialogic spaces, and not just as simple emission of a one-way information, found in just one source. He/she is conscious of communication role in contemporary life and this professional must work in an ethical and democratic way, supporting the rights to information, freedom of speech, and access to knowledge. And only when he/she puts his/her knowledge to the service of those principles, he/she is acting in an autonomous and independent way, making communication a space of dialogue and relationship” (Costa, 2009, p.162).*

Only then it will be possible to guarantee the correct usage of technological resources, and optimize the communication among people in a community, counting on everyone's commitment and creativity (Soares, 1999).

## **Planning and Implementing Educommunicative Dynamics in Classroom**

We want to make clear that this initiative was not produced by the media company, nor is it geared publication exclusively for teaching public, but the insertion of Educommunication theme in the Sunday page of a major Brazilian newspaper. This is the Educom.JT project, the page “Parents & Teachers” which was published on Sundays.

It was developed between 2006 and 2007 and was designed in collaboration between the NCE (ECA / USP) and Jornal da Tarde (O Estado de S.Paulo News Group) with daily circulation in and capital of the State of São Paulo.

The page built every week was a lesson plan proposing new ways of approaching knowledge with mediation of communicational processes. The methodological approach was clear: working knowledge of a transdisciplinary way with educommunication approach, favoured several languages, promoting the interaction of knowledge and proposing a dialogic practice.

Several areas of knowledge were addressed: Science, Art, Music, Theater, Physics, Chemistry, Portuguese, Geography, History, Literature, most often crossing several of these knowledge, ensuring the introduction of print media, in this case, the Jornal da Tarde in the school environment. The page consisted of three parts: background on a theme of journalistic perspective; presentation of a roadmap of educational activities designed to bring the topic to the classroom. Often this script class extended for two or more classes; organization of the additional information to facilitate teachers to research the issues.

The NCE (ECA/USP) initiative intended to disseminate the knowledge produced by public and private universities and among those involved in educational task, public school teachers, mostly in a simplified manner, establishing a bridge between academic knowledge and the school routine. The construction of the column involved a team of educommunicators, who had several functions: theme definition to be developed, direct contact with specialist teachers of knowledge area chosen, joint construction work of the class with the expert teacher. After

finishing the assembly, the class was sent to the final review of the NCE coordinator, PhD. Ismar de Oliveira Soares.

Educommunication approach is understood as a process that runs through all the dimensions of the human being and should be strongly linked to the historical moment and the everyday. Educate in this sense is not impart information and shaping behaviour but promote the creation of spaces for communication between different sectors of society, learning to live with the media (newspaper, book, television, film, video, computer, internet) and making use of them. In this sense, the role of the teacher goes beyond a knowledge diffuser. It happens to be a mediator of the reframing process of thinking, feeling, living and express yourself. It's who assists the student to tread a path between the different sections of the world of technology

NCE (ECA/USP) team made a specific review on the suggestions published and based on them they developed a step guide to plan educommunicative dynamics processes which we are listing here:

Planning previous actions: choosing converging disciplines which will be involved; defining objectives and competencies to be worked with activity; defining profile of students who will participate; description of the dynamics to be performed; definition of the communication technologies which will be used; description of teacher's mediation along the whole process.

Implementing educommunicative dynamics: division of students in small groups (4-5); presentation of the issues/topics to be addressed by each group; presentation of rubrics which will be used to evaluate the process; definition of communication technologies students will use to develop and present the projects; teaching students how to manage the communication mediated by the technologies they chose; mediation and orientation of the groups along the development of the project focusing on the dialogical and protagonist dynamics among students; final presentation of the pieces; joint reflection on the results reached; self-assessment of the participating students.

The results were very interesting, and throughout the year and a half (March / 2006 October / 2007) in which it was held, the NCE (ECA/ USP) staff and Jornal da Tarde team responsible for this column received the return of many educators detailing on the implementation of lesson suggestions and results.

Finally we would like to emphasize that the basis of these educommunicative dynamics which make use of these various technologies, is reflective dialogue. And the legitimate process of dialogue only happens when participants' contributions are real and authentic, with true intention to exchange views, and, consequently, the joint reflection, without handling any participant with no room for oppressor or oppressed.



## Final Conclusions

Educommunicative practices have been adopted at public schools in Sao Paulo city now for more than 15 with interesting and rich results regarding the development of many behavioural skills. And they are not only pointing to the importance of the knowledge about the communication management for educational objectives but also showing us how this approach can make difference on the results obtained at the end of those processes.

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