

MEDIA PEDAGOGY: CHALLENGES OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FIELD IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper it is taken into discussion a new perspective regarding an interdisciplinary perspective of the social sciences between a new field of research that of media pedagogy, situated at the border of communication sciences, sociology and educational sciences. The media pedagogy is analysed in a comparative manner that of media education and of media literacy. It is argued the proper use of media pedagogy that includes not only the aspects of literacy, but also those of applied use of media. In the context of cultural and social life, most of the research studies sustain that media pedagogy concept better explains and gives answers to the actual pressure of media consume impact in our everyday life. The article is tackling the interdisciplinary dimension of the field started from different studies and researches conducted in Romania that analysed young people media practices and uses. These researches revealed emergent themes that offered solid bases for the analytical and empirical foundation of the media pedagogy field.

Keywords: new technologies of information and communication, media pedagogy, media literacy, media consume, media and everyday life.

1. THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA PEDAGOGY – FRAMING THE FIELD

The interest of the researchers in media effects and consume has been a constant subject of the social sciences. It has been increasing during the last period as the communication process supported new types of transformation due to the new technologies developed: internet and social media. The rise of the virtual communication determined thrilled analyses of the process, new perspectives of research investigations and new research fields born at the conjunction of social sciences. In an exhaustive manner, media pedagogy is such a research field: from

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communication sciences, it addresses the mass –media theories and pragmatics, from sociology, it explains the process and the social effects and from the educational sciences, it proposes the answers and the social active utility.

In other words, media pedagogy may be considered sometimes a teaching method, sometimes a citizens' initiative, sometimes a movement of public interest or a form of media analysis and criticism. Yet, it represents a necessity, a necessity that has its roots in the specificity of contemporary society to which school should respond.

The concept of *media pedagogy* contains the epistemic meaning of the pedagogical science in direct connection to the media, the new media and the new information and communication technologies as educational factors. Hence, the initial approach of the media pedagogy translates the post-modern concerns regarding the impact of the new technologies on the educational area; more specifically, it is a proof of the acknowledgement of these influences by means of the social adaptation (i.e. the school as one of the main factors of socialization), by means of permanent learning, evaluation and self-evaluation.

Media pedagogy falls under the concerns of the post-modern theory as it emphasizes the mutations with respect to the role of the education professional. Building on that, the necessity for renewal, through media competence, of the educators' skills is argued, thus redefining the information and communication ability in the context of today's society.

In its primary meaning, the term "pedagogy" refers to the science of education, namely the training activity, the instruction drawing on a certain set of principles and rules aimed at an ideal. Etymologically speaking, the term *pedagogy* is derived from the Greek *paidagogia* (*paidos* = child, *agoge* = to lead) and points to child leading and guidance, his very raising. (Cucuș, 2006: 15)

Starting from these etymological considerations, the *media pedagogy* may be viewed as the science consisting in the training, instruction, guidance and evaluation of the instructional educational process so as to study the media laws, the general and specific principles of the media communication. Media pedagogy examines the forms of media expression, the specificity of media content, the communication, information and media methodologies and techniques, the forms and means of institutional organisation, the inclusion of these means into the learning methodology along the entire instructional educational process in the spirit of media and communication education.

Rephrasing the statement of Emile Planchard (1992), which says that pedagogy "deals with what is, what should be and what is done", media pedagogy may be viewed as an interdisciplinary field, located at the border between communication and education, aiming to determine the matrices, the expression patterns and the specific values of the communication and information contemporary society. In a society heavily dominated by the communication axioms as formulated by the representatives of the Palo Alto School, particularly

the one highlighting the supremacy of communication (i.e. *Communication is inevitable or non-communication is impossible*), it is more than necessary to develop a practical, applied approach to media pedagogy. Thus, this approach points at two essential dimensions: the former refers to the media literacy process, that of media, information and communication competence training and practice for the members of the contemporary society; the latter points to the efficient integration of the new information and communication technologies into the training process, into the instructional educational activity in view of increasing the rate of personalised and creative use, based on individual needs and necessities but also to their utility in the context of lifelong learning. These two dimensions are not antithetical but complementary, thus contributing to the founding of authentic cultural media values, to the outlining and valorising of a media consumption based on a panel of accomplished functions (ranging from information and education to entertainment and leisure), to the development of some multi-varied competencies for communication, which is, in turn, improved in all its forms, harmoniously assembled (from *face-to-face* communication to computer virtual communication).

In this regard, media pedagogy also focuses on the study of teacher and student activity and behaviour (personality, learning based on necessities, skills etc.), on the study of media technologies, of the strategies, of the mass communication tools in the variety of paradigms approaching the field, of the established communication relations (i.e. interactive, transactional, processual, symbolical etc.); it also studies the overall media system, its components and the relations among them.

2. THE ELEMENTS AND PROCESSES OF RESEARCHING MEDIA PEDAGOGY FIELD

Primarily, media pedagogy focuses more on process than on content, as the aim is not to record events and morphologies of the media tools' evolution or to train skills of delivering PowerPoint presentations. The main focus is to train competencies of critical thinking with respect to the impact of the media message, irrespective of its nature, printed or electronic. This process implies a superior thinking – e.g. to learn how to identify key concepts, to make connections among several ideas, to formulate pertinent questions and adequate answers, to produce and create media messages and original products. These skills are necessary to the continuous learning within a cultural media environment and need to be included in the class, in general, not only to certain disciplines (literature, mathematics, history etc.). As Alvin Toffler put it “*The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who can learn, relearn, and unlearn. Through its very nature, the education for media literacy trains and strengthens the learning skills necessary in the 21st century.*” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003: 4)

Secondly, media pedagogy extends the “text” concept not only to what is written, but also to any form of message – verbal, visual or audio (or all the three of them) – used to generate and change ideas. The full understanding of this definition of the “text” implies not only the deconstruction – i.e. the extraction of an existing message or meaning – but also the construction – learning how to write and express opinions by using an entire range of multimedia resources. The latter is an easy task for any child growing in the digital era.

Thirdly, media pedagogy is characterised by the *inquiry* principle – namely, that of learning how to ask relevant questions regarding the perception of a seen or written media content. Such questions are targeted at: the reliability and the validation of the information sources (for instance, “is this new study on weight loss valid?”); the detection of the subliminal commercial information (for instance, “why does this car keep showing up in the background?”); the identification of the influences following the transfer of authority (for instance, “what does the fact that the favourite football player talks about a certain commercial brand mean?”).

In the context of an increased role of the new information and communication technologies, of the media in all aspects of education, the evaluation of the media becomes an underlying condition for the valorisation of the media educational potential, together with the school as the main institution with educational mission.

The evaluation of the media influence is hard to achieve, which is probably why opinions are very different. Some actors consider that the main threat is a crisis of culture, due to the excessive consumption of the mass culture (media culture) and the world is becoming a point of interdependent, strained relations, where the individual risks to get increasingly isolated and lonely. One answer to this pessimistic perspective was formulated in the Delors Report (2000) that shows that it is the duty of the educational system to “help the people seclude themselves from this media and information society that tends to lose its perspective, of the ephemeral”. Should the problem be that mass media and media culture – by means of the topic evading from the real into the imaginary of the virtual – creates addiction, and the education is emancipatory, the solution may no longer be the removal of mass media; rather, education, in all its forms and dimensions, should become “resistant”, develop a critical approach to the products of media culture and the messages of mass media, create and train in the communication society the necessary competences to turn one dimension of non-formal and informal education, for instance, into education for communication and mass media, as media pedagogy.

From the educational sciences perspective, along with media communication, there are underlined the inner transformations of the entire educational process: the changes supported regarding the professors’ role within the learning activities; introducing new media as didactic technologies and educational resources more and more actively and mandatory based; the high degree of non-formal education

influence on the learning process, of the media use and content affecting the curriculum and the classroom. On the other hand, there are major transformations observed at the student level, transformations that are caused by: teachers' changes of the statute and role within the class (his / hers becoming as an information resources, a counselor); the appearance of the "informational paradox", and consequently the information and communication excess that characterizes the contemporary society. The student becomes an independently actor of the media space, but he/she is caught without necessary competences, between the Sfez's tautological technology and the impossibility of effectively use, between uncontrolled excess (lacking of the adult and professional guidance) and total absence due to the lack of resources and devices. One possible answer is to identify the adequate types of interventions of school and education in order to rational minimize the existing gap and to efficiently use and integrate the media society pressures to education.

Several major trends have been recorded in the study of the influence of mass communication. The Frankfurt School initiated a "critical social theory", characterised by critical studies on communication, interest for cultural industries as to their power of influence and (political) socialization. The Birmingham School (or the British Cultural Studies – Dobrescu *et. al.*, 2007: 235) initiated the "cultural studies" which interpret culture (popular and media) from the viewpoint of the production and reception of cultural texts within different historical contexts. And the French theorists violently attacked any issue pertaining to technique, to the new technologies, to the virtual space, constantly pointing out their malefic mutations on the society in general.

Kellner (2001) attempts a continuation and a synthesis of the main trends aiming at "media pedagogy". He considers as rigid the distinction the representatives of the Frankfurt School make between the high culture and the common culture, suspected of ideological monolitism by Habermas. Kellner reproaches the British "cultural studies" the fact that they ignore the high culture and grant the common culture a false homogeneity. He points out that – beyond the methodological eclecticism (typical to a variety of theories) and despite some "unstable" concepts (which do not benefit from "unified contents and terminologies") – the British Cultural Studies do posses an impressive amount of results of certain investigations concerning the cultural production forms and have the merit of having recognised the importance of media culture and its involvement into the social domination process, as well as that of having identified the "domination" and "resistance" forms.

The contextual and critical character of these studies puts up for discussion the issue of power, of cultural policies and that of the need for social change; it equally demands the articulation of a critical social theory to research the way in which media and culture – the same as education – may be transformed into forces of social change.

Consequently, we consider the following as the context of media pedagogy determination: increasing the level of media consumption, irrespective of the form, but with special focus on television and virtual space (Internet, video and on-line games); developing the new information and communication technologies and invading the private space, but also the alteration of the public space (by means of e-government, e-learning, e-commerce, e-banking models etc.); abundant information flow, given by the almost instantaneous reproduction of information, due to the multiplication of the producers (especially the individual ones in the virtual space), to the ubiquitous computerisation, given the statistical gaps between the weight of media existence and physical use, of the new media and information and communication technologies (gaps between the citizens of the overdeveloped countries and those below the poverty threshold); cultural and social determinations triggered by the changes occurred at the level of the self-image of the individual, of the group and of the growing need for the *alter* (from the promotion of values regarding cultural diversity to the proliferation of the lack of control of the source, of its legitimacy).

There is a discrepancy between the overall impression as to the powerful mass media influence and the analyses of the mass media effects accomplished by the sociological research, due to the following reasons (Pop, 2001): most studies have had a narrow approach on the effects (focusing only on the “direct” effects – for instance, commercial, electoral); the studies start from the premise that people are not inclined to learn from mass media and conclude upon some “minimal effects” of mass media; there are difficulties to measure the mass media effects, as the impact of the stimuli induced by mass media is part of a combination of social stimuli, and the researchers cannot know the background of the receiver’ knowledge and attitudes.

In order to promote healthy scepticism rather than cynicism, the challenge of media pedagogy to a teacher or a parent is not that of meeting the child’s questions with the appropriate answers, but to stimulate the formulation of new ones – to guide, train, orient, stimulate and make the student discover the way to find the answer by himself. Moreover, one may say that the aim of the media literacy programs is to produce graduates employable for the labour market and ready to take on lifelong learning. (Huang, 2009)

3. EMPIRICAL ARGUMENTS FOR THE RESEARCH OF MEDIA PEDAGOGY

According to studies performed in European countries, which included a representative sample from Romania (Livingstone et al., 2010), the children aged to 16 frequently use the Internet, even more frequently than their parents, even holding a “native digital profile”. (2010: 36) Equally, although Romania ranks penultimate as far as the use of the Internet, the children most frequently use it at

home and at school. Although they are subject to various types of cybernetic aggressions, the parents do not acknowledge this fact or underestimate it, and one out of five children admit having been disturbed by something on the Internet. (2010: 51) Consequently, school should function as the main guiding and development factor of the critical thinking with children, of the selective and “aware” of media consumption.

Almost 20 years ago, monitoring polls and studies are achieved as to the influence of the media, especially the television, on the public, including children and young people, at the same time with the emergence and the development of specialised university studies – which indicates an acknowledgement of the importance of this field in Romania as well.

The monitoring of press articles dealing with issues relevant to education (achieved by the Centre Education 2000 + between January – June 2004) and the monitoring of TV appearances dealing with issues relevant to education (achieved by the Press Monitoring Agency between May – June 2004) as well as a series of studies performed at the request of the NAC (National Council of Audiovisual) lead to the following conclusions and remarks: the interest for issues relevant to the education field is minimal (on TV) and relatively sufficient (in press); the interest is more aimed at the “sensational” element in the education field (both on TV and in press); both the image of the pupil and that of the teacher are mainly negative (in both press and, especially, on TV, the teacher appears as violent, corrupted, protesting), the choice of the programs is, usually, random, without prior guidance from teachers (or parents).

A series of studies started in Romania revealed that the media influence is overwhelming, producing substantial and long-term effects (*Children’s exposure to radio and TV shows, Television tastes and passions of children, Evaluation of representation of violence in TV programmes*, 2004). Such a survey was conducted in 2005 by researchers of the Institute for Education Sciences (Bunescu, Negreanu, 2005) arguing about the possible effects of the media consumption in shaping attitudes and in the process of decision influencing (such as those of purchasing a certain product), after the use of a certain means of communication among the youth. The power of image to the detriment of the written or spoken word and the explosion of the Internet (which, for objective reasons, although less used, has a doubly declared influence compared to the exclusively audio channels) are further significant phenomena reflected in the pupils’ answers.

Recent Romanian national representative studies (Save the Children Organization: Study on children use of the internet, 2019; Velicu, Balea, Barbovschi, 2019), underlined the increasing of media consume (internet); the decreasing of the children age in internet use; and strategies on answering to the internet risks (cyberbullying, safety etc.). The themes refine the media (internet) effects on children and the relation between school (teachers, educational process, educational resources) and students. The relation is becoming fragile as the internet

and media actively used by the digital natives are overwhelming and the answer provided by the educational authorities is defensive instead of proactive. The idea of training and national educational training programs has become more powerful within the discussions on these results.

4. MEDIA LITERACY'S PERSPECTIVE – CONNECTED CONCEPTS

The related concepts of media pedagogy and media education is *media literacy* and it is one of the most subtle concepts to be defined due to its frequent use and the increasing interest of its meanings in different fields.

The issue of media influence becomes crucial in the absence of “media literacy”, of understanding the hidden means and “agendas” of media functioning, of the awareness of the specific persuasion tools. The young man needs such knowledge and skills in order that he acquires the necessary reflexivity with respect to the media message, which, due to its intrinsic nature, may exert its modelling influence on the human psychic.

The media influences, acknowledged and recognised by the students as to the decisions they make in life, uniformly cover about all “target” areas of the media discourse, particularly those of the publicity discourse, oriented towards stimulating all types of consumption, especially cosmetics and garments. Media not only has an instrumental function, serving commercial purposes – which, actually govern its very logic of existence – but also, to a significant extent, a socialization function, as it provides an offer of success models, of behaviour models (to the broadest sense), of suggestions on how to spend one’s free time, a choice of a certain professional and personal development path. The purely informative function remains somewhat behind the others, so that the phrase “information tools” as a synonym to media becomes void. Hence, the role of media as an informal educational agent is emphasized, the same as it is a behaviour shaper, a value provider and a “creator” of personal agenda, thus invading / “colonising” all areas of the social existence, from spare time to training and job, from family life to consumer behaviour, from ideas, beliefs and attitudes to clothing. All these influences, whose scope inevitably escape any investigation – have an even more violent impact in the case of children and teenagers, whose plasticity and “hunger” for identity landmarks are utmost.

Detecting this effect-triggering influence is qualitatively translated into the opinions as to what media provides, i.e. the satisfaction it offers.

By most common definition, the term *media literacy* is most often linked to the education on mass communication of secondary and high school students. Actually, with some minor exceptions, the most debated controversies and the most topical programs aimed at the teaching of new technologies refer to young people. Media literacy tends to be associated to the socializing process, introducing young

people into what predominantly falls under the adult territory, as much of the media content is produced by adults, for adults and about adults. One of the senses of the concept refers to that of media education. (Dennis, 2004: 202)

Also, the concept of *literacy* generally refers first to the ability to write and read at a competent level, and secondly to the degree of instruction and to the level of knowledge acquired in a certain field. Nevertheless, the evolution of the literacy concept, starting from a book and reaching digital media has always implied a skill, if not a mastery, in the media-assisted navigation. People generally learn to read and use books, newspapers, magazines. Later on, they adapt their visual and audio skills to understand and use radio and television grammar and architecture. For that, most of them need some technical skills, besides reading, turning a page or pushing a button. Children need to overrun their parents in point of media behaviour and consumption in order to get into the media universe.

Lately, media literacy focused on communication skills, described as the “*ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate information in a variety of forms including print and non-print messages*”. (DeBenedittis, 2003: 1) The concern for media literacy has been considered either a teaching method by the educators or a citizens’ initiative, either a public interest movement or a form of media analysis or criticism. Though, it becomes a necessity arising from the specificity of the contemporary society, to which school needs to account. The challenges identified by the school in initiating certain media literacy programs were mainly due to the lack of funding necessary to the introduction of technology and to curriculum crowding. Parents’ mentalities have also played a significant role, as, despite the increasing time children spent on using various media, they agreed this may be done also without an assisted training.

In terms of applied policies on media education, although some discrepancies and inconsistencies between the EU level (policies, regulations and strategies) and the national level (e.g. digital agenda, human rights, education etc.) are tackled, it is evidently underlined by this type of research and the social and educational reality shows a stringent need for correlations.

According to the European Commission (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media-literacy>), by *media literacy* it is understood a competency that: one can access and use media; one can understand and make critical observations on media content; one can create / produce communication in a multitude of contexts. By media it is meant: television and film, radio and recorded music, prints, internet and digital technologies. European Commission considers media literacy competence not only a fundamental competence of the young generation, but also for adults and elderly people, teachers and professionals of the media field too. The European Commission perspective underlines the practical aspect of the media competence on three dimensions: access, analyze and multiplication / producing. This definition is part of the pragmatic perspective by underlying the two most important elements: competence and literacy.

In the context of definitions, the official perspective of the Romanian educational system is very restrictive and the concepts are not explained or mentioned. (Rotaru, 2014) The general framework of competences only refers to the digital one, respectively to the use of new technologies of information and communication. One formal definition is missing.

A more thorough definition is provided by the German educational system in Cities for Children (2011): Agenda for Media Literacy. Policy Recommendations for European Cities to support Children and Young People (p. 6). There is a distinction between the two fundamental concepts: media education and media literacy. By media literacy are meant: competences, knowledge/information and critical thinking that can be spontaneously developed and trained. Media education is referring to more than critical thinking and knowledge, but to creative participation to media production. Media education is comprised within the German *Bildung* for education as training, as part of personal development, the individual as a whole accordingly with the harmonization between personal needs and the society's demands. We consider that this perspective is more proper and it tackles the essence of media education: lifelong training and an extended public.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

Media literacy, respectively media pedagogy, comprises, subsumes the use of new technologies of information and communication (NTIC). In other words, media literacy has a broader meaning, includes the information competence, which equals the ability to use NTIC. Nevertheless, information competence that of using NTIC is, in our view, the first necessary step in the training and practice of the media competence. The relation is one of subordination, similar to the one between the meaning of communication and that of information. In other words, media pedagogy concept includes both media literacy and NTIC's skills and competencies in the perspective of education.

Last but not least, one should mention the fact that the new educations stress the fundamental role of media education as the education for communication and media. The use of the preposition "for" is most convenient for emphasizing purposes, also pointing to the responsibility towards the challenges of the contemporary society. This education comprises the management of the "communication competence", more specifically the development of the personal filters in the selection and adequation of media information, the making use of these skills function of the personal interests, goals and needs and the social relating component of media communication. *The education for communication and media* is the answer, correlated through education behaviours, exercises, theories and practice to the humanistic existence (not only the technological one), to the development of the complex personality of an active member of the present "global village" connected to a global network.

The education for communication and media needs to be analysed from the perspective of the changes occurring at the cognition level. There is a shift from knowledge acquisition to knowledge processing, that education needed to be geared toward the *handling* of data rather than the accumulation of information. Thus, informal education, student's life outside school, is assigned an increasing and emergent role. Consequently, curriculum areas of the study disciplines need to be modified due to the necessity to know more than is taught by the compulsory disciplines; hence, the first step is to turn informal education into lifelong education within the context of information influences that keep coming. Students must possess applied skills, of critical thinking and analysis of the new situations and information flows, of comprehension and media and information competences.

Together with the family, the school, cultural institutions (museums, culture houses etc.) or associative bodies, media is one of the most important educational factors. Their importance is underlined by the interference of media in most aspects of social and daily life. This is even more obvious as we speak about and live in an information society, where the mass information and communication means have constantly gained momentum. The large span of these means (from the written environments – books, newspapers, magazines – to the digital ones – the computer, the Internet) require certain skills, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, some – self-defence – skills to use the contents are also needed. The purpose of these means is to influence, to attract and increase the media consumption. Not once have the outcomes of the mass communication means been declared baneful by an entire range of research. All these perspectives have, in fact, been the measure of their time, as they have coincided with the scientific developments and research linked to communication.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a growing attention towards the media literacy, more specifically for the wider field of media pedagogy, which, we consider, has been influenced by the interest and research undertaken in this particular area and which evolved from the simple literacy to a real pedagogy.

Thus, Elizabeth Thoman and Tessa Jolls (2004: 21) show how, at its beginnings, media literacy only meant students' learning about the media: how the advertisements are done and what are their effects, how to analyse the news programs. In the paper *Literacy in Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information* (1998), Kathleen Tyner, using the concept of "media education", points out that this refers more to education than to media. As she puts it, media education "*extends literacy by including writing and reading into the use of the new communication means. Learning needs the critical, independent and creative use of the information*". (1998: 196)

The field has matured due to a wider understanding of its own potential, not only as a form of literacy but also as a vehicle transforming the essence of learning into a multimedia environment at the global level.

As it is noticed in the framework program Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003), “students will spend their adult lives in a multitasking, multifaceted, technology-driven, diverse, vibrant world – and they must arrive equipped to do so”. Also from the pedagogical perspective, especially the process-oriented one, media pedagogy is no longer a discipline to be taught, but a new way of teaching, or, more, *a new way of learning*, it should develop from the basic media competence skill as stated in media literacy, to media education (for general public and a form of familiarizing media) to media pedagogy (educational resource and strategy of learning and life-long learning).

Today more than ever, learning happens anywhere and anyhow, as various, complex and uncontrolled influences occur permanently. This process gets increasingly powerful together with the one of technological and media convergence. A double convergence takes place, therefore, not only of media, but also between media and education, learning and entertainment, which point to the major features of the current learning environment. Media pedagogy becomes a field of intersection between communication, education sciences and sociology due to media impact and influence in the everyday life. The consequences of ignoring media literacy as well as of exercising media and information competency may be very serious. An inherent feature of media pedagogy is *complexity*: contemporary media system is by far more complex than it has ever been in its history, generating by far more content on different technological platforms and containing by far deeper and more powerful significations than ever. This complexity can only be properly understood and researched in an interdisciplinary manner as the sociologist can connect, network and explain the entire process.

Thus, the media pedagogy, through the media literacy, is not necessary in the future, but urgently now to ensure the future citizens the specific skills to face the requirements of a global economy and to contribute to the values of culture.

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