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# A New Direction in University. Teaching between Solidarity, Complexity and Media Education

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## **A New Direction in University. Teaching between Solidarity, Complexity and Media Education**

*Mihaela Gavrilă\**

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*Abstract:* At the time of an abundance of media offers and the reduced prestige of the institutions, teaching became strategic to maintaining and redefining the authority and professional recognition of teachers. It has therefore become advisable to activate a process of self-reflection on the part of universities on the dimensions of didactic innovation and new demands placed on university professors, starting from the reformulation of the mission of the University of the Third Millennium. Areas in need of consideration include: educating to educate (old and new trends in the mode of transmission of knowledge, considering the continuous access to the contents and the new media and cultural behaviours of the students); educating towards an interdisciplinary perspective; educating towards internationalization; educating for integration and solidarity; educating to divulge the results of scientific research, national and global problems and evolutions in terms of technology and human value; educating with and about the digital media. All these dimensions are explored in the paper, with particular attention given to the multiple dimensions of Media Literacy for university teachers with regard to overcoming physical, cultural and generational barriers between teachers and students and to up-to-date and democratize the quality university education.

*Keywords:* University Teaching, Adult Education, Teaching Innovation, Media Education

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## New missions for New University

Seen as an academy for free of scientific research, grounded in rational thought, the university institution emerged at the time of Abelard, whose name is linked to the history of higher education, in Paris and from here, freedom of research and autonomy in the spreading of knowledge was born. It was here that the free spirit and creativity, in dialogue with the civil authorities, began. The strength of this institution derived from the harmony existing between the goals of higher education on the one hand and the major societal needs on the other. These shared the mutual need to counter oppressive sovereignty and excessive bureaucratic organization. The 'philosophical' university was to be the barometer of this movement of spiritual education in the world and it created the setting for the main expressions of the civic spirit of the time: the measure against authoritarianism of any kind. However, once abstract philosophy began abandoning the search for the true nature of things, modernity and the need to take sides started the decline of the academic institution. After three centuries of intense existence, and isolated from the real world, the French university was in a state of agony by the time of the French Revolution. While avoiding innovation and hanging on to a teaching anchored in the past and struggling to maintain dogmas far removed from actuality, the university remained deaf to new currents of thought. Its ideas failed to have any impact outside its own academic walls, and changes at work in society at large failed to penetrate it. This example from the history of European higher education was not chosen by chance. It is an example of a serious oversight due to recurring causes in the evolution of the university: isolation from the social context, absolute submission in the face of institutional decision-makers, and a detachment from the problems of real life.

As early as the 80s, theoreticians, considering the errors in the history of the university, proposed some guidelines to ensure the repositioning of the university with regard to the various internal and external stakeholders. Among these guidelines, the following two may be mentioned:

- a. the development of a critical spirit in the learning process which enhances the "general culture" as a vehicle for science education, cultural and civic education. This is especially important in the era in which the university had been opened up to ever greater numbers of students (Touraine, 1980);
- b. the transformation of the University in the spirit of the democratization of access and the promotion of continuing education by putting the energies and the results of research and education at the service of the community and situations requiring urgent intervention (Carton, 1983).

For society as a whole the University should be a source of orientation for values by offering action models, cognitive, habitudinal and behavioural

styles. The proliferation of the social functions of the University - centres of teaching, research, production but also generator of moral values and behavioural patterns - has resulted in a shift from a self-referential system to one that is open, flexible, receptive to reform and innovation, as well as becoming interdisciplinary; a responsible and autonomous University practicing the principles of efficiency and administrative effectiveness, cultivating more democratic participation and articulating innovation and tradition. All of these "amendments" summarize the essential features of the need for change that the European University has experienced since the 80s and especially starting from Bologna Declaration (1999)<sup>1</sup>. "European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge" (EHEA, Bologna Declaration, 1999).

In today's world, where the imbalances and difficulties in managing complexity seem to indicate the beginning of a new phase of humanity, the University needs to adapt without betraying its traditional mission. This does not mean, however, that the University should abandon its historical functions of training and disinterested search by caving in to the fad of the day and becoming the uncritical protagonist of fashion and of a certain "standardization" of its work and its protagonists. On the contrary, we believe that the greatest contribution that the University - and only the University - can give to the development of society is that of maintaining, within the study of issues of general interest, critical thinking, the value of objectivity, and the 'passionate commitment'; in short, the habit of thinking aimed at a better understanding of being human within the framework of history. This does not however exclude creativity or the specific characteristics of the individual disciplines, including those of the hard sciences. Indeed, only within an interpretative framework based on problem awareness, doubt and the understanding of the consequences of investigation and scientific production on people, groups, and on the future of humanity, will university teaching and research acquire more relevance. Focussing on the humanistic culture does not mean abandoning the complexity of contemporary life in pursuit of various a-temporal nirvanas. The University remains strongly anchored in the present in preparation for the departure to the seas of the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Bologna Declaration of 1999, is one of the main voluntary processes at European level, as it is nowadays implemented in 48 states, which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In Italy, this reformist direction has been even further radicalized since the early years of the third millennium, at times giving the impression that the succession of laws and protocols have been used as a compass to “play it by ear”, but without any clear end goal. In other words, it is not enough to simply steer north; we need to know what and who will be waiting for us at the other end. In general, but with particular reference to the Italian situation, which is the main subject of this paper, what is apparent is a sense of approximation, which will have medium to long-term consequences; university policies have abdicated their universal vocation of contributing to the establishment and planning of the society of the future. The issue becomes even more urgent when it comes to university teaching, a kind of Cinderella of the Italian system, entrusted to a vocational calling (if any) and the good sense of the individual teachers, and only rarely stimulated and enhanced through specific updating and training programs. It is not surprising therefore, that in Italy teaching is considered little more than of residual variable in the evaluation of teachers for the purpose of career advancement. Dissatisfaction is greater in relation to the rhetoric fostered by ANVUR (Italian Governmental Agency of University Evaluation) which considers educational innovation as a key dimension of University standards, without imagining real strategies for updating and enhancing professors’ creativity and its fulfilment in the didactic experience (Morcellini, 2013; Borrelli, 2015, 2016; Viesti 2016; Morcellini, Rossi & Valentini 2017). Although late, the Italian academic community is trying to respond and rectify this issue. It is doing so with pedagogical optimism which is reflected in the naming of a television program of the Sixties: *Non è mai troppo tardi* (It is never too late).

### **Old and new knowledge for new University**

Starting from these premises, and investigating university teaching from a cross-disciplinary point of view and with particular attention to the Italian situation, the objective of this paper is to arrive at a proposal aimed at training university teachers, regardless of their specific scientific fields.

At the basis of any training course - regardless of the level and audience - several principles should be anchored in the idea of the common good and the total knowledge base that makes up the university. A few years ago, encouraged the recovery of a cross-sectional awareness of the scientific disciplines, Hessel and Morin reflected on the true essence of teaching at all levels, with the aim of maintaining balance and harmony in society.

“It is essential, yes, to teach humanism[...]. It is essential to spread a clear consciousness of the human condition, its history, its twists and turns, its contradictions and its tragedies. It is essential to teach human understanding in order to promote solidarity and brotherhood. It allows us to under-

stand our identity and our differences relative to each other, to recognize its complexity rather than reducing it to a single, generally negative identity. It is essential to teach knowledge of the planetary era that we live in, its opportunities and its risks, including individual and collective problems, of our era marked by globalization. It is essential to teach how to deal with the uncertainties that every individual in the community inevitably encounters, the history of nations; uncertainties that have worsened in the beginning of the twenty-first century for ourselves, our society, our humanity" (Hessel & Morin, 2012).

Today, therefore, more than ever, we need broad-based knowledge which can help address complex and multidimensional problems, even outside the fortified citadel of individual disciplines. Making explicit reference to Weber's thought, we must admit that in our time the institutions and, in particular, the University, may regain its centrality on two conditions: on the one hand by continuing to be a repository of knowledge and tradition which permeates and gives shape the life of society and its evolution; on the other hand, becoming and "appearing" much more functional and close to the learners themselves which is to say, young people and adults who see in the university a guide towards the future. There is a need to invent a specific educative tradition aimed at accompanying people in the complexity of modern society (Is this a title? There is no main verb). If universities are to be the cutting edge of change, then there is only one way to reduce the discomfort inevitably created by the new demands of society and by the increased level of social knowledge: a re-evaluation of teaching as a strategy of socialization and investment for future generations. Consistent with this necessary synergy between the University as a reservoir of changes and the engine of social innovation, the Georgetown University periodically carries out a research report, with predictive objectives and intervention also in terms of university training and on-the-job training. The latest report, published in 2013 looks forward to the year 2020 and predicts the state of the American economy. Recovery 2020 provides vital labour market information such as which fields are expected to create the most jobs, the education requirements required to gain employment in the U.S., and the skills most coveted by employers (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013).

In fact, while it is true that there is the risk of chasing after fads and losing sight of its historical identity, of *what it has always been*, it is also true that without undergoing procedures for updating and "mobilization" of knowledge, there is no future for the university. Indeed, only a *narrow self-referential alternative* remains. Training can open the doors to society and change, without pursuing the ephemeral scraps with which the new so annoyingly presents itself. Focussing on training should therefore be seen as a decisive strategy for the university and not as a complacent way to link

itself to modernity. When all of society changes and dynamism becomes compulsive and incomprehensible, only studying, sharing of educational situations, encounters and maieutics can restore stronger the mental preparedness which is adequate to the new challenges facing society.

### **A bridge in history to save the University and its role in the future**

These transformations and the changing needs of society and consequently of the University community too, require the identification of some transversal knowledge in order to enable the main purpose of university education: fostering greater harmony and synergy between the various instances that make up society as a whole. Above all, the reform of education including that of the university, should start from the words of Rousseau's Emile, "I want to teach them to live." In this complex system of knowledge aimed at helping students to learn how to live, the training of university teachers, which in turn will be transmitted to their students, must not overlook some of the issues developed by Edgar Morin (2001) in his book *The Seven kinds of knowledge necessary to the education of future* and further developed in a subsequent study. "The reform would introduce, at every level of education, from primary school to university, the following subjects: the knowledge of knowledge, knowledge of the human; the ability to deal with uncertainty; trinitarian ethics (individual-knowledge-species)" (Morin, 2011, p. 141).

To achieve this aim several fundamental educational objectives still need to be specified. Among these are: to understand what is meant by knowledge, its cognitive systems and to recognize their respective strengths and especially their weaknesses and susceptibility to error; to understand the psychology of the age and characteristics of the education of young people and adults; to learn about the communicative opportunities and risks; to be available to question the purpose and contribution of the individual disciplines to the development of humanity; to be open to the use of new teaching methods and teaching innovation; to know how to promote innovation and adaptation of curricula; to have the skills needed to address local and global challenges facing the University; to understand the media and communication technologies as strategies to approach students and the various disciples, and for the transmission of shared knowledge rather than as danger of trivialization and vulgarization of science. The examination of pedagogical, medialogical, and philosophical literature, as well as an intelligent reading of the data regarding the main developmental directions of society, requires identifying some key points in the training of teachers as this will, in turn, affect the quality of training of learners:



1. educating to educate
2. educating towards an interdisciplinary perspective
3. educating towards internationalization
4. educating for integration and solidarity
5. educating to divulge
6. educating about the media (developed in section Towards a model of media education for the University teachers)

### ***Educate to educate***

The first question calls for a renegotiation of the three key issues that are at the basis of any process of instructional design: What to transmit? Who to transmit to? How to transmit?

The new trends in the mode of transmission of knowledge and life in the age of access (Rifkin, 2000), call for a radical reassessment of the previous answers to these questions. The answer to the first question is not limited to an exclusive focus on pure knowledge. Knowledge is made available by the great Library of Alexandria which is continuously replenished by the media as a whole, but in particular by the Internet as a meta-media. Instead, what is not easy to find outside of the walls of schools and universities is precisely the questioning of knowledge creation; the chain of events that generate a discovery or a thought; the strong emotional surge, which is both human and humanly inspired; the models, the aesthetics, that which can be kept and what we should leave out of the history of a discipline or a phenomenon; empowerment that knowledge alone can give us.

In a world of information overload, the diversity of sources available for obtaining information becomes an exacerbated response to the increasingly felt need of the individual to control reality through constant updating. This becomes one of the main concerns of modern actors, who add a different issue to the economic crisis and the crisis of values, namely, an expression of the difficulty of controlling and selecting the sources of information at their disposal. This is especially true when the earthquake of digital media upsets the balances of the traditional economy of attention (Goldhaber, 1997; Reeves et al., 2008). University teachers can no longer control this trend by competing with the various information sources. They can, however, act as a tool in guiding student orientation by teaching them how to distinguish valid information from partial or misleading information. The professors may be bearers of a vision of the whole and of the integration of phenomena into the complex alchemy of human history. In doing so, they would facilitate not only the understanding of single phenomena within whole, but above all, the return of a sense of integration, of responsibility and membership of the pupils with respect to society and to the world they “inhabit”.



The second question, “Who to transmit to?”, should accompany the teachers into the universe of their students, both young and old, with their specific characteristics, their cultural behaviours, their passions, the crises they experience, their suffering and their future projections. Michel Serres calls the young people of today the Tom Thumbs since they use their thumbs for most activities, from writing text messages, online experiences, interactions and information searches in order to better carry out the activities related to job seeking or leisure pursuits. Although they are not always digital natives, the modern Tom Thumbs are hyper-connected and communicate with each other through the Internet, through Facebook and Twitter (CENSIS, 2017), watch TV on the Internet and do not feel politically engaged. Compared to previous generations they have on their side an ease and naturalness of access and show a great need to recover their roots, history and place in society. Therefore, the differences between the youth and adults in the third millennium might be considered in terms of access to information mediated by technology. All areas of social life, once exclusively mediated by traditional agencies and individuals themselves, are now renegotiated in the light of the presence and use of technology: free time, training (online courses, research materials, the use of the tablet, video, educational products, books etc.), work (job seeking and work as online research, preparation for work, with the training in working in the media in schools and universities), travel, health, and finally, interpersonal relationships.

University training, therefore, cannot turn a blind eye to these transformations. In fact, by merely being aware of these, the university can transform technologies into new opportunities for teaching/learning, and build bridges between the generations rather than erect walls.

How to transmit? In a changed world the question, “How to transmit?” becomes the true cornerstone of education. Opinion differences between the younger and older generations, Internet users and non- Internet users, teachers and students, are often evident: it is as if the use of this media conditions thought, or opinion, and more or less decisively determines the choice to immerse oneself into the online environment. The same kind of relationship to the internet is presented as a factor of “interpretive community”. In fact, hyper-connectivity further accentuates the differences between people. The challenge of this project becomes then just this, to create a “place”, a common space of sharing between generations and between the community of teachers and students. That is to say, a place where ideas of reconciliation, facilitators of social, cultural and even economic capital, can dialogue. This complexity threatens to almost completely ruin pre-established prescriptive methods. Teachers are urged to undertake a continuous search for the most appropriate strategies to address evolving situations, helping students to “learn to live”, but also to know, be themselves and to transform individual

capital into social capital and vice versa. The reasoning that underlies the entire preparation and updating of teachers is based on a number of key dimensions, which see, in the continuum between theory and practice, a teaching strategy and a tool for mutual growth of the whole community participating in the processes. On the one hand, the aim is to enrich the technical and socio-cultural preparedness of the teachers, who have often had significant experience in their own fields. Such a strategy will be able to enhance interchange and sharing with colleagues from other fields of study. But equally involved in these processes of exchange are also teacher trainers of whom many have experiences in various Italian universities. Gathered around the key question of improvement and enhancement of teaching as a strategy of evaluation and transmission of knowledge, these trainers, in turn, are involved in situations of understanding and elaboration of their knowledge according to the needs and specificity of this new community of shared interests. In short, we are dealing with a real laboratory in which competition should be replaced by a more profitable and value-adding collaborative effort of all participants in the educational process.

In doing so one creates a virtuous circle, requiring conscious management, between individual learning and the learning organizations to which they belong. Furthermore, these processes may also become extremely favourable incentives for the creativity of teachers and students as part of a translational process, which is stimulated by contact with “other” knowledge and is expressed through the ability to transfer content, techniques, languages, metaphors of knowledge from one context to other (Cinque, 2010, p. 63).

The University, therefore, should recuperate and update its mission of becoming a meeting space: a space of teaching and university life based on the connections and development of the network of knowledge and expertise located within an academic environment (Siemens, 2004). Lectures, seminars, research shared with students, dissertations, multimedia examinations and project work must be integrated into everyday activities in some universities. These include, lectures, debates, panel discussions, analysis of creative events such as concerts and theatrical shows, creativity techniques, and participation in creative and / or innovative experiences. Once it is clear that there is healthy need for university enhancement and an updating of its educational mission, the other dimensions that we have identified as critical to the training of university teachers can be explained quite naturally.

### ***Educate towards interdisciplinary perspective***

The Third Millennium University professor has to ensure superior teaching that takes into account the complexity of contemporary society, oscillating between the reassertion of local cultures and the unstoppable dynamics

of globalization. Almost all disciplines, from medicine to engineering, sociology to physics and human geography, seek a real interdisciplinary debate. Indeed, Morin talks about a “blindness of a mode of knowledge which, by partitioning off knowledge, disintegrates fundamental and global problems which require a transdisciplinary knowledge (Morin, 2011, p. 5). Only within the interdisciplinary approach can the capacity for critical reflection be promoted, and individual liberties can be given adequate relevance. To quote Martha Nussbaum, who argues that, developing *capability*, i.e. freedom to do and to choose otherwise, has a greater educational value than producing specific operations, “promoting capacities means promoting spheres of influence and this is not the same getting people to operate a certain way” (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 32). So, relating the world of university education directly to the spheres of economics and business would mean giving precedence to some particular professional operations, but for that very reason would sanction the renunciation of cultivating the sphere of plural freedoms and human capacities to transcend conditions and invent personal destinies (Borrelli, Gavrila & Siciliano, 2016, p. 94).

However, the process of increasing complexity of social systems and the plurality of social and cultural identities require greater shared and cross-disciplinary planning, to restore the quality of life in the public space. To this end university professors as operators within the public space, regardless of the disciplines they teach, can make an important contribution.

Far from being a ground for annihilation of complexity, public space finds its *raison d'être* and raw material for political action in the plurality of voices and in the synergy between the nurturing knowledge. This is in fact its ideal vocation, i.e. to serve the construction of a positive imaginary of living together (Innerarity, 2008). Indeed, public space is also proposed as a ground for resistance to the growing privatization of our lives (Urbonas, Lui & Freeman, 2017) and a place for fertilization of ideas and actions oriented towards the common good, the promotion of communicative action, solidarity with the weakest (elderly, children, disabled, migrants, etc), and the planning of the future. The profession of university professor is dedicated to contributing to social solidity. It assumes a strategic importance to ensure the survival of public space through the guarantee of the right to education. It is a profession called to act as a bridge between generations and peers, as well as between the universes of traditional socialization and those of the old and new media.

### ***Educate towards internationalization***

Internationalization is an integral part of a process of the globalization of knowledge, of free movement of knowledge and mutual enrichment. Today

we share many more things and responsibilities than in the past with foreigners, or “the other”: our problems, “economic, environmental, religious and political are global and have little chance of being solved unless people, so distant from each other, unite and work together as they have never done before [...] we may think here of global warming, fair trade regulation, protection of the environmental and animal species; the future of nuclear energy and to the dangers associated with nuclear weapons; the movement of workers and the definition of decent working conditions; protecting children from drugs trafficking, sexual abuse and illegal work. All of these issues can be addressed effectively only at the supranational level” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 95). But this humanistic understanding, which is, in some ways a bit romantic, is hidden behind the curtain of collaboration and networks organized according to economic benefits. It is no coincidence therefore, that for some years now, universities are in a competitive relationship among themselves at both the international and national level. The rankings that measure the performance of universities function as tools of advertising visibility and end up giving rise to a ‘stock exchange’ of universities, based on algorithms that involve numbers of students, teachers, funding, spin offs, technological innovation etc. (La Rocca, 2013, p. 95).

In this context there is no denying the importance of the meta-communicative function of languages in international circulation and in publications in foreign journals. This is fundamental to making national scientific production available to the global community. Were this not the case there would be a risk of falling into localism and self-referencing. But all this should not be confused with the quality of individual scholars and their scientific work and teaching. We need to think critically about the mystique of internationalization (Borrelli & Gavrilă 2015, pp. 158). Appropriately enough, Beck speaks about overcoming the container model of nation in order to explain social phenomena: to study any social phenomenon one cannot but help studying local facts in relation to their global consequences.

### ***Educate for integration and solidarity***

The very idea of society and being together is based on integration: it is a constant game of mirrors, identity, identification and recognition which makes the exclusion or inclusion become foundations of the quality of life within the society (Santoro, 2005). But integration in contemporary society is measured with a deeper dimension, with less clear rules: individualization.

“Individualization is at the same time, cause and effect of autonomy, of freedom and personal responsibility, but it also has, as a downside, the decay of older forms of solidarity, the atomization of individuals, self-centeredness and, basically, what could be termed *metastasis of the Ego*” (Morin, 2005, p. 43).

University teaching must take these processes into account. It must do everything possible to create opportunities for collaboration instead of competition to deal with crisis situations and to act as a platform of stability and strength in a society described by scholars as “unstable” and “liquid” (Bauman, 2000). On the other hand, life together involves identification, seeing “Soi-même comme un autre” (Ricoeur, 1990). It implies the cultivation of the sense of encounter, respect and sharing among cultures. With this in mind, even before being taught, solidarity must be seen as the connective tissue that guarantees solid human relationships and solidarity underlying the way of acting for all members of the community. Indeed, solidarity must first be experienced by the university itself as something indispensable for ensuring its identity and its mission. Through their style of work and orientation towards knowledge, teachers will provide an imitable model of solidarity. It is clear that the university-community, with a strong ethical identity, such as that which we have described will be an institution able to provide answers relevant to the needs of society and its people. We have to be prepared to deal with the globalization of economics, knowledge, information, and, necessarily, also of human needs. The network technology metaphor may be applied with some effectiveness to the idea of solidarity: networks - between people, between people and institutions, public and private institutions and enterprises, including the elderly, adults and young people – which make it possible to not feel alone and give back a sense of security and social harmony.

### ***Educate to divulge***

The cyclone of the Internet has shocked the world, and as result, cannot but give rise to issues and stimulate new research questions. Digitalization in the form of a media earthquake, has upset the equilibrium of the traditional economy of attention, making us discover previously unsuspected practices and relationships which are generally full of lived experiences and planning and anything but “media snacks”, devoid of nutritional value and equally devoid of values culture, therefore, a waste of time (Jenkins, 2013).

The question of teaching methods and learning environments is critical to current developments in the diffusion of knowledge. One should certainly intensify the exploration and experimentation with new ways and methods to enable the integration of the various elements mentioned above. The dissemination of results and best practices is essential and should be further stimulated. The *dissemination of knowledge*, in fact, has for several years been a topic of great importance and the subject of an expanding debate within the international scientific community. Recently, questioning the mode of communication of research results has become more pressing. The European

Union itself has been urging for the communication and dissemination of research results (see, p.e., Horizon 2020, the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Grant Agreement, General Conditions).

The experiences of distance learning and of 'cooperative education', which bring the academic world and industry together in the context of integrated projects, working methods and teaching methods for groups (groups of teachers, professionals, students) look promising, as do all approaches that promote the spirit of openness, comparison of approaches and disciplines, or the acquisition of skills. Far from merely coinciding with the activities of communication and publicity of experiences, practices, methodologies, knowledge, as well as publishing products tangible, dissemination rather aims at exploiting the results, presenting itself as a process of co-operation, exchange and sharing aimed at the enrichment and circulation of knowledge.

### **Towards a model of Media Education for the University teachers**

Using the experience of study and research in the sociology of communication, which is often contaminated by aspects of Media Literacy (Livingstone, 2004, 2011; Morcellini, 2004) our proposal is to start from the recent affinities between education and communication.

The differences between youth and adults in the third millennium could be evaluated in terms of technologically mediated access to knowledge and information. All dimensions of social life, first mediated only by the traditional agencies are now renegotiated in the light of the presence and use of technology. And neither school nor family can escape these changes.

We cannot avoid thinking, then, with Michel Serres, about the future anthropological mutations generated by contamination among young people, and even children from a fragile age, and a digital environment in which they almost constantly "live".

«Digital technologies disrupt the traditional anthropological paradigm. Virtuality, universal connectivity and access to sources of information are reshaping the cognitive abilities of children and distribute knowledge differently. Knowledge is no longer there, outside, remote, rough, and often distancing; it is now in your pocket, on your doorstep, without mediation, while the major mediators - the school system, but also the institutions of politics and the society of the spectacle - continue to shine, like stars long dead, unaware of their own end» (Serres, 2012).

The virtuous encounter between the fields of education and communication could lead to positive consequences in both areas: for science of education the leap implies an approach to the world and the practices of the



real lives of people, children, the youth and adults. On the other hand, communication, which is often identified with media popularization, could find an ennobling content education and a field of action and experimentation. What is certain now is the power of transformation that communication has on people. Therefore, only a strong synergy between the education and communication would guarantee the democratic exercise of the right to education and information (tab. 1).

In fact, the summary table that compares education and communication makes it clear that the two processes are neither overlapping nor mutually replaceable. In particular, while communication is strongly anchored in the present and often generating short-term and long-term involuntary effects (McQuail, 1972, 1992), education should focus on the future, imagining its effects over the medium to long term; education is routine and confirms norms, communication is sensationalism and extraordinary; education cultivates in particular the world of general ideas and of the possible, communication highlights the crises and problems of the present.

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Table 1. Education and communication. A comparative map.

Education	Communication
Accompanying function	Does not report the normality of life but emphasises the miraculous and traumatic dimension of the world
Focus on the individual	Watchdog and social function
Training by objectives	Casual and unstructured training
Transfer of culture and concepts	Means of information, education and entertainment
Strategies and methods	Standardised structure and sloganeering
Standardization	Controlled improvisation/unstructured training
Mediated socialization	Non-mediated socialization
Generates especially long term effects	Generates short and long term effects
Generates significant changes in attitude and behaviour	Generates change in attitude and behaviour



In the current period we reach the climax of this continuity, through the progressive thinning out of cognitive and perceptual barriers between online and offline experience and, therefore, also between training and education administered in a traditional way or with the use of devices, languages and formats typical of digital communication. All this must be kept in mind in the updating and continuous training of university teachers.

To bring teachers to the tools of communicative modernity, our training proposal will consider technologies as both means of overcoming distances with students and, at the same time, learning tools.

Educating about the media means training the mind to think critically, to be up to date with the needs of the changing times, in terms of innovation of languages and alliances between stakeholders, at the very moment in which the distribution of knowledge, encouraged by the media, implies a democratization of access and increased of life opportunities. Processes of media education contribute to the achievement of at least four socially relevant goals: the re-appropriation of the mediating role of teachers and their awareness of the feelings of their students through a full-emersion in communication studies and production; the acquisition by the students, at the level of technological literacy, of the necessary tools for a critical understanding of how much learnt (self-taught and digital natives); the ability to observe the participation in the media of young people and the way in which they change consumption when making their it productive; last but not least, the guarantee of fairness due to the gradual, and therefore significant reduction, in inequalities (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Prensky, 2001, 2006; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Davies et al., 2014). This methodological framework facilitated by the media will, from time to time, allow for the inclusion of single issue discussions among and with teachers, taking into account the overall dimensions outlined above and with the consciousness about the continuous oscillation of our lives between reality and virtuality: "Human civilization is moving beyond co-existing with technology to co-evolving with it. In this Hybrid Age, technology will be integrated, ubiquitous, intelligent and social" (Khanna & Khanna, 2012).

## **Conclusions**

We have taken for granted, therefore, that in university studies a vacuum is being created. There is a widening gap between knowledge and practice, between the academic walls and what is commonly called the "real world", between research and teaching, including the experts and those who learn through "experience". In contemporary society, Sennett recalls, the sense of experience, meeting, and inquisitive opening up to things, has been lost; in contrast, rather than also putting its experiences to use in improving teaching, the university has often closed itself off from the rest of society in a self-refer-

ential reality. We must also remember, quoting Bourdieu, that the academy is shown to be not just a realm of dialogue and debate, but also a sphere of power in which reputations and careers are made, defended and destroyed (Bourdieu, 1984). All this leads to a crisis of legitimacy for knowledge and the university.

Favouring this distance between the academic world and social life, as well as between teachers and students, the gap between the media users also plays an important role: to the extent that the new technologies do away with mediation while the old institutions of learning close themselves off and protect themselves by producing institutions and bureaucratic devices for superficial self-assessed quality certification.

Instead of closing itself off in these knowledge fortresses, universities need to open up and be fertilized by the practices of life: pure fruit, in fact, goes crazy, as the anthropologist James Clifford said. It is here that education and the recovery of the pleasure of teaching can play an important role as long as teachers know and learn how to explain the products of their research as well as the methods used to obtain them: as argued by Michel de Certeau, teachers should not be afraid to submit their research to criticism (also from their own students), as they do from their own colleagues. In doing so, they do not close off the results of their intellectual labours to the future. On the contrary, they open them up (1974, p. 98-99). Indeed only in this way will the value of their research be amplified among those it are offered to students and society as a whole.

All this also crosses through the need for a different assessment of the responsibilities and public recognition of university professors as professionals of the public space (Gavrilă & Parziale, 2018). Precisely for this reason, in times of multiplication of cultural stimuli and of the delegitimization of the University, and in particular of public ones, the skills and continuous updating of professors should not be left to chance. It is therefore hoped that a more decisive institutionalization of the courses of updating and self-training in universities, also in consideration of the transversal contents analyzed in this paper, may lead to the cultivation of a new responsibility of the teachers, aware of the consequences of their work and the necessity to act as champions of change. Cultural openness, responsibility, continuous updating to social and technological change, are just some of the characteristics of the new Universities, which should face modern times by bearing on their shoulders the responsibilities towards the young, the true envoys into the future of the public space and of global society.

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