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Social Roles and Competences of the Teacher in a Virtual Classroom in Poland and Korea

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Abstract

The paper analyses competences of the teacher in a virtual classroom. It describes the reconfiguration of social behaviours and the role of the teacher in the virtual class after taking into account the theory of dialectics of globalization by Anthony Giddens, developed by Norman Fairclough with respect to social discourse and interpersonal interactions. Taking into account the results of different authors' empirical research on online teaching, social features of such a process and personality traits, social roles and professional competences of a virtual class teacher in Poland and the Republic of Korea are described.

Keywords: education in a virtual classroom, globalization, roles and competences of a virtual classroom teacher, reconfiguration of behaviours and social role of the teacher

Introduction

Nowadays, the main transformations in the knowledge-based society occur both in the sector of formal education as well as in the parallel one, that is in organizations which begin to play a crucial role, enabling people to develop new abilities and form new skills. The contemporary education system constitutes an unprecedented challenge for the implementation of these capabilities, therefore teachers are responsible for meeting the expectations set for them. However, in the contemporary instant culture (culture of immediateness), the mass media/pictorial culture to a large extent shaped by interactive social media, such as the

Internet with its services, mobile telephony, virtual communicators, social forums and, above all, by interactive computer games, shaping the culture of media constructors, users and recipients of media communication, depreciation of the teacher's authority has occurred (Juszczak, 2012). Therefore, in the process of educating teachers, attention should be paid to these aspects of teacher competences which will allow for the rebuilding of their authority in the eyes of the pupils so that the teacher could become a master for his students.

What is becoming important for teenagers is indirect communication, searching for acquaintances and friends in the global network, overcoming the barriers of daily direct communication, undertaking such actions in an alternative reality that would not be possible in the real world, and in particular directing their avatar in computer games of the *Second life* type (Juszczak, 2010). For young people, a role model is more and more often a holder of the following props: a computer with the Internet link, mobile phone, *smart phone*, iPod, tablet, and an original, although old car. Young people are increasingly heading towards the culture of "having". For this reason, in their opinion, a low-income inept teacher is not a role model for them to follow, and more so if the teacher has insufficient knowledge of working, learning and even playing with the digital mass media (Juszczak, 2012).

However, paradoxically, in an alternative reality of computer games, omnipresent indirect communication, confirming affiliation to a group, cyber violence, including digital mobbing, harassment in the network, phone persecution, phone abuse, verbal aggression, as well as the temporality and instability of interpersonal contacts with friends in the virtual reality, feeble emotional bonds in a group, a young person who is able to find in the global network information and people interesting to him and to join their community (the so-called connectivism), is still looking for an authority. Functioning in the post-modern society, a young person is looking for durability, stability, sustenance, a sense of safety, advice and support in difficult situations. Still, he longs to be treated subjectively, wants to be a full participant in the educational dialogue, wants autonomy in self-education and creative self-development. Therefore, what kind of teacher may become an authority for him? The presented study makes an attempt at answering this question.

Characteristics of the contemporary teacher's competences in a virtual classroom

A teacher should have psychological predispositions for this profession, abilities to communicate with young people in difficult and urgent situations, as well as

empathy. As early as during the first lessons he should clearly present to the students the requirements of teaching/learning and the required forms of behaviour. He should be able to initiate cooperation with parents, because otherwise, his pedagogical work will be hardly effective or even doomed to failure. A well-prepared teacher is not only a good didactician knowing how and being able to use digital media at work, but also a scholar, good psychologist and educator able to co-operate with a family and organize social support for his students.

When writing about environments of teaching and learning, we use the notion of **pedagogical ecology**, which contains a set of defined social roles and normative expectations concerning behaviours performed by the “actors” of social processes and events taking place in class. Institutionalization of the social space, namely the pedagogical ecology of class is related to a set of institutionalized social practices which may be called **pedagogical isomorphism** (Jaffee, 2003). This is related, among other things, to a commonly used model of education in a traditional class related to the central position of the teacher. However, as a result of the existence of numerous factors disturbing the functioning of this model, there is a proposition of a **polymorphism** option, which assumes the use of many pedagogical alternatives (cf., Bligh, 2000), and which is observed in the contemporary classroom in many countries, including Poland and South Korea.

When a student enters a traditional classroom, he sits at a desk, takes out textbooks, class books, a pen and sometimes a notebook, sees the teacher’s desk located in the central point of the classroom and a board and waits for commands or information. On the other hand, when a teacher enters such a classroom, he takes a central place which attracts the students’ attention; often the teacher assumes a standing position to be visible to the students, but also to dominate them. Frequently, the students assume a passive role, waiting for information and the teacher plays the role of a “sage on stage”, or a “source of knowledge”; in that case we talk about his “central position” (*teacher-centred position*) and about educating the class based on the central position of the teacher (*teacher-centred classroom-based instruction*). Namely, both the physical space and social roles are institutionalised in such a way that they create a teaching and learning environment, which is related to a system of assertive behaviours of the teacher and an attitude of complete respect expressed by his students (Gimenez, 1989).

The role of the teacher in a traditional Korean classroom was even more significant. The publications devoted to the educational, social, cultural policy, but also to teachers’ everyday life, show that until the early 20th century teachers in all fields were those who controlled the ideas and ideals and in accordance with the Confucian principle: *Gun-sa-bu-il-che* a ruler, a teacher and a father should be

honoured and respected in the same way (“*Gunsabuilche – the ruler, the teacher, and the father are one body or the same*”). What is more, the Confucian education mentioned that even the shadow of a teacher cannot be stepped upon because it would be a behaviour inconsistent with the commandment that a teacher should be treated with dignity and respect as an ideal, virtuous person and almost Saint (Deok-in) with four virtues: In-ui-ye-ji: goodness, fairness, good education (decency and personal culture) and wisdom (Park, 2008).

However, since virtual education was introduced in Korea, methods of teaching have encountered new paradigms, changes occur not only in the traditional practices of educational institutions but also among units. In virtual education, the role of the teacher is different, it goes beyond the role of a traditional teacher, in particular, higher skills and teaching techniques are required from him. In virtual education, the main role of teachers is to accompany students in independent acquisition of knowledge, to help students to learn more, and the role of information suppliers, displayed in a traditional teaching environment is now a thing of the past. In South Korea, in virtual training courses the teacher is expected to abandon the role of a provider of correct answers and to play the role of an asking person, to transform into a designer of learning and experience, to change from the controller of the educational environment into a co-learner, with whom the students could exchange their knowledge, to turn from a lone educator into a member of a learning team (Lee, 2006).

Virtual education in Korea can be divided into three categories. The first one consists in teaching and learning only in the cyber environment. The second type is blended, it is a combination of education in the cyber environment with direct, face-to-face teaching. In the third type, the regular teaching and learning process in the face-to-face environment is additionally supplemented by *on-line* education, which, however, is secondary. Education in cyberspace was established in South Korea in 1998, when the Ministry of Education created the pilot project of cyber-university of the first generation (Lee, 2010). Under the Act of 1999 on continuous education, 9 cyber-universities were created in 2001 and in 2002 – six new universities and at present there are already 20 cyber-universities (state as of 2014). Internet Universities in South Korea have become truly popular because within 14 years they reported an increase by 122% from the time of creating the first one in 2001. This cyber-university development phenomenon consists in the fact that they provide new possibilities of studying and create greater possibilities to achieve higher education because the Internet e-learning is permanent, and, in addition, they perform new roles and functions that were not available to the traditional universities. However, the dynamic changes in the

Korean social structure require new ways of solving emerging problems (Song, Yeon, Heo, Hong, 2014).

The reconfiguration of social behaviours and the teacher's role in a virtual classroom

According to the theory of **globalization dialectics**, by Anthony Giddens (1991), globalization is characterized by three processes which are structuring social relations: separation in time and space and dismemberment (individuals can be found in different places) and thoughtfulness. The first feature corresponds to conditions where calculation of time and arrangement of space are dependent on different places occupied by people (Giddens, 1990). This dependence of time on space enables new ways of organizing both variables and gives the possibility to create the space of general nature (such general spaces are, e.g., McDonald's restaurants), where people participate in standard social activities regardless of their physical location (Durr Schmidt, 1997). Giddens's concept offers useful ideas specifying the structure of a virtual classroom, which is at the same time the creation of globalization and it constitutes major features of the globalization process. Teachers and students located in various time spheres (as a result of asynchronous learning) and separated in space (located in different places) may participate in an interaction in spite of the remote boundaries of their physical location as a result of using the digital text and other forms of information. In addition, they can implement different types of activities in the virtual classroom, typical of a traditional class such as, e.g., reading the assigned reading materials, declamation or writing essays. Separation in time and space creates the freedom of social activities and reaction, which can disturb conventional actions typical of a traditional class. For example, in a virtual classroom, students may not respond to questions or posts of the teacher or may select those which are convenient for them. Such behaviours were occasional in the traditional class. However, the *online* teachers have several tools which will enforce giving an answer, e.g., they can repeatedly communicate with their students digitally, but students can still choose the option: do not reply. However, similarly as in other areas of social interactions initiated by the globalization impact, a virtual classroom creates possibilities of new combination and recombination of the old and new social conventions and interaction categories.

Developing Anthony Giddens' theory of globalization dialectics, Norman Fairclough (1992) focused on the changes in social relations created by globali-

zation. He examined the changes occurring in the institutional discourse and interpersonal interactions. He identified two types of discourse leading directly to globalization, i.e.: democratization of discourse and synthetic personalization. The former is responsible for “removal of inequalities and asymmetry in the processes of communication, duties and shaping of prestige of groups of people” (p. 201). On the other hand, synthetic customization strictly corresponds to the concept of Giddens’ thoughtfulness and is related to the shift of direct private discourse into the public mass media sphere (printed media, movies, television, Internet) or institutional sphere (educational, cultural, social, medical, etc.).

The ideas of democratization of discourse and synthetic personalization can develop and enrich the idea of social presence. The research on social presence in a virtual classroom focuses on how people shape the image of themselves for others so that they discover their characteristics, express emotions referring to others even when they are not required by the situation or are not expected. Fairclough’s ideas enable us to develop the social presence beyond the phenomenon of individuality and to examine it as the demonstrations of broader changes in our social relationships occurring under the impact of globalization.

In a virtual classroom, the education process aims towards learning concentrated on the student or on active learning. The paradigm of learning is changing: from the direct provision of information to the student to the process of active learning. There is a shift from problems concentrated on what and how a faculty or a class teaches to the issue of what and how students learn. This results in the fact that learning no longer is of passive nature, the reception of transferred content, but it becomes an active process, including the use of relevant solutions, synthesis and understanding of the perceived content. An active process of learning comprises a diversity of forms, i.e. individual and collective. When analysing the comprehensive content, students come into interactions with peers, and encountering real problems they try to understand them and to jointly build knowledge about reality. The real (as well as local) pedagogical ecology of the traditional class changes into the pedagogical ecology using a global network. The ecological configuration with the teacher standing on stage (podium) and using the method of dissemination of information of the one-to-many type, changes into the interactions of the many-to-many type. The previous social space, determining the performance of specified social roles by the participants of the education process, relations with students and applied practices by the teacher located in the centre of class, is radically changing. Virtual ecological space creates potential possibilities for reconfiguration of these roles, relations and practices (Girod, Cavanaugh, 2001). Initial posts with information sent to students change into a fully active learning

environment. Initial “participation” in class changes into active participation in exercises, tasks or discussions. In this sense the asynchronous virtual pedagogical ecology increases the level of distinguishing between the “delivery” of content to students and their active participation in the learning process. When teachers in a virtual classroom conduct mediations and direct the students, they cannot at the same time fully control the flow of communication. For this reason the relations between the teacher and the students are hierarchized to a smaller extent, they largely overlap and are of interactive character. This creates greater opportunities of discussion and diversity of the students’ opinions, without the teacher imposing them. Such situations, containing dynamic social processes are much more difficult to be implemented in a traditional class, limited by a strictly specified space (here: a classroom), lesson time interval and restrictions shaped for many years among students, e.g. of free discussion, interactions or changing positions within a classroom. Therefore, in a virtual classroom there is a potential possibility of creating new methods and forms of teaching and student interactions by the teacher, which favours shaping new roles and practices performed by both teaching and learning (Girod and Cavanaugh, 2001). Jaffee (2003) believes that although new methods and forms of pedagogical work are introduced in both types of classrooms, therefore indicating a large area of potential possibilities, high student activity in a virtual classroom, numerous and efficient interactions among the students, conducted mediations and cooperation are far more effective than passive perception of information in a traditional classroom. The interactions concerning learnt content, problems, exercises and tasks enable to construct knowledge and shape any required skills. Mediations involve interactions between the teacher and the students within the scope of the analysed problems, the questioned issues or referred to discussion threads. Cooperation takes place in the scope of student interactions, i.e., asking questions, giving answers, gathering information, team work and mutual evaluation. If the purpose of an interaction is asking questions, obtaining answers, exchange of information, exchange of points of view and perspectives and extensive participation in education, the virtual learning environment can, at least theoretically, achieve its goals far more effectively than in the traditional classroom. Another advantage of the online environment lies in the fact that the teacher and students can create more cooperating and collaborating learning space. Teachers in such classrooms, using the course management tools in the global network, may significantly increase the substantive level of discussion in class.

The application of such ICT technologies as: *cloud computing, e-books, mobile phones, game-based learning, augmented reality, gesture-based computing* or *learn-*

ing analytics has large potential in the cyber education in Korea. Such techniques were introduced to Internet schools in various forms and we can expect their impact on the on-line education in accordance with the speed of development of each of these technologies (Song, Yeon, Heo, Hong, 2014). When it comes to the ICT technology development bringing changes in the education development, Kim Yongsae distinguishes five larger domains of the ICT each being an important future technology: customized learning technology (adapted to a user/personalized technology of learning), mobile technology (technology of mobile telephony), multimedia content technology (technology of multimedia content), human-computer interaction technology (technology of interactions between man and computer) and e-learning (Kim, Jeong, Cha, Kim, Cha, 2006). The management system of students' learning process, LMS (Learning Management System), is constantly developed in Korea. The most important functions of LMS are as follows: (function of) class organizing, (function of) cooperative learning (collaboration in learning), management of presence/absence of course participants, function of the information board (the announcement board), etc. Technologies used in LMS are adapted according to the type of cyber teaching-learning, e.g., different for classes of "transfer of knowledge" and different for classes of "questions and answers" or classes of "configured knowledge," and this is dependent on the development state of the teaching-learning process, i.e., on the level of knowledge of the students (Yoo, Yoo, Jeong, Park, Oh, 2012).

Analysis of the teaching and learning process in virtual classrooms on the basis of the empirical research of various authors (e.g., Anagnostopoulos, Basmadjian, MccRory, 2005) shows that in virtual classrooms the most commonly used medium is the *WebTalk*, treated as the "common space", shared by students and teachers sending posts meant for everyone, concerning, e.g., questions related to the read texts, seen photographs or videos. Another medium may be a class "chat", enabling synchronous communication and giving better possibilities of learning than the previous medium, since it may result in more specific discussion on the presented questions: discussion becomes deeper and may reach beyond the agreed issues. If texts are subjected to analysis, then transcription of the analytical properties of texts is used, more suitable to present and structure the social relations in discourse: interactive control, modality, superiority and ethos of the teaching profession (Fairclough, 1992).

In Korea the mission and vision of virtual education is concentrated mainly on enabling the educated units to accordingly perform their role in the future in three areas: educational, personal and economic. The educational role consists in shaping a flexible system of life-long learning and expanding the student-oriented

educational environment. The role of virtual education concerning the student personal sphere means that adults at the age of 25–50, who have not graduated from university and would like to obtain a university diploma have an opportunity to do this, as well as to deepen their knowledge, to modify their skills and to obtain professional specialization. On the other hand, the role of virtual education in the economic sector refers to training strategic partners/employees or education of specialized staff for industrial structures (Song, Yeon, Heo, Hong, 2014).

It turns out that the desired personal characteristics of a teacher in a virtual classroom are consistent with the expectations of students and their parents towards a teacher of a traditional classroom and they are universal. Therefore, a good teacher should be characterized by tolerance, acceptance of diversities, frankness, energy, creativity, responsibility for the teaching of protégées, empathy, fairness, friendliness, understanding, method, patience, trust towards students, should have authority, demonstrate ethical and moral attitudes, provide support, should be warm in relations with students, kind, positive and even have a sense of humour (as stated by students and their parents in a survey in Poland), ambitious, fair, with pedagogical passion.

Due to the fact that in the Korean cyber education an educator should be able to help students choose relevant/effective programs, the following skills are required from the cybernetic educators. Firstly, teachers and students are connected with each other by means of technology, therefore teachers must identify the strengths and weaknesses of the system and be able to skilfully use them in different teaching environments and provide students with effective instruction. Secondly, teachers support students in the reception of educational content, therefore they should be supervisors facilitating students' easy acquisition of educational contents (contents). Thirdly, teachers must have the ability to create the sense of community and family relations among their students (human "consistency"). Fourthly, it is expected that teachers should be able to teach effectively without direct visual inspection. To sum up, cyber teachers must conduct the teaching program so that the students feel that in the cyber education the same free expression of thoughts, level of the sense of community and exchange of opinions are possible as in a traditional, face-to-face learning environment, in the same place and at the same time (Lee, 2006).

The scope of the social competences students and their parents/guardians require from the teacher includes effectiveness in communication (often extra verbal) with the objects of the education process, introducing relations of mutual respect in a virtual classroom, such relations should be of natural character rather than authoritarian, supporting the learning, the teacher should participate

in mediations, achieve a compromise, be open to interactions, be able to solve educational problems in a creative non-standard manner, and they should provide the ability to handle non-standard educational situations.

The scope of the required professional competences of the teacher of a virtual classroom includes: higher education, updating the knowledge at postgraduate studies and gaining new abilities, knowledge of effective methods of extra-verbal communication, effective cooperation with parents, easiness in using diverse media instruments, particularly spacer education tools, high accessibility, availability, readiness to provide answers to questions and explaining doubts, application of an individual approach to students, abilities to motivate students, comprehensive explaining reasons for assessment of action products and activities and openness to mediations. The aforementioned personality, social and professional competencies of teachers of virtual classrooms are universal for both surveyed countries.

Conclusions

It turns out that characteristics of both a traditional and a virtual classroom in Poland and South Korea are similar. Also, the personality traits, social and professional competencies required from the teacher of a virtual classroom are similar in both countries. It is certainly a result of the first factor, namely the universality of the features of a virtual classroom despite the cultural, social or educational differences. In both surveyed countries teachers are expected, among other things, to shape the world of general and humanistic values among students, to act ethically, to have skills of motivating for learning, to develop cognitive interests, to shape social and health conscious behaviours. The observed significant reconfiguration of social roles of the teacher of a virtual classroom and functions performed thereby is also similar in both surveyed countries. It means that educational, social and cultural processes occurring in the contemporary virtual classroom are universal.

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