

Chapter 35

Multiple Dimensions of Media Communication Skills: New Demands for Transnational, Trans-Cultural Knowledge Exchange

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ABSTRACT

This chapter develops a conceptually informed and empirically grounded account of professionals navigating and negotiating media communication skills and carving out spaces for transnational, trans-cultural knowledge production and exchange (Singh, 2009). This chapter is intended to help engineering and IT professionals better understand the ways in which different approaches to media communication skills can shape transnational, trans-cultural knowledge flows by illustrating different ways to create East/West or South/North exchanges. This chapter focuses on building grassroots professional partnerships locating media communication skills in bottom-up dispositions to periphery/centre exchanges of knowledge. This chapter concludes with methodological reflections on media communication skills in the life history of a professional in this field to provide an indication of ways of envisioning and designing grassroots or bottom-up approaches to transnational, trans-cultural knowledge exchange.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses life history research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001) to better understand media communication skills in the context of transnational, trans-cultural production and exchange (Singh,

2009). Specific focus is placed on Western higher education in preparing engineering and IT professionals via international education, global research networks and student mobility (Chubin, Donaldson, Olds & Fleming, 2008; Singh, Kenway & Apple, 2005). Consider for a moment the case of Australia which has the highest proportion

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of international students in higher education in the OECD: 20 per cent in 2006. Education is Australia's third largest export industry, with the higher education sector accounting for 60 per cent of all education export revenue in 2007 (Bradley, 2008, p. 12).

However, compared with OECD countries, a 'relatively low proportion of Australia's higher degree students are international students' (Bradley, 2008, p. 12). Evidence for this chapter is drawn from the data collected from twenty four research students from China who are a part of this small cohort. Further, a risk to Australian higher education is that international students from China are 'concentrated in a narrow range of subject fields' (Bradley, 2008, p. 12), mostly in management and commerce. Those in this study had worked in China for up to eighteen years prior to coming to Australia, albeit with very little knowledge of media communication skills. In 2008-10 they came to Sydney (Australia) for a Western research education. Many had long dreamed of studying in an English-speaking country. Their imaginings had been incited by mass media images and communication.

Using life history research this chapter addresses the questions of how media communication skills is defined and engaged by their professional practices, and how this may enhance their likely benefits. The life history method used to generate and analyse evidence for this study is explained in terms of the symbiotic relationships between individual professionals and the multiple societies to which they belong. The chapter then proceeds to analyse the media communication skills for the possibilities these present for transnational, trans-cultural knowledge exchange, specifically for connecting intellectual projects in Australia and China (Singh, 2009). The first section of this chapter situates this study in a review of the literature which provides an initial conceptualization of media communication skills.

Globally Networked Media Communication Skills

Globally networked media communication skills represent an extension to e-learning which has been defined as:

A wide set of applications and processes allied to training and learning that includes computer-based learning, online learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. These services can be delivered by a variety of electronic media, including the intranet, internet, interactive TV and satellite (Beamish et al, cited in Mihhailova, 2006, p. 271).

In so far as location-independence and asynchronicity are distinctive traits of media communication skills, it is then possible for globally networked media communication skills to emerge (Singh, Kenway & Apple, 2005). It is claimed that telecommunication technology has 'shattered the boundaries' (Chen, 2003, p. 37) of institutions, making possible 'the formation of regional, national, and even global learning communities'. Negroponte (cited in Chen, 2003, p. 37) imagined that in the digital age there would be 'less dependence upon being in a specific place at a specific time.' However, every professional is situated in a specific place and time, networking with other professionals who are situated in other places around the world perhaps in different time zones. Further, a disadvantage of asynchronous forms of media communication skills is 'the lack of "immediate" response from students on their level of acceptance, understanding and retention' (Tham & Werner, 2005, p. 15).

Media communication skills offer the potential for transnational, trans-cultural knowledge exchange and the sharing of intellectual resources among a diverse range of engineering and IT professionals (Chubin, Donaldson, Olds & Fleming,

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