Chapter 6

B–Log on Social Change and Educational Reform:
The Case of a University Class in Greece

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The use of blogs as a teaching method is something new for the Greek education. The financial and structural problems of the latter however, have not yet permitted the application of new technologies to be fully explored despite the intentions of different parties, like the political authorities or the academics. This chapter will argue that blogs could enhance class interaction without replacing face to face communication. Their use could play a positive role in an education system burdened by the gradual increase of its student population, restricted funding and infrastructural problems. In this framework, blogs could act as an arena that encourages critical dialogue and assessment regarding courses, educators and students. The author's personal engagement in blogging as part of her teaching methods coincided with a major social and political unrest in Greece, conditions that affected the ways students related to their blogs as a form of communication. This chapter will examine how blogs could play a role in the democratization of the assessment methods by enhancing classroom's dynamics and the interaction between educators and students. It will also consider how blogs would contribute to the engagement of both students and educators with social and political critical thinking. Finally, this chapter will discuss how blogging could result in the formation of more active citizens.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

New technologies evangelized the coming of a new era in the context of human communication. However, neo-luddites soon started to express their

scepticism in regards the impact of this type of communication on human relations. For example, impersonalization and de-humanization are often debated as symptoms of online communication in comparison to face to face interaction (Jonscher, 1999). The arguments of neo-luddites against a developing technological fascism often concern

the formation of a homogenous, undifferentiated global culture where hegemonic trends would prevail. An example of the latter could be the gradual dominance of English in online communication (Yiannakopoulos, 2005). As it will be discussed in this chapter, the linguistic predominance of English in cyber land (cyber-English) does not necessarily preclude linguistic variety and the vivacity of national languages. Using Greeklish, for instance, is indicative of such a reaction. Another issue raised by the neo-luddites is the alleged decay of social relations that could lead to human isolation and unpredicted anti-social behaviour. However, online social networks, such as the Facebook, My Space, Hi5 are thriving and in this way, they extend or act as alternative channels to face-to-face social networks. In this context, Freire's (1977) belief that human fear of technology is not a new thing could be a starting point. As he suggests, technology since the invention of the wheel forces mankind to face new dilemmas concerning the products of its civilization and its limits.

The author's interest in online communication started earlier in her career with an online ethnography of a female chat room in order to study language, gender and identity (Sideri, 2000). However, the research concerning opportunities that internet could open for class communication emerged gradually with teaching. This interest was motivated by the department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Thessaly (http://www.uth.gr), which encourages the development of news courses related to new technologies. In fact, there is a special category of such courses in the program of the department called NT (New Technologies). The latter could be selected by the students of all three directions (History, Archaeology or Social Anthropology). The aim of NT is to introduce or enhance students' technological skills and knowledge. All the courses, presented in this chapter belong to this category. As a result, the author started to incorporate new technologies in the organization

of her lectures since the first year of teaching. For example, films or Power Point Presentations of the lectures were engaged on a weekly basis. Students were to find these materials online, together with the syllabus of the course on the educator's web page. The use of such methods, as it is often argued (Solomon & Shcrum, 2007; Richardson, 2008), makes the life in the classroom more creative.

Nevertheless, the introduction of new technologies in Higher Education often takes an instrumental character which rather increases the control and the workload of academics burdening their professional life with the logistics of the departments and holding them responsible for various managerial aspects of their institutions. This criticism is well-founded and was partly one the reasons for the massive mobilizations in the Greek universities during the period 2006-2007. However, it is the author's conviction that the use of new technologies as part of the academic repertoire of teaching methods could raise civic awareness by offering more channels of communications within the classroom. In this way, a stronger barrier against the instrumetalization of knowledge could be formed.

At the same time, blogs were introduced in the Greek public life. For example the demonstrations after the massive forest destruction in South Greece in 2007 were organized after the initiative of various bloggers. As a result, several of the most active bloggers either individual or groups, such as, the G700 (http://g700.blogspot.com/), a group of young bloggers whose salary does not surpass the 700 Euros, were invited to participate in a public discussion organized by a Greek channel, SKAI TV (http://www.skai.gr), during the last election campaign (2007). Nevertheless, solid evidences regarding the use of blogs and its impact on the Greek society are still limited. Blogs are not broadly used within the academic departments with the exception of media studies. The use of educational blogging in Greece, especially in Higher Education, is still in experimental stages and it is usually introduced

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