PERAET 2021
International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»

DIGITAL LITERATURE TEACHING AS COMMUNICATIONAL PRACTICE

Ludmila A. Kapitanova (a)*, Galina G. Maslova (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Pskov State University (PskovSU), Pskov, Russian Federation, kapitanovala24@gmail.com,
(b) Pskov State University (PskovSU), Pskov, Russian Federation, galenamas@mail.ru

Abstract

The research presents the attempt to comprehend the challenges of digital transformation of higher education in the framework of teaching Literature to the students of the educational program "Advertising and Public Relations". This discipline is of significant importance for future specialists in communication as it provides axiological and conceptual dialogue with the students. Therefore, the authors consider how the choice of analyzed pieces of fiction and the applied methods of online teaching influence forming the sense of social as a component of the students' professional competence. The authors present the ways of informational and communicational interaction in online classes through the prism of the sense of social as a conceptual dominant of digital teaching of Literature as communicational practice. Beside this, the authors present the analysis of the students' life values transformation in the turbulent situation and consider the functional changes of the university Literature teacher's role in digital education. The conducted research confirms the correctness of the choice of all-human themes and values as determinants in discussing fiction in crises, and the adequacy of classroom management in the format of communicational practice. All this enables the authors to formulate their position on the prospects of digital literature teaching in face-to-face education.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation in higher education was given impetus by the corona virus lockdown as it was marked in different recent researches (Pazmiño, 2021; Sharma & Sharma, 2020). The lockdown appeared to be not only a curse: on the one hand, it marked the crisis of uncertainty, chaos, and frightening suspense, whereas on the other hand, it concisely determined the new educational digital paradigm with the student on the center stage. In fact, these are students, who boosted forming a digital educational area in this turbulent situation as the necessity to attend to their learning needs. It promoted activating various online practices urgent, in our opinion, mostly for getting feedback from the students. University community perceived this feedback as determinant, mainly because it much fostered positive psychological climate in online communication (Turda et al., 2021).

The researchers claim that feedback assisted students in going through traumatic conditions of compelled isolation, which was accompanied by an edgy feeling of lack of communication with group mates, feeling of loneliness and isolation, raising suspense (Klyagin et al., 2020). Establishing tools of feedback from students and teachers, applying educational platforms and arranging distant psychological aid, in particular, were undoubtedly paid attention to in overcoming this situation by universities.

Thus, the disquieting consequences of the abrupt transition to distant learning were mitigated by the relations with students built on trust, empathy and sympathy, which greatly coincided with the ideas disseminated among professional communicants, PR-specialists, in particular, that claim the necessity of communicational literacy as the basis of life safety in a self-isolation period (Beilin et al., 2020). In their view, communicational literacy is conjugated with such spiritual values as mercy, sympathy, solidarity, and implies the transfer to real actions such as genuine care for people and sincerity in helping them.

Focusing on the feedback as on the solution to the problem of the person's preparedness to new realities in self-isolation has proved converting the "feedback situation" from psychological and pedagogical angle to the social and communicational (but not communicative) one. According to the Gavra's (2019) standpoint, the notion "communicative" is applied mainly in linguistics and pedagogy, while the notion "communicational", used in communication management, political and business communications and PR, means the other behavioral mode of the subject. This mode is oriented to "conducting information and communication interactions with exterior and interior environment" aimed at constructing the optimal social reality (Gavra, 2019, p.74). In this respect, various online activities applied in university distant education are inherently communicational practices that provide students with both educational interaction and the opportunity to recognize themselves as social actors who genuinely empathize with the world in the pandemic situation. This sense of social, being existential for the students, is revealed in online Literature classes, which are conducted in the format of communicational practice.

2. Problem Statement

Specificity of digital Literature teaching as communicational practice is completely evinced through the group sessions with the students of "Advertising and Public Relations" educational program, whose curriculum includes the discipline "History of World Literature and Culture". Teaching Literature

as communicational practice is fully determined by the essence of the future PR-specialists' professional activity, which is based on forming communicational connections between the basic subject (organization, person, project, idea) and the community groups for the sake of mutual harmonic relations as the core of beneficial transformation of reality and community. Thus, the classes of Literature contribute to the students' understanding the essence of their future profession and communicational practice in teaching Literature to future communicants naturally becomes a priority element of their classroom activities.

The communicational component in Literature classes has traditionally been determined by the aim to master the professional skill "to listen and to hear" any "the Other" as a factor of building up public relations of different levels by means of Literature, in which the concept of "The Other" is generally represented by the characters, the reader, the author, whose total available knowledge produces a huge communicational area. However, this area has mainly been triangle-shaped (consisting of a university teacher, students, and a text) and focused on internal communicational environment of the class imparting privacy and even intimacy.

Due to the pandemic crisis, the change of teaching formats dramatically affected value priorities in teaching Literature. The online practice in Literature classes has proved that the students' sense of social began to dominate the sense of aesthetic. Deprived of real interactions with other people and the world they consider books an opportunity that enables people to talk to themselves trying to understand themselves and their aspirations. Moreover, while communicating the students reveal their professional maturity focusing more on moral grounds of public relations namely being within the problems of community, collaborating in the resolution of common problems humanely, thinking about people and caring for them. As a result, Literature classes acquire the traits of social interaction area where the teacher is regarded as a facilitator and an opinion-leader. The former role corresponds to the idea of the "digital healing", the latter is related to the Literature class reflection of the brand-new communicational trends being formed in the situation of uncertainty in the professional and academic communities. In fact, we share the opinion that the supportive mode of behavior in a crisis is better performed by a charismatic teacher personality (Frolova et al., 2020; Kaur & Bhatt, 2020).

Identified in crisis and post-crisis periods the newest communicational trends were undoubtedly determined by the urgent need for empathy and were implemented in teaching Literature as communicational practice, based on the informational and communicational interaction, constructing optimal – humane and sustainable – social reality, protecting people from "atomization", which finds its way in a critical point of loneliness and insecurity. The way in which this social reality is made up by means of interaction in digital Literature classes is displayed in tailor-made educational provision.

3. Research Questions

Investigating issues of digital teaching Literature as communicational practice determines setting and solving a series of questions.
- What are value priorities of distant Literature teaching in crisis and post-crisis periods that determine its content and functioning as communicational practice?

- What are the methods of online interaction in classes that reinforce the students' sense of social as a meaningful dominant of digital teaching Literature as communicational practice?
- How has the function of a Literature teacher in digital education changed?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research questions determine the purpose of study, which includes three aspects:

- comprehending content peculiarities of digital Literature classes conditioned by the transformation of students' life values and the teacher's role in the isolation period;
- defining and assessing the efficiency of informational and communicational methods of interaction in online Literature classes in the pandemic situation;
- reflecting on the results of "mediatized ways of involving" students (Novikova, 2020) in digital learning on the assumption of representing fiction in different formats.

5. Research Methods

The research framework includes two scientific approaches: communicational and activity-based. These approaches are integrally interrelated. The communicational approach explains digital teaching Literature as a communicational practice, whereas the activity-based approach is oriented to the process of creative personality self-construction.

These approaches presuppose using such methods as the analysis of scientific and theoretical resources and online and offline educational provision for Literature classes, and generalization and interpretation of empirical data: students' educational products and outcomes.

6. Findings

As Literature classes with the pre-service PR-specialists demonstrated, the new pandemic cognitive and sensual experiences resulted in the students' firm aspiration and desire to be implicated to all what is happening around and to make the sense of social their life priority. This aspiration remains in the post-crisis period, too. The sense of social is exactly a clear awareness of inability for a person to be separated from others, because a priori people live in the community, in the context that is their links, bonds, and relations. Although young people nowadays are blamed in being concentrated mostly on themselves, our students were centered not on their individuality but on people "in the world" in on-line Literature classes. They tried on the fates of the characters: rebels like Kate and Heathcliff in "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Bronte) and conformists (Tomas in "Buddenbrooks") in their relations with the world. They spoke much and excitedly about the bitter exposure to the world, which sometimes kills (Hanno, in "Buddenbrooks", Robbie in "Atonement" by Ian McEwan, Volodya in "The Light and the Dark" by Mikhail Shishkin), however remaining important and significant for the person. In all these fluctuated from class to class oral and written discussions of books, which indirectly entailed the students' thoughts about modern reality, the main values in everyday crisis life such as empathy, compassion, and solidarity were articulated and got evident for all present in class.

Besides creating special, warm, and trustworthy atmosphere in the classes, the open and sincere talks about books through the prism of the mentioned above values fulfilled the function of consolidation. These moral virtues appeared to turn the piece of fiction into a bonfire that gathers people around and blots out boundaries of segmented videoconference screen. This effect also accompanied viewing and reviewing of classes' video recordings and reinforced the perception of digital literature classes as "the area" of unity, solidarity, and comradeship helping to stand the situation of uncertainty. All this entailed conceiving of the literature class as "the area of healing" (Pandi-Perumal et al., 2021). It resulted in extending the teacher's functions in the digital format from the opinion leader, expert, and facilitator to the healer, who supports with a word, advice, and mainly with constructing the class as the "territory of interaction", analogous to communicational practice. Our experience shows that the content in class and the built up on the basis of communicational practice atmosphere can compensate the minuses of distant teaching (Barzani & Jamil, 2021; Benmansour, 2021).

One of the most effective methods of communicational interaction in online classes was creative projects in the form of presentation and the textual commentary to it. Such projects, for example, addressed John Fowles' novel "The French Lieutenant's Woman": "Representation of the Visual Images of Sarah Woodraff and Charles Smithson" and "Visual Representation of the Novel's Finale". The projects were made in small groups (4-6 people) of the 4-year students. The groups were prepared to the task as they had been practiced project work regularly before, although not in an online format. However, the process of fulfilling the task and its presentation online did not challenge the students much: the quality of online projects was not inferior to the before-pandemic literature projects in its creative aspect and, undoubtedly, in its presentation form. While presenting there were a lot of happy moments in the class: it was the admiration of the mates' projects, the amusement by the courageous decision to mirror Sarah Woodraff through the Leonardo's "Mona Lisa", respect to the expressed opinion on the project, and etc. as the students were involved into a peer assessment mode (Serrano-Aguilera et al., 2021).

Commenting on the novel, the students cited its lines that reflect the state of the person experiencing existential and ideological crises: "The determinacy to remain oneself" about Sarah, "We cannot change from where we come, but we can choose where we are going" – about Charles. It was clearly understood that the students addressed these lines to themselves, living like the Fowles' characters in the situation of uncertainty, in which one should remain oneself and look to the future with hope. John Fowles' idea written in the novel's finale that "one should endure life as best as one can, and go out again into the blind, salty, and dark ocean", ocean of life, is conceptually connected with the second project, which generalized the "area" of unity, empathy, and comradeship as all four project groups converged in accepting the third finale of the novel, signifying Charles' choice in favour of the storming and turbulent ocean of life. That was the personal choice of the students, too, which shows their readiness to the world's challenges and hardships.

Researchers admit that students accepted the change of the learning format from face-to-face to online (Viliavin et al., 2020; Zhaojiang, 2021). It is proved by creative online activity and acquiring many new digital learning methods by our students, too. While the university distant Literature teaching had been developing, the university teacher was building up the "territory" of digital area involvement in Literature classes where the students are able to obtain "mediatized" ways of engagement in fiction texts.

Among such ways, there is an audio essay "My impressions and opinions about Herman Melville's novel "Moby Dick". The students' accomplishment of the task was as creative as that of the writing essay. In the audio essay about White Whale, one could hear the sounds of the sea, the students' poems, in which the Whale was presented in the image of the old man with a bunch of keys, opening the doors to all possible worlds. Those were the students' talks with themselves and imaginary interlocutors. Moreover, the audio essay got the students aware of the text forms plurality in the digital area.

One more alternative to the conventional classes was the task which offered the students to imagine that they work in a book publishing house and prepare references to the digital presentation of the novel "The Unknown Masterpiece" by Honore de Balzac in order to attract the readers' attention to different documents (textual, visual, audio, animated illustrations, etc.) that are linked to one other by the aim: plunging the reader into the text of "Unknown Masterpiece", finding its implied meanings, enriching the reader with new cultural knowledge, and expanding their outlook. The task resulted in the visual presentation of the e-text of "The Unknown Masterpiece" with the textual comment of the presented material.

In general, as the analysis of the created variants of the digital fiction text and the practical results of applying a series of other activities show, the students demonstrate the awareness of the transition from one textual form to another, comprehending the existence of various "doors" in the cultural area. Such awareness is extremely important for the students as it justifies the process of digitalization of art and, as a consequence, its implementation in the content of university Literature classes to them.

7. Conclusion

The all mentioned above manifests that for university teachers not the technologies are of primary importance but their students with their thoughts, intentions, feelings, and, mainly, with their learning needs and hopes to be lived up in a modern university. Such a focus on the students was revealed in online Literature classes with their tangible content and technological results, which, first, proved the correctness of the choice of all-human themes and values as determinants in discussing fiction in crisis situations and, second, the adequacy of classroom management in the format of communicational practice. The atmosphere of mutual trust, empathy, healing, the unity of the teacher and students in classes determined the comfort of digital learning and teaching, and, as a result, successful accomplishment of transmedia tasks by the students. It means that distant learning can be converted to the area of creativity, and it hereby turns into a learning environment. Our experience proved that distant learning enabled the students to get acquainted with newest communicational trends and to expand their professional knowledge and competences.

References

Barzani, S. H. H., & Jamil, R. J. (2021). Students' Perceptions towards Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic: An Empirical Study. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, *8*(2), 28-38. https://doi.org 0.23918/ijsses.v8i2p28

Beilin, M., Gnatenko, E., Zheltoborodov, A., Lysenko, A., & Pomazun, O. (2020). Media-reality as epiphenomenon of digital technologies in media-philosophical discourse. *The European*

Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 108, 569-575. https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2021.05.02.69

Benmansour, S. (2021). Zoom Sessions in Distant Learning: Algerian EFL Students' Perceptions and Attitudes. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on Covid 19 Challenge, 1,* 264-280. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/covid.20

Frolova, E. V., Rogach, O. V., & Ryabova, T. M. (2020). Preimushchestva i riski perekhoda na distancionnoe obuchenie v usloviyah pandemii [Benefits and risks of switching to distance learning in a pandemic]. *Perspektivy nauki i obrazovania* [Perspectives of Science and Education], *48*(6), 78-88. https://doi.org/10.32744/pse.2020.6.7

Gavra, D. P. (2019). Ponyatie i kharakteristiki kommunicativnoy strategii [The Concept and Characteristics of Communicational Strategy]. *Rossiyskaya shkola svyazey s obschestvennost'u. Kommunikatsii v tsifrovuyu epokhu* [Russian School of Public Relations. Communications in the Digital Era], *15,* 65-78.

Kaur, N., & Bhatt, M. S. (2020). The face of education and the faceless teacher post COVID-19. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, *2*(S), 39-48. https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2020.v2.nS.id1030.p39

Klyagin, A. V., Abalmasova, E. S., Garev, K. V., Gruzdev, I. A., Yegorov, A. A., Zakharova, U. S., Kalinin, R. G., Kamal′dinova, L. R., Karlov, I. A., Korneyeva, I. E., Makar′yeva, A. Yu., Minayeva, E. A., Platonova, D. P., Semenova, T. V., Skokova, Yu. A., Terent′yev, E. A., Frumin, I. D., Shvindt, A. N., & Shibanova, E. Yu. (2020). Shtorm pervykh nedel′: kak vysshee obrazovanie shagnulo v real'nost′ pandemii [The Storm of the First Weeks: How the Higher Education Entered the Reality of the Pandemic]. *Sovremennaya Analitika Obrazovaniya* [Modern Analytics of Education]*, 6*(36), National Research University "Higher School of Economics", Institute of Education.

Novikova, A. A. (2020). «Kul'turnye industrii» kak chast' publichnoy sphery: transformatsia form souchastiya [Cultural Industries as a Part of the Public Sphere: The Transformation of the Forms of Participation]. *Khudozhestvennaya kul'tura* [Artistic Culture], *1*(32), 65-85. https://doi.org/10.24411/2226-0072-2020-00003

Pandi-Perumal, S. R., Vaccarino, S. R., Chattu, V. K., Zaki, N. F. W., BaHammam, A. S., Manzar, M. D., Maestroni, G. J. M., Suchecki, D., Moscovitch, A., Zizi. F. Jean-Louis, G., Narasimhan M., Ramasubramanian, C., Trakht I., Seeman M. V., Shneerson J. M., Michael Maes, M., Reiter, R. J., & Kennedy, S. H. (2021). 'Distant socializing,' not 'social distancing' as a public health strategy for COVID-19, *Pathogens and Global Health*, https://doi.org/10.1080/20477724.2021.1930713

Pazmiño, M. A. G. (2021). Application of virtual environments in university training. *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 109,* 107-116. https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2021.06.11

Serrano-Aguilera, J. J., Tocino, A., Fortes, S., Martín, C., Mercadé-Melé, P., Moreno-Sáez, R., Muñoz, A., Palomo-Hierro, S., & Torres, A. (2021). Using Peer Review for Student Performance Enhancement: Experiences in a Multidisciplinary Higher Education Setting. *Education Sciences*, *11*(2), 71. https://doi.org/doi:10.3390/educsci11020071

Sharma, B., & Sharma, B. (2020). Educational Technology – Mitigating Covid-19 Impact on Learning. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Engineering and Technology, 11*(4), 500-508. http://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJARET?Volume=11&Issue=4

Turda, E. S., Ferent, P., & Crisan, C. (2021). The impact of teacher's feedback in increasing student's self-efficacy and motivation. *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 104,* 507-519. https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2021.03.02.52

Viliavin, D. A., Komleva, N. V., & Danchenok, L. A. (2020). Digital technologies in online education. *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 90*, 893-900. https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.10.03.105

Zhaojiang, Yu. (2021). Study on a new teaching mode in universities during the period of new coronary pneumonia. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME), 1*(11), 1-4. www.iosrjournals.org