Social Presence and Video Conference in Professional Education

Gissele B. Leal Bertagnolli

Feevale University, Brasil

PhD in Cultura Diversity and Social Inclusion,

Fapergs/Capes Scholarship

adv.gissele@gmail.com

Denise Regina Quaresma da Silva

Feevale University, La Salle University, Brasil

PhD in Cultura Diversity and Social Inclusion,

Bolsista de Produtividade do CNPq

denisequaresmadasilva@gmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative and exploratory study aims to analyze the use of technology applied to vocational education from the theoretical review of the concept of social presence and the use of videoconference as an effective technological instrument in the consecration of social inclusion and interaction. In the face of worldwide globalization, need for qualification and professionalization of individuals is incorporated, with the modality of Distance Education being seen as an emerging strategy in the search for alternatives for this purpose. Within the results, two categories were listed and analyzed: professional education through videoconferences and social presence in the technological context. It is concluded that vocational education through videoconferences has been employed in order to face the demands of the labor market, qualifying workers and collaborating with the inclusion of those outside the productive process of the social system, with education being one of the main means for the realization of what we refer to as social inclusion. It is believed that cultural changes would be able to achieve a teaching method that should be seen as a social necessity, irrigated by the interaction of the subject through technologies and social presence, penetrating the entire social structure.

Keywords: Pedagogical Formation; Continued Education; Vocational Education; Social Presence;

1 Introduction

Different authors conceptualize online education, also known as e-learning, as a particularity of distance education (Anderson, 2008; Elloumi, 2004; Ally, 2004). Online education refers to the use of the Internet as a medium for accessing didactic-pedagogical materials, conducting courses, interacting with content, teachers and peers, as well as for support during the learning process (Ally, 2004).

Vocational education, through videoconferences, has been employed to meet the demands of the labor market, qualifying workers and collaborating with the inclusion of those outside the productive process of the social system, with education being one of the main means for the realization of what we refer to as

social inclusion.

In this sense, videoconferencing is a form of remote and bidirectional communication that allows synchronized transmission of audio, video and data in real time. On this subject, Cruz and Barcia (2000, p. 4) state that, "of the technologies used in long-distance learning, videoconferencing is the one that most closely matches the standart situation of the classroom".

The subject's involvement in an online learning environment alludes to the concept of social presence. According to Lowenthal (2010), the definitions of social presence in online education tend to involve the degree to which a person is perceived as being "real" and as "being there".

In vocational courses conducted in part by videoconference, there is direct participation of the student, making it possible to reveal their ideas so that the teacher can determine their learning knowledge with a higher degree of interaction, yet with an expanded ability to communicate. However, how to maintain a sense of closeness in a communication context mediated by a computer? It is understood that the concept of presence, especially social presence, can subsidise this reflection.

Thus, this study aims to present a reflection on vocational education through videoconference, taking as a starting point the concept of social presence.

2 Social Presence and Videoconference Education

According to Obana and Tori (2010), the concept of presence is addressed in many researches and there are different definitions being applied, in which the most often found terms are: physical presence, social presence, co-presence and self-presence. According to definitions identified by the researchers, presence and physical presence have the same definition, with reference to the feeling of being in a real or virtual place. In this case, they can be known only as presence. On the other hand, social presence is a person's sense of being with another person or entity in a real or virtual environment.

In this context, Obana and Tori (2010) consider that social presence is of interest to all applications involving some kind of social interaction, whether for collaboration with remote human users, for virtual trials of representation or for public speaking practice with a virtual audience.

The Social Presence Theory elaborated by Short et al. (1976) apud Santos (2008), focuses on investigating how the media can successfully give users a sense of closeness and intimacy that is usually felt in physical presence. According to Bassani et al. (2011), social presence consists of interactions that enable the subject to recognize themselves and others in the environment, thus enhancing the feeling of trust and presence.

Some authors such as Whiteside (2007), for example, classify social presence into five categories. *Affective association* refers to emotional connections; *community cohesion* reproduces the way different subjects perceive the group as a community; *interaction intensity* refers to the level of interaction between participants; *knowledge and experience* entail on the sharing of additional experiences and resources; finally, the *investment of the instructor* refers to the involvement of the instructor in the establishing of the community.

For their part, Perry and Edwards (2010) highlight the importance of developing, implementing and evaluating different technologies to increase subject interaction in online education. From a Piagetian perspective, Perret-Clermont (1978) apud Bassani et al. (2011, p. 109), it can be stated that "certain social

interactions can modify an individual's cognitive structure". Still in this perspective, Perry and Edwards (2010) argue that the result of interactions in the online teaching-learning process can be understood as an enhancing of the experience of social presence within a virtual class, strengthening a "community culture". According to Bassani et al. (2011), based on conditions of interindividual coordination, the subject will elaborate their cognitive structures. As such, their cognitive processes will allow them to participate in new (more elaborate) social interactions that, in turn, will change their thought structuring. Thus, in this study, it is understood that social interaction is a condition for learning.

In the words of Carvalho and Ivano (2010), the use of digital technologies in educational practices is important for educators in a society which is increasingly connected to the internet. Commonly, technology has been used in long-distance education, seeing as besides promoting creativity and student participation in learning processes, it also promotes new ways of learning and teaching.

Online education refers not only to the use of technology in educational processes, but also to the inclusion of the internet in such proceedings, such as for the development of courses, as a means of access to teaching materials and as a means of interaction with the lesson's content, with the teacher and classmates (Ally, 2004).

For the efficiency of classes taught throught videoconferencing, there must be a subjective sense of being in an environment distinct from one's physical environment. According to Albuquerque and Velho (2002, p. 01), in any communication mediated between remote users, the individual is physically in one place, but engaged and responding to a remote environment. "As the feeling of presence increases, the user becomes more aware and engaged in the remote environment and less aware of the environment in which they are physically located".

When considering the theme interaction, intrinsic within social presence, we are talking about situations experienced by subjects, in which emotion and participatory cooperation of those involved prevail.

On the matter of technologies used in long-distance education, videoconferencing best achieves a standard classroom situation. Unlike teleconferencing, it enables conversation between student and educator, allowing the teaching process to take place in real time and to be interactive.

In the context of social presence, interaction is a fundamental requirement for vocational education processes made through videoconference. In this sense, Lowenthal (2010) points out that definitions of social presence in online education tend to involve the degree to which a person is perceived to be "real" or "being there". Thus, technology modifies the interactions that subjects make with each other and with society.

Social Presence is considered to be the social and emotional projection of an individual in a virtual environment, namely, their involvement in the online learning environment. Moreover, it is a manifestation on the students' part, and on the teachers' part it is a perception of the interactivity of their subjects regarding themselves, their colleagues, their teacher and the environment (Bastos, 2012).

2.1 Corporate education, new challenges in work education and continued vocational training

A company is a learning space, and universities and schools can greatly contribute to the education of professionals, as companies are trying to experiment with pedagogical practices stemming from the theories and methodologies of education. If companies seek to produce knowledge, add value and gain advantages

over the competition, they will need to create and empower knowledge workers. With this, educational actions in companies are increasingly directed at the workers, as permanent and continuous learning is a competitive differential in today's market.

To teach content or to develop skills? We favor a fair, planned education focused on the students and their context; to develop their talents by valuing their experiences and practices, and to no longer focus efforts on whether or not they have memorized all they have learned. [...] as unfinished beings we can always evaluate and (re) evaluate, learn and learn [...]. (Ricardo, 2009, p. 91). In this sense, teacher training in this modality becomes essential, because technology can contribute to corporate education assisting in the advancement of Corporate Universities, and also as it is available to education for the purpose of facilitating learning. Innovative pedagogical practices promote reflective, questioning, revealing, critical and contextualized learning, and videoconferences and social presence are examples of these new pedagogical practices.

We agree with Senge (2004, p. 38) when he states that the organizations most likely to succeed in the future will be those that learn how to seed commitment in people and also the ability to learn within all ranks of the organization. This author emphasizes that companies must be committed to learning and developing the strategic competencies of their employees at all levels, even those less accessible by physical distance', and videoconferencing enables such access.

The scenario of globalization, according to Morin (2006), requires from Education a new outlook regarding the construction of knowledge, that is, a perspective able to respond to the challenges of the age of information through new ways of thinking and building knowledge. One of the great challenges of our century is knowing how to choose and handle information; To convert information into "pertinent knowledge", that is, that which is "capable of locating any information in its context", to exercise, learn and teach an "ecology of ideas and actions"; to understand ancient wisdoms, which are not yet gone, seeing as they still speak of the lingering essentials; to facilitate the emergence of new wisdoms; it is to seek complementarities in opposing knowledge (Morin, 2000).

It is, therefore, knowing how to make use of our "general intelligence" through compartmentalized knowledge and the culture of specialties. Therefore, the student must be encouraged to develop an investigative and autonomous spirit, ready to question the issues of a complex society, whose certainties are shaken by the speed that technologies of information and communication affect personal and professional daily life. Drucker (1989) complements this analysis by emphasizing that the future of companies depends on their ability to learn collectively and demonstrably from knowledge workers.

With this statement, it can be perceived that companies have many concerns that bring them to develop strategic competencies in their employees, that is, with investments in the development of human capital. There are innumerable efforts for facing an unstable and increasingly competitive market, and investing in knowledge, in learning how to learn, to do and to be, is essential and strategic. And as Geus (1999) states, the speed on which individuals and organizations learn can become the only sustainable competitive advantage for companies.

One of the alternatives used by companies is the implementation of Corporate Education, which unlike training courses, is more focused on current and transient work situations, limited to a specific physical space and distant from learning proposals directed to problem solving and applicability in the workplace's

daily tasks.

Meister (1999) distinguishes between corporate training and corporate education, stating that there are seven different points between these two modalities: the content, the methodology, the location, the target audience, the faculty, the frequency and the goal or expected result.

Corporate education can take place in any physical space, with the aim of working on subjects and actions that develop competencies suited to the strategies and business ventures of the company, with these being broad and global activities related to the whole business chain, with facilitators or teachers coming from the company itself or outsourced, such as university professors or outside consultants, thus contributing to the company's success, and particularly committed to worker performance. The author also reinforces that Corporate Education is a process which assists in the management of workers able to create and manage business opportunities, or even to enable them to be capable of facing the companies' internationalization processes (Meister, 1999).

The challenge lies in uniting business and education with a critical and reflective outlook on the pedagogical act and on the act of learning. In this sense, corporate education is an advance in relation to training programs that seek to develop competencies in line with the company's strategy. The focus is on the institution that understands and stimulates learning, with special regard to the company's core competencies, generating a development of people and, consequently, of organizations. (Bayma, 2004, p. 25).

The challenge lies in uniting business and education with a critical and reflective outlook on the pedagogical act and on the act of learning. In this sense, corporate education is an advance in relation to training programs that seek to develop competencies in line with the company's strategy. The focus is on the institution that understands and stimulates learning, especially regarding the company's core competencies, generating a development of people and, consequently, of organizations. (Bayma, 2004, p. 25).

Éboli (2005, p. 53) states that the "Corporate Education System is a system of training and development of people based on competencies", and should aim to develop in employees the skills considered critical for the viabilization of business strategies, contributing for an active and permanent learning process, linked to the business' values, objectives and goals.

In this assertion, definitions lead us to understand that the process of corporate education is largely related to the notion of individual, organizational/collective and essential/critical competences, which stem from the strategic design of the organization. This development of competences must be based on learning processes, and structured with the purpose of being shared, so that they contribute to the critical/essential competences of organizations.

Within this context, companies with the Corporate Education model generally develop organizational learning strategies using long-distance education, live training and the exchange of experience combined with daily work practice, and the use of videoconferences is one of the tools which allows access to workers who would not have the possibility of continued education available in person.

3 Final Considerations

When dealing with the topics of interaction, social presence and videoconference, it is understood that there is support for a social construction in which the manifestations of the culture of those involved would prevail. The subjects, when associated with emotion and cooperation, will be impregnated with cultural manifestations received through their socialization processes, since, from a Piagetian perspective, it can be stated that "certain social interactions can modify a subject's cognitive structure". If nowdays we have a culture that pervades technologies, our actions are included in the cultural assertions of these days.

By analyzing the interaction between the different actors and the environment in order to understand how social presence occurs, as well as inserting the instruments that assist the cooperative and collaborative learning process, we understand that there are subsidies for both the development of the learning strategies which will be employed as for the choice of the means to be used, wether they are informational or not.

Another interesting question regarding the use of technologies in vocational education concerns social presence, as the interaction of the subject being heard, the reception given to them, the interaction or even informal communication are all beneficial factors for the speaker. In this sense, according to Bassani et al. (2013), social presence is a fundamental condition for the cooperation between subjects to actually take place within collaborative environments, and the way the subjects present themselves in the social/virtual environment can be facilitated by the informational means and enhanced by the strategies of the subjects guiding the interaction.

When dealing with the theme of interaction, we are discussing the experiences in which what prevails are the cultural manifestations of those involved. In any virtual environment, participants will always be imbued with the manifestations earned in their socialization processes, resulting from the desire to strengthen friendship bonds at times when individuals begin attending certain environments more often, even more if they start perceiving it as a "place". Thus, for the learning to take place in online subjects, it is necessary for students and tutors to have access to an appropriate learning environment, to content designed for this particular purpose and to situations that provide interactions between student and teacher. It must also be noted that this is a broad area of study which, evidently, allows for different interpretations. However, it is believed that some cultural changes would be able to achieve a teaching modality that should be seen as a social need, nurtured by the interaction of the subject through technologies and social presence, penetrating the whole social structure. Such experiences with digital technologies are part of a broader cultural transformation that is shaping education and providing a new medium for fostering creativity and student participation in teaching and learning processes.

This is, therefore, a primary approach between considerations about videoconference before education and Social Presence, allowing an in-depth analysis to take place in future works, aiming to present other aspects related to the discussions that seek to situate the field of education studies and social presence.

4 References

[1] Albuquerque, A., Velho, L. (2002).Together ness through virtual worlds: How real can be that presence? Proceedings of Presence, Fifth Annual International Workshop on Presence. Porto, Portugal.

[2] Ally, M.M. (2004). Foundations of educational theory for online learning. Anderson, T., Elloumi, F. (Org.) Theory and Practice of Online Learning. Canada: Athabasca University.

[3] Anderson, T. (2008). Toward a theory of online learning. In: Anderson, T., Elloumi, F. (Org.). Theory and Practice of Online Learning. Canada: Athabasca University.

[4] Bassani, P.B. S. et al. (2011). Anais do XXII SBIE - XVII WIE**.** Presença social na educação online: análise do ambiente de escrita coletiva etc por sujeitos com deficiência visual.

[5] Bassani, P.B.S. et al.. (2013). Revista Iberoamericana de educacion/revista ibero-americana de educação.

[6] Bastos, H.P.P. (2012). Presença Plus: Modelo de Identificação de Presença Social como Ferramenta Auxiliar da Tutoria em Ambientes Virtuais de Ensino e Aprendizagem. Tese de doutorado. Porto Algre: PPGIE/UFRGS.

[7] Carvalho, F.C.A., ivanoff, G.B. (2010). Tecnologias que educam: ensinar e aprender com tecnologias da informação e comunicação. São Paulo: Pearson Prentice Hall.

[8] Cruz, D.M., Barcia, R. (2000). Educação a distância por videoconferência. Rio de Janeiro, ABTE, (29) 150/151, 3-10.

[9] Lowenthal, P.R. (2010). The evolution and influence of social presence theory on online learning. In: KIDD, Terry. Online education and adult learning: new frontiers for teaching practices. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

[10] Obana, F., Tori, R. (2010). Presença Conceitos de presença. Disponível em: <http://www.Ibd.dcc.ufmg.br/coleções/wrva/2010/019.pdf>. Acesso em: 13 jul. 2018.

[11] Perry, B., Edwards, M. (2010). Creating a culture of community in the online classroom using artistic pedagogical technologies. In: Veletsianos, G. Emerging technologies in distance education. Canada: Athabasca University.

[12] Santos, M.L. (2008). A proximidade mediada: um estudo experimental em ambientes de aprendizagem online. Dissertação de Mestrado em Pedagogia do E-Learning. Lisboa, Universidade Aberta.

[13] Whiteside, A.L. (2007). Exploring social presence in communities of practice within a hybrid learning environment. Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota.