THE INTERNET – A NEW BURNOUT SOURCE
FOR THE ROMANIAN TEACHERS?
WE ARE DEALING ALREADY
WITH A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS

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Abstract

Starting from the idea that the New Technologies are more and more present in our daily and professional life, this paper explores issues that have emerged from the using of internet by the Romanian teachers. The research methods were related with the main question we want to answer: Is the Internet another source of the teachers burnout? In the meantime, our objective was to identify which are the dimensions of this burnout emerged from the New Technology use and, an aditional one - to determinate if a good orientation of some Ethical Professional Guidelines could help teachers in prevention of this kind of burnout. We have used the Focus Group (teachers group Interviews) technique applied between April – July 2012 and the online questionnaire applied via email on June, July and August 2012. 390 Respondents have validated some important findings for our specific goals; they are teachers from the Romanian High Schools from six Counties: Braila, Galati, Vaslui, Mures, Botosani, Maramures. While we have been relatively successful in indentifying the dimensions of the teachers burnout we made up some correlation with these results and the findings from the teachers Students reflections on the use of New technologies during their initial teacher training (MA, first semester, 2012-2013 academic year). From these results, we tried to design some recommandations about designing of a healthy virtual community for romanian teachers under the idea of an Applied Ethics Course for Teachers (with specific topics about using internet like a personal and professional development tool).

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Teachers Burnout, E-learning, internet, New Technologies

Résumé

Partant de l'idee que les Nouvelles technologies sont de plus en plus presents dans le quotidian et dans la vie professionnelle,ce travail cherche des faits issus de l'emploi de l'internet par les professeurs roumains.Les recherches ont ete liees a la question principale a laquelle je voudrais donner la reponse: l'Internet,est-il, une autre source d'epuisement pendant que notre objectif est d'identifier quelles sont les dimensions de cet epuisement issu de l'utilisation de la nouvelle technologie et,en plus, de determiner si une bonne consiliation pour l'orientation professionnelle ethique pourrait aider les professeurs dans la prevention de ce type d'epuisement.J'ai utilize la technique Focus Groupe (interwiues avec des groupes des professeurs en avril-juillet et des questionnaires on line appliques sur le

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courriel en juin-juillet. 390 respondants ont valide des resultats importants pour notre buts specifiques.Ceux-ci sont des enseignants de 6 departements: Braila, Galati, Vaslui, Mures, Botosani, Maramures. Pendant que j'ai eu un success relative dans l'identification des dimensions de l'epuisement des professeurs, j'ai fait une relation entre ces resultats et les constatations des reflexions des futurs enseignants sur l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies pendant le temps initial de la formation (master, 1-er semester, l'annee academique 2012-2013). A partir de ces resultats, j'ai essaye de formuler quelques recommandations concernant la formation d'une communaute virtuelle saine pour les professeurs roumains,partant d'un Cours d'Ethique Appliquee pour des enseignants,avec des sujets specifiques sur l'utilisation de l'internet en tant qu'instrument personnel et professional de development.

Mots-clés : nouvelle technologie, development professionnelle, l'utilisation de l'internet, communaute virtuelle, futurs enseignants

Rezumat

Pornind de la ideea că noile tehnologii ocupă un loc din ce în ce mai important în viaţa noastră, articolul nostru dezbate asupra unor probleme corelate cu aceea a utilizării internetului de către profesorii din România. Metodele de cercetare utilizate au fost selectate pentru a răspunde ipotezei de lucru: Este internetul o nouă sursă de stress pentru profesori? În acelaşi timp, obiectivele noastre adiţionale au fost acelea de a identifica dimensiunile acestui nou tip de stress – cel indus de Noile Tehnologii – şi, de a determina dacă existenţa unor direcţii eficiente de etică profesională ajută profesorii în a se proteja faţă de această nouă caracteristică a muncii lor. Am realizat un interviu de tip Focus Group, aplicat pe populaţia ţintă în perioada aprilie – iulie 2012, ce a fost completat ulterior de un chestionar administrat online (iunie, iulie, august acelaşi an). Cei 390 de respondenţi ne-au oferit rezultate importante pentru obiectivele noastre specifice; aceştia sunt profesori în şcoli şi licee din şase judeţe ale ţării : Braila, Galati, Vaslui, Mures, Botosani, Maramures; 40 profesori din două şcoli pariziene au completat fericit setul de deschideri utile pentru potenţiale recomandări legate de impactul internetului asupra dezvoltării personale şi profesionale. Alţi 50 de practicieni aflaţi şi în ipostaza de studenţi nivel master (primul semetru, anul academic 2012-1013) au contribuit la extragerea unor reflecţii colective faţă de acelaşi topic propus spre cercetare empirică.

Cuvinte cheie: noile tehnologii, stress profesional, dezvoltare profesională, profesionalismul educatorilor, internet, comunitate virtuală

1. The internet – a different education world for teachers?

As living in an Information Era and on Knowledge Society, we are witnessing the exponential growth of knowledge and the New Technologies huge impact on the practices and procedures in professional and personal life. Considering the fact that education is the nucleum and the most powerful catalysts for any society to achieve a better future, teachers are the architects of our next generations. Their behaviour, their values, orientations or educational beliefs play a leading role in both developing and implementing curriculum – meaning at least *what* and *how* they will teach. Even though curriculum guides or syllabuses describe the goals,

objectives/expectations, content, implementation and assessment process, the elements related with teacher's values, perceptions, and beliefs about the educational process and the subject matter are not documented in the curriculum guides. As stated by many authors (e.g. Ennis and Chen 1993; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1999; Campbell 2003; Altet 1997) teacher's curricular decisions are shaped in part by their *values orientation* reflecting philosophical positions. This is one of the reasons for, we believe that Professional Ethics has to be an important component of the teachers education making a good start for designing *a personal professional moral* (Seghedin 2011a).

On the other hand, we tried to sustain the idea of the need of political strategic decision linked to the Professional knowledge taking into account the New Technologies which become part of our lives. The concepts of *virtual community* and *professional community* has to be discuss because they are more often invoke under the idea of teachers professional development (Littleton and Hakkinen 1999, apud. Cucos 2006). The burnout implications which are linked with these both types of communities has to be determinates for maintaining the level of self respect like a part of the safety teacher's professional development (not to lead to a start of burnout even before the teaching practice begin - see Fives et al. 2007).

About the tendencies of evolution for the virtual education Glen M. Farrel (2001) specify a list of seven main elements which invoke in fact the characteristics of online education (apud. Cucos 2006, p. 23): extension of the learning opportunities (more than face to face learning); information and knowledge connections or sites are invested now with specific education goals ; learning objects market is increasing under the better utilisation of all virtual networks ; very easy transferability of these learning objects which can become useful on different cultural and curricular contexts ; new jobs and new pedagogical culture about the training the person involved in, which means new strategies for training and assessment, for tutoring, respecting the new educational realities; testing and development of new models for learning and the management of learning because of the new context – virtual ones are imposed new way of thinking, learning and training ; new strategies for the quality control, for accreditation, monitored and assessment of these virtual ways of learning.

Indeed, we have to take into account that Quality Assurance has to be an important priority for assuring a good perspective for these new personalized educational ways for a person development (professional and personal, too). In the same time, the axiology of this new way of thinking about education has another perspectives for curriculum designers, for IT practitioners is made up a new education model and a new paradigm which has to became a part of the teacher education curricula – pre-service and in-service professional development.

Using internet on the teacher education has a lot of implication on the teachers personal and professional life; having a framework for teachers education (and learning community) while analysing educational values of both teachers and teacher students (like practitioners candidates) is much easier for us to determine

the set of values orientations for the members of this community. We have used in our present study a five structured framework of values orientations which have the following components: Disciplinary Mastery (DM), Learning Process (LP), Self-actualization (SA), Social Responsibility (SR) and Ecological Integration (IE) (Ennis and Chen 1993, which present a new version of Values Orientation Inventory) and the *Teaching Job Demands and Resources Model*. In our opinion, the detailed information's on these five elements could become an useful starting point in designing the next steps for teacher professional development without having burnout symptoms.

Table 1: A five structured framework of values orientations in Teaching

Value Orientations		Description
Disciplinary Mastery	(DM)	Places high priority on mastery of fundamental core knowledge and skills, gaining proficiency, cognitive understanding.
Learning Process	(LP)	Priorities learning independently, problem solving skills.
Self-actualization	(SA)	Emphasizes nurturing student growth, personal liberation.
Social Responsibility	(SR)	Places high priority on societal needs and social change.
Ecological Integration	(EI)	Puts emphasis on personal search for meaning by integrating natural and social environment

(cf. Ennis and Chen 1993)

The internet is most of the time associated with the concept of "virtual community", no matter if the impact is measured on the individual or collective level, and without relation to the influence good or bad on the personalities.

Teaching has a special position on using internet by the professionals, because teachers are encourage to use the virtual world at least for making useful selection for teaching resources, for finding new resources for their classes. On the other perspectives the forms in which the internet became part of the teacher's personal and professional development are much alike to the other professional areas. But, education has a special position because of the wide interest on it. Thus, it is easy for a teacher to discover platforms for open debates, personal blogs containing scientific articles related with the education issue and personal reflections, which are accessible to everyone, online debate groups etc. Some of these are free access and can develop an addiction on them. The other, more known are: Twitter, web posted articles and projects (in the last six month, for Romanian teachers the most liked forums are: www. didactic.ro or www. dascali.ro).

Why, teachers or all of us, are trying to be part of this "new virtual communication world"? First is because is very easy to have access on and second, because we are finding a lot of resources very easy to use in our teaching. See below a screen capture from a tutorial, with *the steps which are to be made* as an example, how easy is to become part of a discussion platform/forum. To be a part

of a virtual community is important to become an active member of that under the participation into debates and/or sharing documents linked with the proposed topics.

2. Teacher's burnout – could be Internet another source of ?

Teaching is stressful and this is already considered as a truth which has no need to be tested or validated (Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W., 1999, using Borg & Riding, 1991; Travers & Cooper, 1996); for example, it has been estimated that between 5% and 20% of all U.S. teachers are burned out at any given time (cf. Farber, 1991). In comparison with other professions, teachers show high levels of exhaustion and cynicism, which is known like the core dimensions of burnout (Maslach, Jackson and Leiter 1996; Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998 cited by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1999). In Romania, the country where the current study was conducted, educators have the highest burnout levels compared to workers in all other human services and white collar jobs. However, it is important to note that the majority of teachers are not anxious, stressed, unmotivated, or burned-out (Farber 1984). Quite to the contrary, the vast majority are content and enthusiastic (Kinnunen, Parkatti and Rasku 1994; Rudow 1999) and find their work rewarding and satisfying (Borg and Riding 1991; Boyle, Borg, Falzon and Baglioni 1995). So far in the occupational health psychology literature, the negative aspects of teaching have dominated. Therefore, we have used the Job Demands–Resources Model in the current study in order to include not only teacher burnout and the associated process of energy draining, but also teacher engagement and the positive motivational process involved and, not in the end, the principle of social responsibility involved by the teacher professionalism (and professional ethos, too).

Burnout is usually defined as a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al. 1996). Exhaustion (rom. *Extenuare*) refers to feelings of strain, particularly chronic fatigue resulting from overtaxing work. The second dimension, cynicism refers to an indifferent or a distant attitude towards work in general and the people with whom one works, losing one's interest in work and feeling for work has lost its meaning. Finally, lack of professional efficacy refers to reduced feelings of competence, successful achievement, and accomplishment both in one's job and the organization. However, during the past decade, evidence has accumulated that lack of professional efficacy plays a divergent role – personal exhaustion and family problems and the lack of success on teaching.

The relation between teacher burnout level and the preoccupation for being a part of a virtual community has a reason in the fact that the burnout is linked with the idea of stress, and the models used in the job stress literature are orientated on the assumption that stress is the result of a disturbance in the equilibrium between

the demands that employees are exposed to and the resources that they have at their disposal. For example, according to the well-known and influential demands–control model (DCM; Karasek 1979), job stress is particularly caused by the combination of high job demands (work overload and time pressure) and low job control. Thus, the DCM focuses only on one type of *job demand* (psychological workload) and one type of *job resource* (meaning job control).

On the internet, teachers are free to choose, but even so, they are online, in a virtual world because they are under an authority control – they have to prepare better classes using new technologies, they have to select resources for their teaching from a lot of cognitive applications and so on. But they all admit that they start using internet for their job demands not for free time or entertainment (and our respondents had the same position about this issue). Being by yourself for the learning time could become a very important issue for all of us. The success of the distance communication or for virtual communities is constructed from their specificity: open learning, adult education characteristics, individual centred learning or no name intervention (self -protection), self-management, independent study, non-formal education, even study contracts, information on personal needs etc. Not in the end, we talk about intergenerational effects (positive or negative) because of the diversity involved by a virtual community, even we take into account a professional dimension (Lallement 1998, apud Necula, Damian, Gavrilovici and Bunea 2012, p. 211).

3. The Professional Ethics Course could be a good solution against teachers internet burnout - An empirical study

Starting from the idea that this burnout related with Internet usage could be stopped, we tried to identify some important elements for elaborate a coherent strategy to stop it. We already know that teaching has a lot to do with the moral perspective about life and education. As we established in some of our works before, the professional ethics has two distinct components from the individual-collective perspective: a. *a group professional ethics*, which is developed in time, by acquisitions regarding the practice quality of each professional and of the professional community as a social group; b. *a personal professional ethics*, which is formed on several levels of individual moral development given as evolution opportunities, carried on at the same time with the professional development steps; represents one of the in-service teacher education purposes. (Seghedin 2011b)

Our study is based on a three steps: the opportunity to talk with teachers during some of our experiences on in-service teacher training sessions; after FG with teachers we use an online interview for teacher students MA level and, during august – september 2012 we try to find some common perceptions using the research visit to Paris to complete our conclusions with some highlights (only some elements of the comparative study are present here, another results will be develop in our future articles).

The objective was to identify which are the dimensions of this burnout emerged from the New Technology use. And very linked with this, we tried to reveal if a good orientation of some Ethical Professional Guidelines could help teachers in prevention of this kind of burnout.

From the theoretical perspective we elaborate a model under we try to interpret the results of our interviews sessions. Theories about Teachers Professional Development, but we develop ideas around the main two, much related with the *Reflective Practitioner* Paradigm (see Donald Schön theory, 1983). Using the important idea of Reflection like a professional competence for teachers we make a transfer to the *Ten Competences* Model (developed by Ch. Perennoud).

We have to admit the fact that Professionalism is underlying the process for development of competences but is not identical with, so we have to make a distinction between being a Professionalist and trying to became one; *Professionalism* versus *Professionality*. On this idea, as a theoretical base for our anquette we used our *Three-element professionalism Model* with the *reflective capability* representing the link between the other two components: the technology of teaching and the ethical implications of teaching. The main teacher's moral-professional competence remains autonomy. The *professional autonomy* refers both to the *personal ability of making operative decisions* while working, in the absence of any outer pressure or outer professional opinion, and to *the pertinent social responsibility* towards the results and quality of the educational practice. Because we cannot develop any type of firm convictions without resorting to reflection, the critical thinking educational paradigm elaborated by Luke and Freeboy is presented like a good answer in helping students in their decision about a teaching career.

From this theoretical perspective the basic point for our experimental design was the fact that the *reflective capability* represents the mobile element, which helps the transition between the professional conscience and the professional conduct. The reflective capability helps the individual to choose. In order to meet the large variety of requirements and to shape up its behavioural offer to diverse challenges, the student teachers must be able to reflect over the meanings of their actions, to be aware of their future mission. The capacities involved in the critical thinking are as many opportunities not to make professional mistakes, but it is important to take into account the fact that we cannot consider the teachers responsible of things over which they do not have any power of decision..

Luke and Freeboy are designed a Reflection processes synthesis, starting from Smyth theory, and they organized it in a cycle of four phases that represent, in fact, the reflection types that should be adopted by educators:

a. *Describing*: What is this I'm doing? What are my practices?

b. *Informing*: What's the meaning/purpose of what I'm doing? What theories do my practices express? Analyse the descriptions to identify relations between elements.

c. *Confronting:* How did things turn out this way? What are the causes? Assumptions, values, beliefs? Where do they come from? What social practices do they express? What is it that keeps my theories standing?

d. *Rebuilding*: What and how could I do things differently? What should I do to make these changes?

To conclude, if a university chooses to strengthen the research-teaching nexus in undergraduate curricula, this implies involving students more often in the role of participants in learning and research. A review of policy documents and research literature revealed that the research-teaching nexus can be shaped according to using creative and reflective teaching strategies. The internet using has to become a part of teachers pre-service education because any type of open and distance education curricula will prepare educators to became internet users for their professional and personal benefits.

4. Study design

a. *Methodology and respondents*

For our study we considered that the Focus Group (teachers group Interviews) technique is the best method for verifying the proposed objectives, having time to debate on some of the common answers and become more reflective about the proposed topic. The FG items were applied between April – July 2012 and we used an online questionnaire applied via email on June, July and August 2012 for our MA degree student teachers. In september 2012, we organized a same items Focus Group with teachers from Rosny sous Bois High School from Paris - France, trying to compare the findings from the Romanian lot of subjects with this group of respondents.

390 Respondents have validated some important findings for our specific goals. The distribution of the study subjects is the following : 300 are teachers from the Romanian High Schools from six Counties: Braila, Galati, Vaslui, Mures, Botosani, Maramures; 50 were student teacher on Pedagogy and Special Education Master Degree on the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences; 40 teachers from a parisian High School - Rosny sous Bois, Paris (France).

For the student teachers we used an online questionnaire applied via email, only a part of these were validated (from 70 received questionnaires only 50 were complete and could be part of the interpretation: we have to insist that this instrument was sent to a group address after the exams session not to introduce any Bias elements in the students responses).

The items of the FG instrument were developed, as we already said in the introduction, starting from a *Teaching Job Demands and Resources Model*. The Job Demands–Resources Model was used as the basis of the proposal that there are two parallel processes involved in work-related well-being among teachers, namely an energetical process (i.e., job demands, burnout, ill health) and a motivational

process (i.e., job resources, engagement, organizational commitment). In addition, some cross-links between both processes were hypothesized for all three subjects groups (N =390). The results confirmed the existence of both processes, although the energetical process seems to be more prominent. More specifically, (1) burnout mediated the effect of high job demands on ill health, (2) work engagement mediated the effects of job resources on organizational commitment, and (3) burnout mediated the effects of lacking resources on poor engagement – at this level we introduce the virtual community variable (with the idea of increasing the engagement). The robustness of these findings is underscored by the fact that they were obtained not from a sampled group of subjects.

Thus, the items were structured in three category:

a. Job demands (all the teaching responsibilities are professional capabilities to be educated)
b. Job resources (including Internet materials, Online Teachers Forums and online Professional Development Platforms, all re-grouped under the idea of *virtual community for teachers)*
c. Burnout elements were related with ill/health; organizational commitment; profession commitment; engagement (we introduce some ethical elements useful on our topic, too).

Making a correlation between all these theoretical framework, we have tried to develop a scheme of our empirical study, thus we can present this figure.

Fig. 1*: Teaching Job Demands and Resources Model*
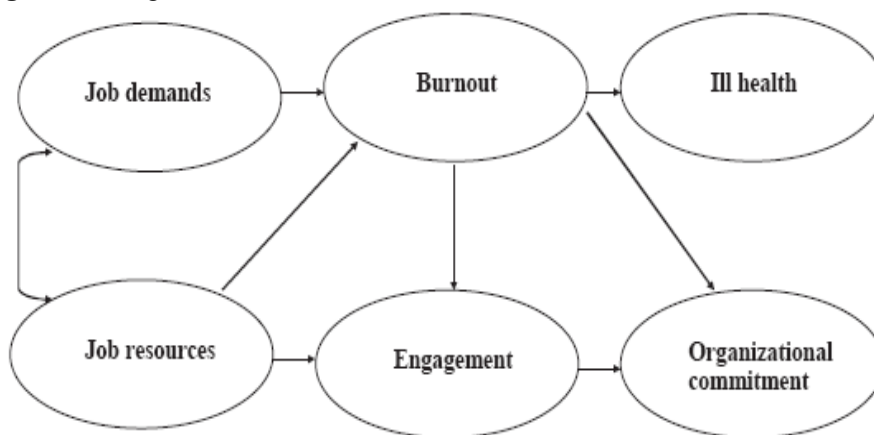
Talking about Burnout (definitions, components, factors) but in realtion with ourdays causes and facilitators including Internet use, we had to make an approach with the *Virtual communities* Paradigm and Models, too (ex. Collaborative learning, Persico et all. 2010).

b. *Findings*

From the beginning of our interpretation of the results work, the main findings from related to our students are the following: our students are not enough prepare in working with pedagogical texts; they know nothing or almost nothing about teaching profession; they don't read enough, they don't write enough, meaning that they are not reflective in their works. On the other hand they seems to be much more prepare for using internet like a source for entertainment and not for their own personal or professional development.

> "I have an account of the yahoo.group of my academic group but I open it twice a week ; my Facebook account and I use twitter, too ...all the time, I can say...using my mobile phone I am online all the time. But it is not ..bad, isn't it ?" (S 23, teacher student, second year)

For the first objective (*to identify which are the dimensions of this burnout emerged from the New Technology use*) we have to present that all respondents (340 teachers) saw the Internet as an important professional and personal development source. For the item of identifying burnout causes on but in the same time, they identified internet like a professional burnout cause, too (100%).

> "I think, in our days, I have to have a connection with my colleagues...And, I am glad that I have an internet connection at home. We discuss a lot on weekends, we debate about some recent documents posted on the Ministry of Education site. And, I have to appreciate that I am using Junior Achievement page for resources, SIVECO and, of course the www.ael.ro and...some lesson plans from www.didactic.ro – very good and updated sites. I have to say, in the end of my answer that.. the most used group for teachers, from my perspective is www.dascali.ro" (Physics Teacher, High School level, 32 years in education)

And the answers from all the respondents were emerged on the same idea – new technologies has to be a part of our lifes but we have to manage the timing and the useful of these. The main observation was that the school management imposed the internet like a teaching resource and the teachers are under this pressure. The both Romanian and French teachers respondents were very precise in indicating some links which were recomanded by the Central School Authorities (Ministry of Education)

There are no differences between the Teachers perception about the Burnout definition, under the Country variable: (ro - *Burnout-ul este un sindrom de epuizare, cinism si eficacitate profesionala scazuta* – was very close to the French teachers perception on definition, which is as much as the same with the known definition offered by the literature, see Maslach et all. 1996)

There are some differences between the Teachers perception of Burnout related with the identification of the dimensions of this burnout emerged from the New

Technology use (mainly *country* variable and the *age of the teachers* variable). The main conclusion about *Job demands (teaching)* and *Job resources* in which we introduce Internet is that we have a direct correlation with ill/health items interpretation*;* about *Job resources* (including Internet) we find a direct correlation with the organizational commitment and ethical teaching principles, in meaning of did not fit better to the data than the proposed model we were used.

c. *Could be a Professional Ethics Course for teachers – a solution?*

There are some limits of our study, and we have to admit that this in only one phase of the results interpretation. For some future studies we need to expand the present study by testing the correlation between objective teaching (job) demands and internet resources on the one hand, and work engagement and teaching values on the other.

For, this phase of studying Internet like a Teachers burnout cause, our main objective was to identify the need for a special attention to the moral component of the pre-service teachers education curricula. The important role of some Professional Ethics Guidelines which have to include references to the new technologies usage is already revealed.

The internet resources for teachers are allowed to use during their practice but they have to protect themselves not to became dependent on those; their creativity and their teaching originality will dispair and not to be involved in developing their own teaching style materials is an alienation starting point.

5. Some conclusions

This article is a result of the feedback and comments received on the first form of this study which was presented on the International Conference *Unity and Diversity in Knowledge Society,* Iasi, in September 2012. We have to admit that this last form of the study could be a new start for other research designs and works for new findings. Thus, a lot of remarks could develop even more important remarks about which is the real face of the internet related with the day by day invasion in our personal and professional life.

The main idea which can be synthetically written is that a good orientation of some Ethical Professional Guidelines could help teachers in prevention burnout (especially this kind of burnout) which is imposed by the virtual world. Under the pressure of internet viewed like an inherent and unlimited space of knowledge and teaching resources, the educators have to deal with finding a good balance between their main role (educating the young generations under the spirit of real and "great" culture, respecting the real values of knowledge) and their needed "updates" of this role (using online resources during their face to face teaching or for distance education).

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