

Академична и стратегическа комуникација
Academic and Strategic Communication

**Education and Academic Communication:
Functions and Intersections**

DOI 10.55206/FKET4524

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Abstract: The crisis in education has been the problem for many decades and entropy in education does exist. The aim is to present a situation in Serbia concerning education and reforms as well as to highlight a new strategy in the process of education. The hypothesis is that entropy could be replaced by synergy and academic honesty could be integrated in the legal system in the domain of education in Serbia. The focus is on several topics: Good practices of scholars from the USA in the field of shared responsibility for student learning as a creative approach to reforms in education are presented. A few examples of negative appearances in the structure and organization in educational institutions in Serbia are analysed too. Some perspectives are described. The first one is related to unity, responsibility, and trust between all parties responsible for the successful education: teachers, students, and parents, local and state representatives. The second one is that without democratic media and objective and true information about the real situation in the domain of education, all efforts toward achieving progress will remain locked in the paper work and empty promises of a bureaucratic way of thinking in the field of education.

Keywords: education, entropy, synergy, academic honesty, knowledge society, media.

Introduction

An investment in knowledge always pays the highest possible interest, said Benjamin Franklin. However, education, not only in Serbia, but in general, has been stagnant for years. As far back as 1967, UNESCO organized an international, intercontinental conference in Williamsburg, America, where the growing crisis in education was pointed out. Such a factual situation was also recognized in our region, so reforms started in 1974 in the former Yugoslavia. Several reforms have been attempted in Serbia from 2001 until today, which have not made any visible progress to this day. Even with a lot of arguments, we can claim that education has regressed compared to that of former Yugoslavia.

Through various documents and programs, the Government of Serbia and the Ministry of Education are trying to harmonize the education system in Serbia with European countries that have harmonized their education system with the development of society as a whole. Unfortunately, bureaucratized state systems and sub-systems have been unable to contain entropy for decades, which results in the devastation of values in important areas of society, where bad taste and variety through the mass media shape people's consciousness. And education, as the most important and sensitive factor in the development of a society, is organized within the framework of such a formed consciousness. Many factors are responsible for such a situation, and it is impossible to cover them all in this paper. Our intention is to look at some of the problems, to point out how the further collapse of our education system could be prevented, to give an example of an attempt to stop entropy in education in general, and to inspire some ideas on which the management of education can lay the foundations for a synergy that is the only healthy mechanism for getting out of the current crisis.

Our initial thesis is that without academic honesty, integrity, free and independent media, there cannot be a successful education and even the most perfect programs cannot be successfully implemented in any society.

One of the definitions of entropy given by Wikipedia is that it is the tendency of a system to spontaneously move to a state of greater disorder. Nikola Kaitez, a philosopher, in his book *Philosophy of Entropy* proposes that entropy be a new philosophical category, and at the same time reminds us that, ignoring it, the powers of entropy develop in society as a destructive energy, which can significantly influence the creative forces of life. [1] If we concentrate on the area of honesty, trust, ethics in relationships, not only in the area of education, but also in other areas, such as culture, sports, politics, economy, we come to an opposite tendency in relation to entropy, which is synergy. So, can the so-called knowledge society, as a new paradigm of today's global society, abolish entropy? What would synergy look like in the fight for better education in Serbia? Without going into institutional problems, the thesis is that the starting point for improving the quality of education in Serbia is a quality relationship between students, teachers and parents, based on mutual respect, understanding, unconditional trust and cooperation. Teachers' tasks are, among other things, to motivate pupils and students for new achievements, while respecting their diversity and nurturing their creative potential, strongly encouraging their aspiration towards self-realization. On the other hand, pupils and students are expected, which according to UNESCO are also the basic goals of education, to learn and apply knowledge, to learn to live in harmony with the community. In order for synergy to develop in the desired direction, it is necessary to include parents and motivate their contribution to that unique relationship. The school is tasked with, precisely in these troubled and uncertain times, first of all abandoning the authoritarian style (learning to be an attentive listener, according to a prescribed pattern, obedient,

submissive), improve education and knowledge of students about the devastating influence of mass media and prepare students to become free and creative individuals.

The influence of Mass media over young people becomes, from day to day, more extensive and creates a new dynamic and life style. Virtual reality becomes dominant space of their daily activities. Unfortunately, it affects, greatly, the domain of education and knowledge. Informatics web created by new technologies creates global way of communication. That new cultural context of communication many modern theorists call computer or internet culture. (Cvetanovic, 2018) [2] Eriksen in his book "The Tyranny of the Moment" (2011) argues that we live in the time of no liberty because every day we receive more than needed information's that directly affects the process of learning. [3] Media manipulation has a very negative influence on young people and their focus on academic learning. They have less and less time for reading and concentration that leads to the lack of critical and argumentative way of thinking. Motivation and ambition are missing as a direct influence of media. The only way to handle media in right way is to focus on media education. However, in Serbia media literacy is not the priority of those who are directly involved in education. Bodrijar (1991) [4] writes that information instead of producing the meaning swallows communication itself leading toward entropy, creating servile and submissive, obedient citizens.

On the other hand, without Mass media progress in the domain of education would stagnate. Free media can be an objective mediator between the creator of policy in the field of education, educators, parents and students.

Students on academic honesty and integrity

In order for these beautiful and inspired words of this excellent pedagogy to be put into practice, Academic Integrity should first be included in the legal framework as the highest value that every individual, as a member of the academic community, must respect and consistently implement at all levels of the educational system. That would be the starting point for the return of trust in the education system in Serbia. That it is a topic that is of great interest to students as well. They advocate that the concept of academic integrity be introduced into the public discourse, which would take concrete measures to prevent violations of this principle. Creating the necessary social awareness about this important, but neglected issue, would significantly prevent inadequate academic behavior in the future and thus significantly affect the improvement of the reputation of school institutions. There is a firm attitude that aims to include the concept of academic integrity in the legislative framework of the Republic of Serbia and the Education and Science Strategy for the period from 2020 to 2027. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) defines academic integrity as the academic community's commitment to core values: honesty, trust, fairness,

respect, responsibility and courage. From these values emerge principles of behavior that enable academic communities to do their work responsibly, openly and with unconditional truth. The Parliament of Montenegro, for example, passed the Law on Academic Integrity in May 2019: “Academic integrity is academic behavior that ensures the preservation of academic honesty, the dignity of the profession, the quality of work and work products, the spirit of equal cooperation with all participants in the academic process, focus on truth as a fundamental value and respect for legal regulations as the basis of the responsibility of members of the academic community, i.e. any behavior that is in accordance with the principles of academic integrity”. [5]

The concept of academic integrity first appeared as a proposal in legislation in Serbia, in 2015 and the proposal of the deputies at that time was to adopt an amendment to the Law on Higher Education under an urgent procedure to harmonize the regulations of the Republic of Serbia with the legal system of the European Union, has not been officially included in any legal framework to date, even though the Republic of Serbia is a member of the ETINED platform. Unfortunately, neither Transparency and Integrity in Education within the Council of Europe, nor the project “Strengthening integrity and the fight against corruption in higher education” which was implemented in Serbia from May 2016 to May 2019 and which belongs to the common program framework of the European of the Union and the Council of Europe (Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey), which was implemented by the Department of Education of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Office of the Council of Europe in Belgrade, did not set a more serious platform for the normative regulation of the concept of academic honesty and integrity.

The determination of many students’ organizations that academic honesty enters our educational system through the big doors is strong, because they firmly believe that following the example of Montenegro, we should include academic honesty in the legislative framework, because this turns social rules into legal norms, which are binding to everyone. What speaks in support of this is also the fact that the European Union monitors the progress of countries that are in the process of negotiations on joining the EU, among which is Serbia, and its positive attitude towards Montenegro as the first country in the region and beyond that regulates issues of academic integrity by a special law. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development should be the leader in this process in providing guidelines to all institutions, in the direction of institutionalization and implementation of this important principle. They go further and ask higher education institutions that have disciplinary policies to be much more transparent in providing data on the incidence of disciplinary violations, as well as analysis that can help us understand how deeply rooted the problem is in the academic community. This proposal aims to legally recognize the concept of academic integrity, as an obvious value whose respect protects the independence

of universities, faculties and the wider academic community, but also prevents the possible politicization of principles. Also, a specific initiative of the competent ministry should institutionalize the discussion on the issue of academic integrity as a mandatory topic: conversations with members of the academic community (through mandatory courses for students, panel discussions, debates, and especially including mass media to the extent so that every member of the academic community is familiar with the concept, forms and importance of this principle. In the preparation of the law, they suggest, universities should be included through the delegation of representatives of the Conference of Universities of Serbia (KONUS) as well as representatives of the highest student representative body of the Student Conference of Universities of Serbia (SKONUS), the non-governmental sector, organizations dealing with educational policies, but also independent experts. In this very crucial movement in mobilizing all segments of society, Mass media, in full, should be the leading force. To be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, this kind of initiative and determination of all segments of society with Media should be regarded as the engine force showing that academic honesty become much more visible, uniting all sides in progress of knowledge and education, on each level of responsibility. It can energize the whole society that a lot more can and must be done in order to change the situation and take a new path, its original path, as Finland, for example, a small and poor country once, and now among the most developed, a country that everyone points to as a country that has transformed the entire country with its reforms in education and given it guidelines in the direction of development and well-being for all its citizens. The positive and open attitude of Mass media has established the democratic approach to all segments of education, from academic honesty to the freedom of non-bureaucratic approach to knowledge.

We would like to emphasize that similar problems in the field of education also plague many more developed countries. The author of this paper lived in America for 18 years and has rich experience with all levels of education in that country, from primary, secondary, basic academic studies to postgraduate studies. The author personally taught in elementary and high school (an all African-American school), was an assistant at the University of Illinois, where he received his doctorate, and later taught at Harper College in Palatine, on the outskirts of Chicago. If we compare the education system in Serbia and the US, we can conclude that both, each in its own way, have their own specificities and advantages, but also weaknesses. One important segment that separates the two systems of education is the cooperation between the school faculty, students and parents that is based on precisely established rules where new solutions are explored to overcome the crisis in the field of education. Communication with science, holding seminars, debates. With media covering and following every aspect of innovations in education. Everything is much more transparent. In Serbia, the connection between educational institutions and ministries is based

on documents, on “paper relations”. The media generally only inform about what is happening in educational institutions, without delving deeper into the issues, without investigative journalism. The Minister of Education and Science very rarely appears in Media talking about the deep crisis of education in Serbia. In the US, on the contrary, this connection is much stronger, the living word is more present and the conduct of dialogue and debate is more present. Diplomatic silence reigns in Serbia... No one wants to start an open conversation because everyone is minding their own business. Almost everyone knows that something is wrong “in the state of Denmark,” but everyone puts their head in the sand, and the tide of entropy is rising more and more....

Unambiguous vision of education

The book “Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning”, by two young authors from Wisconsin, Anne Conzemius and Jan O’Neill, lecturers at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, raises many new and original ideas. [6] They wrote a valuable book in which they tried to lay the foundation of healing the education system in America. They pose a basic question to the teacher, student and school principal, dean, secretary: Who is responsible for students’ knowledge? Each of them individually said I, starting from that basic responsibility that comes from within. Awareness of sharing responsibility is, as they say, a path, a process, which must heal the very idea of education and knowledge. Only when the importance of original knowledge is fully understood, when all members of society understand their responsibility, will there be a renaissance of education. Therefore, they say that first of all it is necessary to determine the focus and mission, which must be clearly determined. Argumentatively, they claim that a precisely defined mission, today in education, is more important than ever and that we should stop with phrases about developing lifelong learning, creating conditions for learning, publishing innovative textbooks, which is certainly very important, but for once, focus on the end product of learning. What have children concretely learned, and even more importantly, how to approach the problem if all children do not meet those expectations. All of this requires an unequivocal vision. Also, they suggest that everything that has been or is currently present in the education system should create something that is an entirely new approach to education, quoting Proust who wrote that “the true path to inquiry is not to seek new landscapes, but to change look at the world”. As one of the strategic plans, the authors mention mutual, open and sincere cooperation of all those who participate in the process of education. In such an environment, the authors emphasize, people feel that they are respected, highly valued and warmly accepted. The system gets the best part from them when there is a sense of common mission and goals. In such environments, we talk openly, not behind closed doors. And when things don’t

go as they should, they don't look for the culprit on duty, but openly discuss the system that failed and find common solutions to eliminate the problems most effectively. In such an environment, everyone tries to build a culture of dialogue and debate, because in dialogue everyone wins.

Behavior based on self-interest or the interest of the group, the "tribe", does not lead to results, but only to the collapse of the system. Conflicts that are based on the interests of rival groups and clans or personal interests, where each "tribe" tries to maximize its resources and satisfy its personal interests, without caring for the welfare of all and higher interests, only lead to entropy, and no progress. Leadership in education implies a community of those who mutually openly discuss the vision, goals, mission, progress and effectiveness in the process of building a stable course of education where the basic agenda would be to create a culture of building leadership capacities and equal responsibility. They understood very well that it is necessary to fundamentally change the current system of work in the field of education, which acted according to the principle of urgency, quick and hasty decisions, and that the only way to get out of the crisis is to adopt the principle of long-term stable planning and constant checking of what is planned and the collective responsibility of all participants in the education process. In that atmosphere of mutual cooperation, a system is created where everyone who participates in the education system gives their full and responsible contribution. They not only state that the situation is very serious and that the crisis in the education system is great, especially in the field of state education, already provide constructive and concrete plans on how to achieve such an education that has only been talked about and experimented with for years. The book of these young and progressive educators was well received by the public and by media and the ideas from the book were widely discussed on media platforms all over the US.

The bureaucratic dinosaur of the knowledge and media society

To interpret the attitude of Habermas, when he cites the opinion of Jaspers that every institution can function properly only as a living form and embodies the idea inherent in it. As soon as the spirit leaves it, the institution petrifies into something that is merely mechanical, like an organism without a soul, which decays into dead matter" (Habermas, 1997). [7] Mile Nenadić, in his text "Crisis of the Serbian Society of Knowledge and Education" about the crisis of education in Serbia, which was published in the National Interest (Nenadić, 2011) [8], mentions Jaspers in the context of what is happening in the so-called knowledge society, and in particular, quotes Asman who says that once defined education "as an agreement of a group of people about which texts from the canon of high culture must be read". Nenadic underlines that more than ever before, society's prosperity depends on how countries educate and train their citizens. Speaking

about the knowledge society, he refers to the education reforms in Serbia that are created in the name of the knowledge society, which directs state universities to style themselves in a marketing way or to transform into postmodern “knowledge factories”, that produce and sell knowledge that goes out to the public market. If they have nothing else to offer, he continues, they sell educational and scientific services, which means programs, lectures, exams and finally – diplomas. Private faculties, as Nenadić claims, have accepted the role of “knowledge boutiques” and offer their skillfully designed and well-packaged teaching programs and courses for big money (Nenadić, 2011). [9] He speaks with irony about the so-called “knowledge society”, about a bureaucratized monster without a spirit that has reincarnated into society and is becoming stronger and more resistant. He expects from the advocates of the “knowledge society” free-thinking, enlightened and argumentative-critically oriented, educated people who know how to think for themselves and who are also brave and willing to articulate their views clearly and loudly, and it turned out that they advocate only a mere political-economic and market-capitalist label (label), a self-indulgent brand (brand or logo). If a distinction is made between the organization of education and the importance of education, whereby organization is meant as the institutional framework, order, certificates, curricula and teaching contents, and under the importance of education, the meaning that connects individuals with their education, then we can say, quoting Beck: “The organization and the importance of education have separated from each other and become independent in relation to each other.” (Beck, 2000). [10] Baudrillard in his essay “The Last Tango of Values” warned that “education functions as a global simulacrum: students simulate knowledge, teachers give lectures, and faculties give diplomas.” Because there is an end for value and for work, but it does not exist for the simulacrum of value and work. The world of simulation is too real and excessive and no proof of reality will end it anymore.” (Baudrillard, 1991). [11] He goes on to speak with anxiety about the future of knowledge acquisition and the fact that at the faculties of the “knowledge society” half-education is achieved which continues and what is most painful, it can last indefinitely (Baudrillard, 1991). [12] University must return, if it is not too late for that, to the apolitical liberal idea of education, to the inner individualistic training guided by the truth. However, as Nenadić states, knowledge managers are convinced that knowledge is a resource that, like any other raw material, can be bought and sold, accumulated, imported, exported.

He further states his opinion that without much deeper involment of Mass media, in all segments, the reforms of education, from elementary to highest, cannot be achieved. The luck of information and the implementation of investigative journalism, only can deepen the gap between the bureaucratic approach to the “knowledge society” and education of a free, liberal and democratic society.

Elections

The institutions of higher education are overwhelmed with many substantial problems. One of them, among many others, is the system of selection for academic positions at faculties. There are many examples of prominent and deserving professors who, for political, interpersonal or who knows what reasons, are prevented from advancing and being elected to a higher position or even lose their job due to non-election. The media informs us about this from time to time in the sensational manner of the yellow press, and not as a very important problem that shakes the basic foundations of higher education institutions. The procedure itself and the selection criteria for higher education are not methodologically well established. Regardless of the fact that it is declaratively spoken about the importance of teachers' duty to provide a contribution to the social community outside the teacher's desk, the importance of the quality of teaching, intellectual, pedagogical, spiritual and human qualities of candidates, in practice, in the selection process, is not subject to any assessment. Bureaucratically, stubbornly, only published works classified by M categories are looked at, although even those criteria are very imprecisely determined and ambiguous. The opinion given by student organizations is formal and not subject to a deeper analysis. This sends a clear message that the most important thing is to meet formal, rigid criteria, and the quality of lectures, the integrity of teachers and the unconditional commitment to the knowledge of students and their overall progress are not taken into consideration. And that is why many teachers, who have "captured" the system, concentrate all their energy on publishing papers according to M forms in order to be sure that they will "pass the exam", be promoted to a higher position. And it is the major task of University professors. A similar mistake occurs when hiring new staff at faculties where there is no interview, as for example in the US, where the committee will include both a psychologist and a pedagogue, for example, but the admission of new teachers and assistants is done only through the principle of paperwork. Critical thought among students is suppressed under the influence of media content, social networks and passive reception of information, which especially contributes to the decline of interest, but also the urge for a deeper analytical understanding of reality. It creates an invisible pressure on all those who think differently. Demotivation towards learning becomes, unfortunately, a way of thinking and it is a great social danger. The corona virus pandemic has shown that teachers often do not have the skills to work in conditions of uncertainty when the quality of work inevitably declines.

In the process of investigating many wrong doings, in the field of education, the media can help a lot and devote themselves more seriously and fundamentally to education. Especially since the United Nations Development Program determined that global human development, as of June 1, 2020 is on a downward trajectory for the first time since that program was introduced in 1990.

Shouldn't that seriously sound the alarm for all competent institutions, but also for every individual in society? A large number of students go to master's studies and doctoral studies for the reason of buying time. And most importantly, many do not have the level of knowledge that qualifies them to enroll in postgraduate studies. Students, who complete doctoral studies, if they are not already within the educational system, do not have clear guidelines on what to do next, because academic studies are not directed towards jobs in the non-academic sector. Where to go with a PhD degree? And everyone closes their eyes, under the pretext of not complaining, because everyone is minding their own business.

Also, there are not enough mentors from our Diaspora who would make a great contribution with their experiences from the environments they come from, and there are reasons for this known to everyone. The system of higher education in Serbia is quite closed, because the number of joint study programs with foreign universities could be much higher, as the enrollment of a larger number of foreign students. Teachers' mobility, even before the pandemic, was not sufficiently developed, for many known and unknown reasons, ignorance of foreign languages, insecurity, incompetence or simply academic passivity. The right strategy for attracting the most talented students to enroll in doctoral studies has not yet been found. The alumni institution, which is very developed in the USA, for example, in Serbia, does not function in the same way. The problem of the outflow of the most talented and educated young people is an agenda that has not been properly resolved for decades. Dilution of community values at all levels, cronyism, violation of professional ethics of anomy, which Durkheim [13] and Weber [14] wrote about, and especially Auguste Comte [15], who recognizes the danger of society slipping into entropy and general chaos. Let's just remember the Index affair in Kragujevac, Serbia where the accused of corruption have not been sanctioned to this day, while the whole case has already been forgotten, and some other affairs that are uncritically and sensationally discussed in the media. And we could talk about other anomalies in the system of education in Serbia, but the effect of media involvement in this discussion would be much more effective.

By way of conclusion

The assumption is that partnership is needed in education, not autocracy. Educational institutions could take responsibility for education to become a “specific form of cultural memory” of a people. It is obligatory to gradually build mutual trust of faculty management, teachers, parents, the Ministry, the local community, and the different social communities. The next way is to use objective communicative approaches, informing citizens about the actual situation. Media as well as social networks could play a key role during the process of establishing and organizing communication campaigns about reforms in education. Rethinking the role of educational institutions and media concerning synergy and strategic collaboration between them are the next approaches.

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- [14] Maximilian Karl Emil Weber (1864 – 1920) was a German sociologist, historian, jurist and political economist. He has contribution to theory of the development of modern Western society. Weber's ideas influences under social theory and research. Weber is one of the establishers of sociology, along with Émile Durkheim.
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Manuscript was submitted: 25.02.2023.

Double Blind Peer Reviews: from 26.02.2023 till 15.03.2023.

Accepted: 16.03.2023.

Број 55 на сп. „Реторика и комуникации“, април 2023 г. се издава с финансовата помош на Фонд научни истражувања, договор № КП-06-НП4/72 од 16 декември 2022 г.

Issue 55 of the Rhetoric and Communications Journal (April 2023) is published with the financial support of the Scientific Research Fund, Contract No. KP-06-NP4/72 of December 16, 2022.