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The contributions of Marshall McLuhan to the field of educommunication: dialogues with Freirean thought

As contribuições de Marshall McLuhan para o campo da Educomunicação: diálogos com o pensamento freiriano

Las contribuciones de Marshall McLuhan al campo de la Educomunicación: diálogos con el pensamiento freireano

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Abstract

According to Kuskis and Logan (2013), one of Marshall McLuhan's main concerns was education, although he is not widely recognized for his studies in this field. Despite having published only two books specifically on the subject, his ideas can be accessed through lectures, interviews, and other media appearances. Based on detailed research conducted in libraries in Canada, McLuhan's home country, this paper aims to identify possible connections between the ideas of Freire and McLuhan, as well as to explore the aspects that distinguish them. By applying the Laws of Media (McLuhan, M.; McLuhan, E., 1988) to Freirean and McLuhanian thought, considering the classroom as a medium, it is concluded that McLuhan can be seen as an educommunicator and that his studies offer significant contributions to the field of Educommunication.

Keywords: Education; Communication; Educommunication; Media Ecology; media.

Resumo

Segundo Kuskis e Logan (2013), uma das principais preocupações de Marshall McLuhan era a educação, embora ele não seja amplamente reconhecido por seus estudos nessa área. Apesar de ter publicado apenas dois livros sobre o tema, seus pensamentos podem ser acessados por meio de palestras, entrevistas e manifestações em diversas outras mídias. Com base em uma pesquisa detalhada realizada em bibliotecas no Canadá, país de McLuhan, este artigo tem como objetivo identificar as possíveis conexões nas ideias de Freire e McLuhan, bem como explorar os aspectos que os diferenciam. Aplicando as *Laws of Media* (McLuhan, M.; McLuhan, E., 1988) aos pensamentos freiriano e mcluhaniano tendo em conta a sala de aula enquanto um meio, conclui-se que McLuhan apresenta um perfil de educador e que seus estudos oferecem contribuições significativas para o campo da Educomunicação.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Comunicação; Educomunicação; Ecologia das Mídias; mídias.



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Resumen

Según Kuskis y Logan (2013), una de las principales preocupaciones de Marshall McLuhan era la educación, aunque no sea ampliamente reconocido por sus estudios en este campo. A pesar de haber publicado solo dos libros sobre el tema, sus ideas pueden encontrarse en conferencias, entrevistas y diversas otras manifestaciones mediáticas. Basado en una investigación detallada realizada en bibliotecas de Canadá, país de origen de McLuhan, este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar las posibles conexiones entre las ideas de Freire y McLuhan, así como explorar los aspectos que los diferencian. Al aplicar las *Laws of Media* (McLuhan, M.; McLuhan, E., 1988) al pensamiento freireano y mcluhaniano, considerando el aula como un medio, se concluye que McLuhan presenta un perfil de educador y que sus estudios ofrecen contribuciones significativas al campo de la Educomunicación.

Palabras clave: Educación; Comunicación; Educomunicación; Ecología de los Medios; medios.

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Introduction

The relationship between education and communication is a recurring theme in academic debates that seek to understand how knowledge is constructed amid cultural, social, and technological transformations. In this context, two 20th-century thinkers stand out: Paulo Freire and Marshall McLuhan. Although they came from different backgrounds — the former, a Brazilian educator committed to critical pedagogy and social transformation; the latter, a Canadian who investigated the impacts of media on culture and cognition — both shared a concern with the ways in which we learn and relate to the world.

Paulo Freire (1921–1997), author of the classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), advocated for an education based on dialogue and emancipation, in which students cease to be passive recipients and become active subjects in the learning process. His ideas are widely used in studies on Educommunication, have influenced educational practices in different countries, and have established him as one of the greatest educational thinkers of the 20th century.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980), recognised as one of the founders of the Media Ecology field, became famous for analysing the cultural, social and cognitive effects of media, coining expressions such as “the medium is the message” and “global village”. Although he is widely recognized for his studies on technology and communication, McLuhan also reflected on education, despite having published only two books specifically devoted to the subject: *Report on Project in Understanding Media* (1960) and *City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* (1977). In addition to these works, his lectures, interviews and archived materials — now preserved in libraries at the University of Toronto and Library and Archives Canada (LAC) — highlight his pedagogical practice and his interest in transforming the classroom into a space for exploration.

In this sense, identifying similarities and differences between Freire and McLuhan allows us to broaden the horizons of studies in Educommunication and, consequently, Media Ecology. This article, which is part of a doctoral thesis defended in 2025 in the Graduate Programme in Communication at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (PPGCOM/UFJF), proposes to examine these connections. The work was carried out with the supervision of Professor Dr. Robert K. Logan, McLuhan’s intellectual partner between 1974 and 1980, who kindly made available to the author the manuscript of his work co-authored with Alex Kuskis, *Culture, Technology and Education: McLuhan as Educational Theorist*. In their manuscript, one of the authors’ objectives is to bring together what McLuhan wrote about education. In this article, we provide an update on these considerations about media and education and expose the potential for enrichment of educommunication studies.

As a field of mediation (Soares, 2000), Educommunication establishes natural links with related areas, according to the purposes of each project/research. Thus, it becomes possible to articulate its contributions in perspectives that converge, for example, with Media Education, which, incidentally, also combines the perspectives of education, media, and technology; however, without having the same *modus operandi* (Consani, 2024).

Media theorist and (edu)communicator

As mentioned, despite having reflected deeply on learning processes and the role of, Marshall McLuhan is rarely recognized as an education theorist (Kuskis; Logan, 2013). This perception stems from the fact that his critiques went beyond the limits of his time, questioning educational practices and systems of different generations and countries (Kuskis, 2011). Interestingly, something similar also occurs with Paulo Freire, who, although widely cited, is not equally recognised by some groups.

Even though McLuhan is not usually cited as an immediate reference in educational studies, his vision was clear: it is not possible to study education without studying communication (McLuhan; Hutchon; McLuhan, 1977). For him, the “total environment” is the true teacher (McLuhan, 1967, LP), meaning that learning extends beyond the boundaries of the school to encompass all forms of media and everyday life itself. This movement, in his view, broke the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid and “broke down the walls” of the classroom (McLuhan, 1960).

A recurring concern in McLuhan’s work was student engagement in the classroom. For the author, even young children should have the opportunity to build their own learning spaces and experiment with their own methods. This does not imply transferring full responsibility for learning to the student, nor blaming



them for any difficulties. On the contrary, it is up to the educator to arouse curiosity, stimulating the active exploration of knowledge in a continuous movement of exploration.

Education on all levels has to move from packaging to probing, from the mere conveying of data to the experimental discovery of new dimensions of experience. The search will have to be for patterns of experience and discovery of principles of organization which have universal application, not for facts. [...] It is the orientation of the society that matters, and our whole world, in shifting from the old mechanical forms to the new electronic feedback forms, has already shifted from data packaging to probing of patterns (McLuhan, 1966, p. 38).

Furthermore, for McLuhan, “[...] teachers need to be not the source of information, but insight” (McLuhan, 2003, p. 10). This means that knowledge should not be understood as something transmitted exclusively by the teacher, but constructed in a process in which the teacher acts as a guide, not as an absolute authority.

Despite his public notoriety and the frequency with which he gave interviews, McLuhan stated that he did not seek to offer definitive explanations, but rather to explore ideas, positioning himself as a facilitator of learning, someone who helps students develop new perspectives. This view brings his reflections closer to the practice of educommunication, in which educommunicators act as mediators, stimulating transformations in the way media messages are received and contributing to the formation of critical and participatory citizens.

In this context, Soares (2011) describes some fundamental characteristics of those who play the role of educommunicator. These are: openness to dialogue with other people; ability to manage conflicts; ability to contextualise issues and propose solutions; and willingness to take on collective responsibilities. These agents are also involved in discussions on topics such as sustainability, ethics, human rights, and the democratisation of media, defending a concept in which the student occupies the role of protagonist and the educator acts as a mediator (Consani, 2024). Educommunication, in this sense, articulates activist practices in favour of social causes and is concerned with the multiplicity of interfaces between education and communication. Its goal is to foster interactive spaces that promote diversity of voices and collective participation, such as NGOs, socio-environmental projects, informal education actions, and other initiatives.

McLuhan’s own trajectory reveals experiences that dialogue with this perspective. Among them, we highlight one in particular: during the research period in Toronto, Logan stated to the author of this article that McLuhan did not characterize himself as a political activist, despite maintaining a close relationship with the then–Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, to whom he often offered advice. Still, this did not prevent him from taking a stand on relevant social issues. Logan recalls, for example, that both participated in a rally in front of the Ontario Parliament against the construction of the Spadina Expressway — a planned expressway that would cut through downtown Toronto, but which was ultimately not completed in the central area. McLuhan was actively involved in this campaign, alongside students, businesspeople and various social groups, as part of the *Stop Spadina – Save Our City Coordinating Committee*. The project became a symbolic milestone in the tension between corporate interests and human needs in relation to the environment.

Although such initiatives do not strictly constitute environmental educommunication projects led by the Canadian, his work reveals an activist involvement that dialogues with the field. The connection between education and activism, as Jenkins *et al.* (2016) point out, does not imply equivalence between the two concepts, but it does show that stimulating civic engagement is an essential part of educational objectives. The impact of this episode is discussed in *The Bad Trip: The Untold Story of the Spadina Expressway*, by David and Nadie Nowlan (1970), which examines the ramifications of the project. In it, McLuhan is quoted as warning that Toronto would be “committing suicide” if it allowed the expressway to be built, reinforcing his criticism that the interests involved were far removed from the real needs of the population.

McLuhan’s contributions to communication-mediated education go further, highlighting a convergent educational culture characterised by the full involvement of the student, the identification of patterns and creative exploration. This perspective represents a shift from the traditional model of teaching, in which the teacher is seen as the main source of answers and responsible for “instructing” the students under their tutelage.

A milestone in this journey was the *Report on Project in Understanding New Media* (1960), considered one of the first studies to receive federal funding for research in instructional technologies. The support,

granted by the National Defence Education Act (NDEA), was linked to the need to strengthen education in science, technology, and foreign languages in response to the impact of the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik (Acland, 2014).

Shortly before the completion of this report, McLuhan was already experimenting with proposals for educational renewal. In a letter sent to Walter J. Ong (also a scholar of Media Ecology) in 1957, he reported having taught a course for 30 secondary school teachers on media grammar (Molinari; McLuhan; Toye, 1987). In another letter, addressed to Claude Bissell in 1960, he mentioned his participation as a speaker at the *Cincinnati Conference of DAVI (Department of Audio-Visual Instruction)*, promoted by the National Education Association. James W. Carey (2007), in analysing this manuscript, notes that it could be considered one of the most heterodox reports ever presented to the authorities in Washington. Furthermore, he points out that McLuhan stood out as one of the first intellectuals to treat television seriously, seeing it not only as a vehicle for transmitting content, but as a resource capable of expanding educational possibilities.

McLuhan was trying to convince the Office of Education that his developing ideas could be the lever of reform in the educational system, moving it from a dependence on classical literature to an engagement with the “new media,” the media which formed and carried the real culture of students (Carey, 2007, p. 84).

Also called “Project 69”, the purpose of the report was described as follows:

Project 69 in *Understanding Media* proposed to provide an approach to media and a syllabus for teaching the nature and effects of media in secondary schools. A new tactic was used, namely to consider not so much the constituents of the “content” of the media, as their effects. [...] My objectives were: (a) to explain the character of a dozen media, illustrating the dynamic symmetries of their operation on man and society, (b) to do this in a syllabus usable in secondary schools. (Secondary schools were chosen as offering students who had not in their own lives become aware of any vested interest in acquired knowledge. They have very great experience of media, but no habits of observation or critical awareness. Yet they are the best teachers of media to teachers, who are otherwise unreachable.) (McLuhan, 1960, p. 1 - 4).

McLuhan would later revisit and expand on these reflections when he introduced the notion of the “classroom without walls” (1960). The expression summarises the idea that much of the learning process takes place outside the formal school environment, mediated by magazines, radio, television and other forms of mass communication.

Freire meets McLuhan in the classroom

Paulo Freire was at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto in the late 1970s, where he taught a six-week summer course. Despite this geographical proximity, he never met McLuhan in person. Furthermore, there are no records of Freire citing *City as Classroom* (published in 1977) or any other work by the Canadian in his seminars or interviews. It is not possible to say with certainty whether they read each other’s works, but an analysis of the approximately 6,000 volumes that make up Herbert Marshall McLuhan’s working library suggests that this did not occur. It is important to note, however, that this collection does not represent the entirety of his personal collection. After his death in 1980, the books were removed from his office at St. Michael’s College, boxed and stored in different locations. In 2013, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto acquired the collection of Eric McLuhan, the thinker’s son.

This collection reveals the Canadian philosopher’s wide-ranging interests, which ranged from Catholicism to technology, media and the environment. There are no records of titles by Paulo Freire, although the book *Tomorrow’s Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture*, by Rubem Alves (1933-2014), a renowned Brazilian educator, theologian and writer, is included. Nevertheless, there are indications that McLuhan knew Freire. The Canadian used to collect newspaper and magazine clippings on various topics, many of them sent by acquaintances, and today preserved at Lac. Among these materials is an article from



Monday Morning magazine (February 1972) entitled *Paulo Freire*. In it, the philosopher noted the phrase: “For Education and Culture in the Electronic Age.”

Despite their different trajectories, both shared the view that teachers should not occupy a hierarchical position superior to that of students, but rather act as guides in the learning process. The difference lies in the fact that Freire was more emphatic in putting his theories into practice, developing transformative pedagogical practices in dialogue with diverse communities.

According to Bomfim *et al.* (2019), Freire also identified the media as a structuring force in society, capable of imposing norms and values and, at the same time, limiting the critical formation of individuals due to the bias of much of the content conveyed. For this reason, he advocated a liberating education, capable of promoting critical reflection on media messages. This concern appears in *Starting From Nina: The Politics of Learning* (1978), when Freire states that technology is generating a new type of literacy. According to the author, many people can read, but do not necessarily understand what they read or hear. Hence the importance of investigating both how these skills are formed and why they should be developed, as well as recognising that the media are not neutral. Although he does not use the expression directly, Freire points to a conception of media education, considering, of course, the means available in the late 1970s. McLuhan has a similar approach. For him,

[...] for centuries, the only kind of skill or grammar or literacy that was taught was that connected with reading and writing itself. All the other skills and technologies or the environments were accepted as merely environmental and taken for granted. Today because these things have stepped up in many of their developments... many of their manifestations, we have to understand the language and grammars in many media. And it is rather fantastic, isn't it? When you think of the number of hours that people spend in front of a film or a television when they know nothing about the process of making these things or nothing about the means available for them to express themselves. So, the grammar of media has become a new area of stress in education (McLuhan, 1964, 57m26s).

Freire provokes us to reflect on technologies, questioning in whose favour and for what purpose they are used, as well as against whom or what they can act. His position is not one of rejection of technological advancement, but of caution: it is essential to understand that technology should never be considered neutral. In his own words: “television says to people: “right now, be silent, and open your heads to be filled by me” (and starts speaking). We don't talk to others; we cannot receive friends because we have soap operas to watch. We believe in the news which we listen to” (Freire, 1974, 27m 48s).

This reflection echoes McLuhan's concept of “the medium is the message”. In his words, no medium is neutral, as it acts directly on people, shaping their perceptions as if massaging their brains. The difference is that, while Freire emphasises the bias present in media content, McLuhan focuses his attention on the bias of the medium itself, understanding that each communication technology shapes and encodes reality in a different way, thus influencing the message transmitted. In other words, each medium not only transmits information, but reveals and communicates a unique facet of reality, offering specific perspectives and illuminating dimensions that would otherwise remain hidden (Carpenter, 1960).

The Laws of Media and the classroom as a medium

While preparing a second edition of *Understanding Media*, one of his most famous books, which addresses the effects of communication technologies on society and culture, McLuhan began to sketch out ideas that would give rise to a new book. In this process, he and his son, Eric McLuhan, reflected on what could be common to all media. The first insight was directly related to the subtitle of *Understanding Media*, “the extensions of man”, indicating that all technology functions as an extension of the human being.

These reflections culminated in the so-called four Laws of Media (LOM), or Tetrad, conceived as an empirical methodology for identifying the properties and effects that media technologies and artefacts have on us. For Marshall and Eric, these laws can be applied to any human creation, be it physical equipment, software, a literary style or a philosophical system (McLuhan, M.; McLuhan, E., 1988). Their construction is based on the Figure/Ground logic. The term can be understood as a tool to help discover structures and properties of

specific situations: a background may be “hidden” because it has become so familiar to our eyes that we no longer pay attention to its existence. This perspective has the potential to contribute to questioning subjects’ political and social positioning — an action that is central to a process of conscientization (*conscientização*) through which transformed reality reveals the emergence of new subjects. LOMs are organised around a set of structuring questions:

1. Enhancement – What does the medium/artifact enhance or intensify?
2. Reversal – What does it become when taken to the limits of its potential?
3. Obsolescence – What previous condition is removed from the focus of attention by the new medium?
4. Retrieval – What does it retrieve that had previously become obsolete?

According to McLuhan and Powers (1992), the use of LOM allows us to identify patterns that may not be evident at first glance, requiring careful analysis of the artefact in relation to its context. In this study, we apply them to the “classroom” as the object of analysis. Using a probing approach, we reflect on the ideas of Freire and McLuhan and construct a comparative table.

Based on research into the principles of both authors, it was possible to identify several connections. Bomfim and Martins created a line of research entitled *Interfaces between Educommunication and studies on Marshall McLuhan* within the scope of the *Grupo de Estudos & Pesquisas em Educomunicação* (CNPq/UFSJ). The work *Conexões entre Educomunicação e Marshall McLuhan* (Bomfim; Martins, 2024) was the first publication dedicated to such epistemological reflection; however, the publication offers only a bibliographic parallel involving authors frequently cited in studies in the field. Based on these analyses, we found that the parallels drawn between the authors focus mainly on the educommunication bias present in the Canadian’s ideas. In the interpretation of Table 1, some issues draw attention for establishing points of convergence between the authors, with particular emphasis on the Figure/Ground relationship (McLuhan, M.; Hutchon; McLuhan, E., 1977) observed throughout the reflections. With regard to the confluences, we highlight:

1) The liberation and emancipation of students: the central concept in Freire’s ideas is conscientization (*conscientização*). Although he was not the first to discuss the term, Freire (1979) gives it a meaning linked to liberating practice and a critical approach to reality. For the Brazilian educator, the more conscientized we become, the more capable we are of acting as both announcers and denouncers, by virtue of the commitment to transformation that we undertake. (Freire, 1979). Therefore, conscientization entails an action that denounces structures of dehumanization while simultaneously announcing pathways toward (re)humanization.

While Freire emphasizes the “liberation” of the student, McLuhan addresses the idea of “liberation” in a different sense. For Freire, to “liberate” implies freeing oneself from something, whereas in McLuhan’s view, to “liberate” refers to becoming free through perceptual and cognitive expansion. For both authors, liberating or emancipating the student entails fostering the development of critical consciousness and strengthening intellectual autonomy in relation to the influences of media. It is important to note that Freire’s “environment” is socio-institutional, political, and economic, whereas in McLuhan, the environment is predominantly technological.

2) The process of exploration and prioritising the formulation of questions over answers: For McLuhan, stimulus is intrinsically linked to exploration. In his view, discussions about school and education revolve around investigation and questioning. In one of his statements, the author asks: “why is knowledge so easy backwards and so hard forward? [...] Why is it so hard to discover?” (McLuhan, 1970, 39min30s). This leads to a central point: formulating questions is a more complex task than presenting answers, since there are multiple possible solutions to the same problem, but the proper formulation of the question requires questioning the environment itself and the researcher’s condition in relation to the object under investigation.

According to McLuhan (1970), many scientists find it difficult to project themselves beyond their problems precisely because the accumulation of knowledge can act as a barrier. In other words, an overreliance on established theories constrains creativity and imagination. This concept is similar to Freire’s proposal regarding teaching methodology. Freire argued that educators should not bring a rigid, predefined teaching structure to the classroom, but rather construct it based on their contact with the class. It is in this dialogue that the “Ground” is revealed, making it possible to identify the paths to follow. It is a dynamic in which Figure and Ground are articulated, since the “Ground” always conditions the way the “Figure” is perceived (McLuhan, M.; Hutchon; McLuhan, E., 1977).

Table 1 - Laws of Media considering the classroom as a medium

LAWS OF MEDIA	MCLUHAN	FREIRE
Enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student liberation (through perceptual and cognitive expansion); • Encouragement of student creativity and autonomy; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorations; • Technological immersion/Media Literacy (in a broad understanding of the term “media”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student liberation/Conscientization; • Encouragement of student creativity and autonomy; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue; • Literacy.
Reversal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Global Village; • Recognition and discovery of patterns; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grammar of media; • The total environment as the primary teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and adult literacy; • Critical subjects capable of social transformation; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grammar of the Portuguese language; • The teacher teaches and also learns in the process.
Obsolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conventional model of education, particularly in light of the adoption of a greater variety of media in the classroom; • The traditional model of educators (who should instead act as “guides”); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of neutrality; • The student as a passive receptacle of knowledge, based on the transfer or deposit of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conventional model of education, incorporating students’ everyday language and themes into classroom practice; • The traditional model of educators (who should instead act as “guides”); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of neutrality; • Authority and authoritarianism; • The student as a passive repository of knowledge, based on the transfer or deposit of information.
Retrieval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions rather than answers; • Ground in relation to Figure; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical consciousness; • Broader engagement and greater student interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning rigidly hierarchical social and political positions; • Protection against ideological influence; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical consciousness; • Action in a mode of dialectical tension and reflection.

Source: prepared by the author (2025)

Furthermore, in his problematising pedagogy, Freire (2000) emphasises that the role of the teacher is to stimulate the problematisation of the reality experienced by the student, favouring their critical insertion into the context. This process presupposes the valorisation of curiosity and the formulation of questions as tools for emancipation. Thus, understanding the social position of individuals and moving towards emancipation requires raising critical questions about the environment in which one is inserted. Attentive observation and the exercise of exploration open space for new questions.

3) The role of the teacher as a “guide”: in the Brazilian public education system, the traditional classroom layout usually features desks arranged in tight rows, accommodating classes that can exceed 40 students. In this scenario, many teachers find themselves forced to devote much of their effort to maintaining discipline. In this context, educators may end up reproducing the logic of “banking education”, as outlined by Freire. In this model, students are led to occupy a passive position, devoid of questioning, which, according to the author, results in their uncritical adaptation to existing social conditions. This is a practice that is not limited to the public education system, as many private institutions also resort to forming large classes as a cost-containment strategy, consequently imposing a heavier workload on teachers.

Similar criticisms were made by McLuhan, who compared the conventional classroom to a prison or even a feudal dungeon (McLuhan *et al.*, 2003). For him, this model reduced students to automatons, conditioned to deliver pre-formulated responses to the teacher’s questions. In this arrangement, the ability to formulate questions — seen by McLuhan as the true “Ground,” as opposed to answers, which would be the “Figure” — was not encouraged. Therefore, he argued that attention should be focused on questions rather than answers. In this context, the teacher should take on the role of guiding students in their own investigations based on the media that surround them.

4) Education and media: in this topic, we highlight two central aspects. First, Freire (1978) argues that it is necessary to develop a “new” literacy, capable of contemplating the transformations brought about by technological advances. This implies adapting educational environments to the demands of the emerging

context. McLuhan, M.; Hutchon and McLuhan, E. (1977) question whether it is possible to ensure that the “Figure” is perceived exactly as intended by its producer. These reflections underscore the importance of media education, particularly in times characterized by the proliferation of hate speech and disinformation, when the “ground” can be deliberately concealed in favor of the “figure”. Second, it becomes evident that multiple media should be incorporated into the school environment beyond the textbook, enabling students — through interaction with peers and teachers — to cultivate critical thinking in response to messages circulated by different media forms. At this juncture, the fundamental convergence between Freire and McLuhan resides in their shared recognition that media are not neutral.

Points of convergence and complementarity between the authors

In an interview with *Playboy* magazine (1969), McLuhan pointed out that many people have difficulty “understanding media” precisely because they do not master the very concept of “media”, which, in his view, encompasses any technology capable of expanding human capabilities and senses, from clothing to computers.

When considering the Brazilian economic, social and cultural scenario, it is possible to affirm that several of his reflections dialogue directly with the principles of Educommunication. This is evident in experiences shared by teachers who wrote to him reporting pedagogical practices in the classroom, even when they did not involve electronic devices. A notable example was the submission of a poetry book composed by sixth-grade students after a collective silence exercise — an activity that exemplifies the educommunicative approach: collaboratively producing meaning through horizontal communication and by leveraging the resources at hand.

McLuhan employed the term “technology” in a broad sense, understanding it as any extension of the human, and his main focus was on the cultural effects that each innovation inevitably produces. From this perspective, it can be said that educommunicative processes do not depend exclusively on digital or electronic technologies, as they can make use of any media that enable interaction and learning — from a newspaper to a basket, for example.

A concrete example is the *Tapajós-Arapicuns* Video Letters project, developed in indigenous communities in the Amazon (Brazil). The initiative sought to strengthen communication between villages and promote cultural appreciation through the production of “video letters” made by the indigenous people themselves with the support of volunteers. The process involved experimenting with documentary and fictional languages, using simple resources such as mobile phones and everyday artefacts. In the end, participants reported having developed a critical view of television and social media content. This example reinforces the relevance of associating McLuhan with the field of Educommunication, since his concept of “extensions of man” converges with the logic presented. In addition, the dialogical and horizontal nature of the process refers to Freirean pedagogy, which defends the role of the educator as a critical mediator of the reality experienced by students.

Concluding Remarks

This article reflects on how the thoughts of Paulo Freire and Marshall McLuhan, although originating from different contexts, offer complementary contributions to the reflection on Educommunication. Both authors converge in defending educational processes that overcome student passivity and favour the construction of a critical awareness of the media and technological transformations.

In this regard, Educommunication and Media Education can be seen as fields of essential mediation, capable of fostering critical, participatory, and creative pedagogical practices. Building on Freire’s notion of conscientization, together with McLuhan’s view of media as extensions of the human and as instruments of exploration, one can envision a horizon in which the school serves as a space for critical reading, collaborative creation, and the cultivation of active citizenship.

The evidence analyzed underscores that educommunicative processes do not rely on sophisticated technologies, but rather on horizontal relationships, critical engagement with reality, and the recognition of participants’ cultural expression. Accordingly, we argue that the convergence of these authors indicates an educommunicative model that not only treats media as objects of study and practice but also re-signifies them as tools for emancipation.



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