



## **Chapter IX**

# **Learning with New Media at the University: From Representations to Utilization**

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### **Abstract**

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*The following chapter aims at discussing the possible uses of new media for teacher work at universities based on an analysis of data collected from research carried out at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro's Department of Education in Brazil. Such research looks at the level of insertion of university students into the computer society and at the representations they make of the new medium. In the first section, responses from students are analyzed, mainly from young scholarship holders from less favored communities in Rio de Janeiro in contrast with other students' responses. A second section comparatively analyzes the social representations of the book, television, and the Internet made by the students as means to gain information and knowledge. This chapter concludes that one must acknowledge both how youths value new media and the importance of relating presential culture to cyberculture in*

*teaching, as well as the need for a change in mentality on the part of teachers and for their effective training to adopt new media in their pedagogical practice.*

## Introduction

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Currently, Brazilian university life is increasingly providing teachers with the use of new pedagogical strategies which make students more interested in the contents of subjects; this reality is becoming commonplace in institutions of higher education. However, the social representation of the university remains as a place where knowledge is sacred, the greatest part of lessons are anchored on teachers' talk and predominantly based on the textbook, perpetuating a devaluation of students' autonomous thinking and emphasizing the mastery of the syllabus. These represent a hierarchy as well as rites centered mainly around the teacher's figure, failing to take into consideration other elements which constitute this scenario, and, most of all, to open up to what is new.

In this sense, new media, among other elements, are overlooked, many times based on the premise that they present superficial knowledge which is inadequate to the "seriousness" demanded by academic life. Another very common argument in university halls holds that access to these new media is a privilege of the higher classes and, therefore, inaccessible to poorer students.

We believe it is opportune to point out that we are referring to the reality in South America, Brazil, more specifically the state of Rio de Janeiro, which, among Brazilian states, has well-defined social classes. Such a reality does indeed account for some differences which are mostly significant. However, we believe there is a universal essence which we shall focus on henceforth, having as a background research on youths and the Internet in which the study of social representations was the highlight.

We took this path because we consider that investigating social representations means bringing to the surface contributions by the individuals in a certain group without minimizing reciprocal and dynamic influences. Thus, specific knowledge of the modes of appropriation and production of meanings engendered by the researched community, along with its social practices and representations, widens the possibilities of understanding in which way "gestures change according to time and place, to the objects read and to the reasons for reading" (Chartier, 1999, p. 77; 2001a, 2001b).

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