Digital Technologies for a Quality School: A Didactical Experience Supported by Web Forum

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ABSTRACT

The work focuses on the use of digital technologies for a quality school, through the description of a significant educational experience carried out in a school context and supported by web forums. The aim of the present work is to verify whether through digital technologies, both in school and extra-school moments, it is possible to foster meaningful learning experiences. The reference model is based on the integration among the formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts and on the participation of all actors involved in the educational process: students, teachers and parents. At the end of the experience the authors, referring to the methodology of sentiment analysis, have analysed the process of communication in web forums, and we present the results.

Keywords: Educational Technology, Meaningful Learning, Quality in Education, Sentiment Analysis, Web Forum

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current globalized society, thanks to knowledge/information increasingly available anywhere and at any time, as well as a complex society due to different cultures living in the same places, ICT, if properly used, are considered as tools with the ability to solve problems related to knowledge, relationships and social status, typical of the current historical-cultural context. However, it is necessary to master these skills in order to understand how digital technologies can be properly used so that limitless and confusing knowledge become easily accessible and immediately modifiable in function to information needed to understand and solve problematic situations. These critical situations increasingly involve school; in fact, it is continually being called, now more than ever, to reconsider new areas of activities and procedures which are able to promote both the processes of teaching and learning. The goal of every professional teacher who, in a conscious and competent way, wants to make pupils protagonists and constructors of their own learning process, is to hypothesize paths that can foster

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meaningful learning, characterized by motivation to learn and active participation. Through a proper use of new technologies it is possible to set real and virtual learning environments, where students are stimulated and “pleasurably” involved, by themselves and with the group, in the educational and training processes. In order to let students mature their own personal critical and reflective mind, as well as to develop effective relational skills, it is both important and strategic to communicate and discuss on facts and events of daily life that are verified in every part of the world involving a large variety of people. Comparisons and discussions that promote the acquisition of meta-cognitive learning, initiate interpretation processes leading to the maturation of students’ critical thinking and offering a significant contribution to the achievement of the educational process are activated (Ausubel, 1978). All this can be done independently and in a flexible way through the use of communication technologies, which permit the construction of a learning community in which, from anywhere and at any time, everyone can participate and feel as a protagonist (Ciliberti, 2000; Frabboni, 2011; Wilson, 1996). In the present work, in consideration of the above, a learning experience, carried out in a Fifth grade, primary school, is presented: students, using a web forum, interact and relate in a collaborative way, even outside of the school context. The has been to verify whether it is possible, if through digital technology, meaningful learning experiences are fostered. In particular, the analysis carried out on the comments posted by students in the forum, has been intended to verify whether the students may bring out their emotions by interpreting real life situations; if the integration between school and extra-school moments is favoured; if communicative relations among teacher-students-parents are stimulated; if the students’ motivation for research and the collaboration among them can increase.

2. COMPLEX SOCIETY AND QUALITY SCHOOL

The current society and the historical context in which we live are characterized by a high amount of information and knowledge available to people; in short it is characterized by globalization, to use a term now entered in everyday language. Just with globalization, which began in the early nineties, we have seen the emergence of a global market and of a vast communication network that branches out across the globe, thanks to which the space-time distances between opposite places on the planet are significantly reduced. We participated, moreover, to a predominant use of technologies in the activities that man performs on a daily basis, both those professional, including those in schools, and recreational as well as social. New and different languages (Abbruzzese & Maraglio, 2008; Rivoltella, 2009; Rossi, 2011) are used more and more (in particular technology and media) through which different ethnic groups get related, with their cultures, their religions, their behaviors, which have helped to transform all aspects of private and public life, and the social integration of people, thus generating a complex system that has led us to define today’s society: complex society (De Maio, 2010). The term “complexity”, according to Edgar Morin (2004), “...it is increasingly being used, but is not an explanation, but an inability to describe [...]. It’s said more and more often “it is complex” to avoid explaining [...] The complexity is a challenge that [the subject] can and must collect, appealing to certain principles that allow the operation of a complex thought». In complex situations order and disorder are present together in the same space and at the same time; determinism and randomness prevail; uncertainty emerges and individuals need to activate a “strategic approach”. It is precisely in such circumstances, states Morin (2012), that all people have to make a careful reflection on how to “equip” subjects and in particular students, so that they can learn to cope with various problematic situations that life offers by resorting, from time to time, to tools
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