Digital Narration and Didactics of History in High School: Between Formal and Non-Formal

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this work is on didactic planning (in high schools) with a special emphasis on the following topics: the use of problem-solving and social media in a course centered on scientific knowledge, participatory and collaborative activities, on and off line, the paradigms of collective intelligence (Levy, 1994), and connective intelligence (Siemens, 2005, 2006) and technical skills. The work methodology includes the creation of an integrated educational environment functional to the promotion of process-based learning for the presence of learning practices in the formal didactic setting taken from non-formal or informal contexts, as suggested by Luciano Galliani (2011). The leading hypothesis of the work is concerned with the participatory practices (production-sharing-socialization) which are used in a structured learning context and on their effects: a) to increase the degree of interest and involvement of the students and, b) to have a positive effect on subject knowledge (learning history), and cross-curricular knowledge (responsible use of technologies).

Keywords: 2.0 History, Authorship and Education, Participatory Culture, Social Media, Social Networks, Social Software Didactics, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Theoretical Basis: Web 2.0 and Learning

The use of technology in many work-related, educational and social activities and the consequent transition from the Gutenberg galaxy to the Internet galaxy (Castells, 2006; 2008), has led to profound changes in communication processes and knowledge acquisition methods. Participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009) and the concept of connective intelligence (Siemens, 2005), are the foundations of many didactic initiatives based on Pedagogy 2.0 methods (McLoughlin and Lee, 2011). It has been widely demonstrated how the use of social networks, blogs and Wiki calls on the reprocessing and metacognitive dimensions implied in learning processes (Dickey, 2004; Deng, Yuen, 2009; 2011) and leads to critical and further study activities. Didactic experiences that leave the classroom context and continue in informal environments force students who intend to present and share their ideas to organize the material through the creation of mental maps,
which summarize the main points that they want to cover (Parmigiani, Pennazio, 2012).

It is therefore a consolidated view among pedagogists and educational policy makers that didactic environments need to be created that can bring the informal dimension closer to the formal dimension through the use of technologies in order to promote participation, authorship and active citizenship. All these activities, on the one hand, promote collaborative and problem-solving processes, typical of the real world, and on the other, contribute to the creation, as indicated by Jenkins (2009), of a new form of implicit curriculum, functional to the young people’s chances of success, both in the educational world and in the world of work.

Finally, this approach is useful in order to prevent, on one hand, the lesson being perceived as boring, in contrast to the more stimulating environments of online interaction (Ferri, 2008) and, on the other, to prevent young people believing that extra-scholastic learning opportunities are better than those offered at school (Petrucco, 2011).

Naturally, awareness that there is no relationship between the use of technology and an improvement in learning processes is required, especially when dealing with the effectiveness of multimedia resources and “open” technological environments in the independent construction of knowledge by pupils (Calvani, 2007; Gramigna, 2012). It's not without reason that still today, a study published by the European Commission and the New Media Consortium (non-profit organization based in the USA which unites educational technology experts) highlights two of the most urgent problems that European education has to face:

1. Poor knowledge and digital skills of the learners;
2. Need to include the effective use of IT technologies and communication in teacher training.

The report underlines how the inclusion of ICT in teacher training and the poor digital skills of the students are problems that can be solved. The creation of “authentic” learning opportunities, based on real life experiences and the relationship between formal and non-formal, will be objectives that are more difficult to achieve in the short term. It will be even more difficult to create the right conditions for improving the teaching of complex thought and to ensure that the students can contribute to personalized learning (Johnson et al., 2014).

1.2. Learning Models

Therefore, aware of the fact that there is still no scientific evidence, the problem lies “in creating process-based learning through a complex relationship between formal teaching contexts with institutional and organizational aims to teach subject knowledge, application skills and cross-curricular skills, the non-formal teaching contexts typical of work organizations, in which abilities and skills are acquired through professional practices and their continuous updating, and the informal context of family and social life in which attitudes and interests are cultivated in free time (music, sport, tourism, mass-media and new media etc.) and learning takes place through experience and relationships with others” (Galliani, 2011, p. 9). Process-based learning dynamics means the school opening up, in formal and controlled situations, to the learning methods used in real life contexts, and the languages, tools and codes that come from social and work situations (Jonassen, 2002; Petrucco, 2010).

Learning models functional to a scenario of this type appear to be those based on an active approach, in which knowledge is built on a collaborative basis, starting from the thought processes needed for problem solving. Didactic planning needs to be able to combine some variables of the informal context, such as participatory culture and the immediate and instinctive activism of serendipity (Buchem, 2011), with formal learning methods, directing them towards aims that are coherent with the educational process (Marinelli and Ferri, 2010). From this point of view it is important to recognize the interests and abilities that the
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