Learning in Cross-Media Environment

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper to reflect on the definition of a cross-media learning environment by analyzing two training approaches to the professional development of teachers. The first approach centers around curricular internships as training for future teachers, the second focuses on professional development for teachers in service. The aim of the author’s analysis was to identify the factors that contribute to overcoming the ‘real’ vs. ‘online’ and ‘theory’ vs. “practice” gap, opting for an integrated cross-media learning environment.

KEYWORDS
eLearning, Experience Learning, Internship, Learning Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper compares two training projects within a cross-media environment. Both approaches integrate multiple learning media: the traditional (technologically equipped) classroom, on the job experience, and the eLearning (LMS – Learning Management System) online environment, all done in a university setting.

This is an extended work presented in IDEE 2014 (Fardoun & Gallud, 2014) and this research focused on the definition of a multi-level learning environment, analyzing the effectiveness of the learning processes of two specific types of training: internship curriculum courses for teacher education and professional development courses for experienced teachers. In the first instance, our research followed the training that took place during the third year of a course partly in the university and partly in schools. In the second case, our analysis focused on understanding the integration of classroom, on the job, and online training for teachers in service working on a post-graduate degree program. Both training approaches availed themselves of an e-learning platform (Moodle) and emphasized group work.

2. BETWEEN SCHOOL AND WORK IN ITALY

A paradigm change in educational research has been taking place in Italy for some time (Damiano, 2013; Rivoltella & Rossi, 2012) driven by the contribution of enactivism by Rossi (2011), situated learning (Fabbri 2007) and in Italian edition by Ajello and Sannino (2013) of study about transfer and boundary-crossing by Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003). What comes out of this is the central importance of the teaching/learning process as a situated inter-action involving a plurality of individuals and contexts that produce learning patterns not always encompassed in the expected goals.

Concrete experience, doing and experiencing, is the main trigger of the learning process as long as it is part of an overall teaching plan guided with specific intent. By reflecting on an experience,

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it becomes possible to configure new cultural-cognitive artifacts, that is, new knowledge and skills patterns.

One specific area of didactic interest is the world of university curricular internships. The nature of this particular reality is such that it stands between different perspectives, one emphasizing the importance of theory and the other the need for practice. The world of academic teaching, generally polarized around theoretical models, meets the working world, which is usually concerned with getting things done. During the PRIN Employability & Co. - Innovative Curricula to create new professions Project (Boffo, Fedeli & al., 2017), we have begun to reflect on the interrelationship of new technologies and curricular internships in the university context.

Usually, a kind of separation exists between the theoretical models and the world of practice, a sort of dependence of the latter on the previous, resulting in a shortsighted validation of the superiority of classroom training over the straightforward performance requested by practical activities. This separation is due to the different organizational and cultural approaches that characterize the two realities, the educational system (school and university) and the work system (profit, non-profit, and public). The educational system expresses this distinction by attributing to the working world competitive, economic, and utilitarian approaches that are hardly suited to educational values, such as personalized learning time, cooperation, and future planning. By the same talking, the working world also expresses this separation, for example, by pointing out to society how the rules that govern production cannot meet all the social expectations required by people. These different interpretive frameworks explain the lack of a sufficient interaction between the two systems, reinforcing a sense of self-referentiality.

This separation between school and the working world, in many cases experienced also as dependence, loses sight of three very important aspects: a) by bringing up real tasks, work issues, and unexpected contradictions, practical experience produces knowledge, skills and new forms of action that “contaminate” and evolve people’s theoretical models and patterns of meaning; b) transferring knowledge from theory to practice is not automatic, but rather it requires specific mediation skills that will allow students to decode and reassemble theoretical models in terms of skills that may be applied to the multiplicity of contexts they are going to face; c) a personal and professional life plan is the result of integrating a number of systems that constantly activate shared artifacts, in spite of the attempts at self-referentiality of specific organizational approaches. The didactic system of university internships is specifically called upon to take note of the paradigm shift in teaching and to revise certain educational practices. This shift arises from a cultural and social transformation that has been occurring for some years and that redefines the boundaries of both the didactic and the working world in light of the pervasiveness of ICT.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An initial analysis criterion of contemporary culture is given by the category defined by some authors as «new mobilities» (Urry, 2003; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Leander, Phillips & Taylor, 2010), according to which people, environments, ideas and objects trigger novel lines of movement based on a number of technological and infrastructure factors. At the end of the nineties, Appadurai (1996) defined this society as a «cultural flow», subsequently redefined as «liquid society» by Bauman (2002), a category describing a contemporary reality characterized by factors like mobility and new lines of movement.

A new category that goes beyond the old global versus local distinction by bringing out and creating new relational spaces where social life is expressed by means of new modes and rhythms for the exchange of information and knowledge. These multiple “mobilities provide for the meeting of places
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