Information Technology and Edutainment: Education and Entertainment in the Age of Interactivity

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ABSTRACT

The tight connection which occurs between entertainment and education has originated what is defined edutainment which can be considered as a continuous and innovative brain-training, which stimulates, in an interactive way, the capacity to combine attention and motivation to explore and learn. The role of games in learning is a common topic in research. The various games linked to the edutainment mechanism, in particular, have been analyzed to understand in what way and to which extent they can facilitate study, development of memory, attention, motivation and other cognitive processes as well as spatial abilities. The aim is the definition of “edutainment” as a branch of e-learning which promotes learning process in school, extra-school and didactic field in general, in a playful way, through multimedia applications. The idea of encouraging the integration of game, technology and learning is new and at the same time complex for its educational aims. At international level, United States Department of Education, with the cooperation of educational agents and teachers, recently developed a statistical table of the results reached by an important project for the creation of modules for the learning through Internet. Shown below there are information about the results of this project that were used to be transferred on a national level to start and implement the same project. The interactive technologies, really because they turn the users into actors, they can involve and entertain reducing the gap between the teacher/communicator, standing out as leader of knowledge, and the pupil receiving the information.

Keywords: Brain Training, Education, Edutainment, E-Learning, Formative Intervention, Game, Infotainment, Intelligent Entertaining

DOI: 10.4018/jdldc.2013010102
INTRODUCTION

The tight connection which occurs between entertainment and education has originated what is defined edutainment which can be considered as a continuous and innovative brain-training, which stimulates, in an interactive way, the capacity to combine attention and motivation to explore and learn.

*Edutainment* arises from Marshal McLuhan, a sociologist of communication, and from B. Heyman (2002), a documentarian of the National Geographic Society, mixing the concepts of education and entertainment. In 1960, both proposed edutainment as a form of communication which uses the game for educational purposes. In particular, Marshal McLuhan (1998) highlighted that those who distinguish between entertaining and education ignore that the education must actually be playful and that the entertainment must simultaneously be educational. Between the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies an increasing reflection on the influence of multimedia tools gave a strong impulse to the spread of the educational programs. Also the psychologist and pedagogue Gerald Lesser (1975), a scholar of Harvard, was a forerunner of *edutainment*, having realized an educational program for television, Sesame Street, for children and whose aims were literacy, cultural integration and racism overcoming. It was successful and so it was translated into many languages and spread in several countries, including Italy.

Thus *edutainment*, though at the beginning, was realized to indicate some playful communication forms with educational aims. Then, it developed its meaning, that is teaching by playing, including everything that could be communicated, thanks to the use of game, in a productive and educational way.

Benefits of edutainment derive from the fact that brain’s cognitive processes in the moment of playing are similar to the ones occurring in the moment of learning, so that they immediately produce motivation, repetition, self-control, meanings and the elaboration of big quantities of information (Corona & Cozzarelli, 2011).

Obviously, *edutainment* in computer technology has a leading role, so that this terminology is used to describe many multimedia products, funny and easy to enjoy, able to provide to the user useful information and notions. One of the aspects analyzed is the role of game in learning process. Several games linked to *edutainment* mechanism, specifically, were examined to understand how and to which extent they can promote study, memory development, attention, motivation, development of cognitive processes and of spatial abilities (Carlomagno, 2012).

It was underlined that digital games and technological systems can facilitate language development, if for example parents actively participate in their children’s experience and teachers take part to this with an educational aim, supporting the development of cognitive schemes and control of impulses.

It’s arising so a new line of research which is clearly based on a new approach defined *edu-infotainment*, where the reinforcing word infotainment is added to the previous neologism underlining the will to combine communication and formation.

The *edutainment* field contains some macro-areas: interactive games, divulgation products for children, scientific products and especially specific school and didactic tools promoting an intelligent entertainment.

Many researches have been conducted, in these years, focusing on the potential of edutainment and on the space reserved to the interaction between didactics and entertainment. To educate and inform by amusing, this is the key for many people, for supporting the current needs linked to a socio-cultural dimension subject to continuous changes and belonging to current generations.
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