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## NEW SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL COURSES AND PLAYFUL ORIENTATION TEACHING

Fiorella PAONE\*

### Abstract

In this article it will be formulated a hypothesis testing of the relationship between changes in the socio-cultural system and in the cognitive-behavioural and communicational dynamics of youths. Within this framework it will be outlined the role of the traditional agencies of socialization, such as school and family, and it will be identified the strengths on which it can build a training proposal based on a playful approach that enhances the specificity of the current social context in a functional direction to serve the welfare of individuals and community.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural change, new media, youths, learning, play

### Résumé

Dans cet article, il sera élaboré un test d'hypothèse de la relation entre les changements dans le système socio-culturel et dans la dynamique cognitivo-comportementales et de communication des jeunes. Dans ce cadre, il sera souligné le rôle des agences traditionnelles de socialisation, comme l'école et la famille, et il sera identifié les points forts sur lesquels elle peut construire une proposition de formation basée sur une approche ludique qui améliore la spécificité du sociale cadre courant dans une direction fonctionnelle pour servir le bien-être des individus et des communautés.

**Mots-clè:** changement socio-culturel, les nouveaux médias, les jeunes, l'apprentissage, jouent

### Rezumat

În acest articol vom formula o ipoteză care să testeze relația dintre schimbările sistemului socio-cultural și cele din dinamica cognitiv-comportamentală și comunicațională a tinerilor. În acest cadru, va fi subliniat rolul agențiilor de socializare tradiționale, cum ar fi școala și familia și vor fi identificate punctele forte în jurul cărora poate fi propus un program de formare bazat pe o abordare de tip joc, care va spori specificitatea contextului social actual într-o direcție funcțională, care va servi bunăstării individuale și comunitare.

**Cuvinte cheie:** schimbare socio-culturală, noile media, tineri, învățare, joc

### 1. A social and communicational changing context

The analysis here proposed develops from the assumption that a theoretical analysis investigation about socio-educational topics concerning the processes of socialization and training of childhood can contribute in the decoding of relational

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and communicational dynamics that characterize the new generations and therefore that can help to identify some indicators that describe the processes of development trend of contemporary society<sup>1</sup>.

In particular, the point of view that will steer the present proposal it will be the one which aims to investigate the relationship between contemporary communicative context and dynamics of learning, reporting and communication between different generations and among peers more common among those who belong to a new generation (Morcellini, 1997) in order to create a theoretical and practical hypothesis that attempts to extend the concept of socio-educational training revitalizing and enriching this in order to make it the strengths of the social changing system (Bocchi, 2005).

Even if just referring to my professional experience<sup>2</sup>, I can say that a set of behaviours and attitudes that require new theoretical approaches is emerging among youths, making it difficult to decode through traditional interpretative categories<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the idea of this discussion to contribute to the development of scientific research in this area, using new theoretical approaches related to sociology, encouraged by Durkheim's signs that consider *social facts* as things in virtue of their effects on people<sup>4</sup>. As several important researches support (Morcellini, 2004), the current social and cultural context lives a quicker and quicker process of deep change of the forms of communication, of relationship and social action compared to the nearest past<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the relationship between education and society as well as processes, contexts, subjects of education and training can be a useful tool for understanding the emergence of new social models. For more details see Besozzi, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> As a socio-cultural operator and counselor expert in working with children in collaboration with libraries, local and national associations, social cooperatives, educational institutions and with the Regional Cultural Promotion Agency (Abruzzo, Italy).

<sup>3</sup> In this regard is very significant the case of a group of seven years old children from a school of Pescara who could not understand the meaning of the death of a wrestling champion. These children, after hearing the news, didn't show any kind of reaction, and when the teacher, intrigued by the fact that they were not sorry for the disappearance of one of their "heroes", asked an explanation, the small pupils began to repeat that *he can rise again*: they applied the logical pattern of videogame to a biological occurrence. I would like to underline that the phenomena that seem to escape the usual optical explanatory are very frequent and I have chosen to report this episode not because it was unique, but because I consider it particularly illustrative

<sup>4</sup> "We're not saying that social facts are material things, but they are things in the same way in which material things are - although in another way". (Durkheim, 1895: 10). In addition to the French sociologist, the study of reality, as a theoretical speculation on it, implies an attempt to improve it.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Censis report on the social situation of Country/2010 (Italy)*, collectively we live the paradox for which the media over-stimulation, and over-exposure to a multiplicity of messages, not only has the effect of pushing the person to reach a greater number of goals, but, on the contrary, has the effect of undermining the capacity to recognize and cultivate their personal interests. The report outlines also the picture of a society that lives a time of deep crisis, not only in relation to the material structure that characterizes it, but especially in reference to its cultural framework.  
[http://www.censis.it/10?relational\\_resource\\_381=109150](http://www.censis.it/10?relational_resource_381=109150)

Therefore it's necessary to define a new paradigm analysis, able to identify points of reference, which define themselves to a *cultural approach* (Berger – Luckmann, 1966) to social phenomena as suggested by W. Thomas<sup>6</sup>. According to this approach, actions systems and practices that may be detectable are considered in relation to the particular kind of society in which they become part and to the way in which they are perceived by individual and community.

The hypothesis from which this analysis is build on considers that the rapid growth and diffusion of New Media communication (computers, Internet, mobile phones etc..) <sup>7</sup> could influence the processes of socialization of younger people and the way wherewith they store and process values, ideas and knowledge (De Kerckhove, 1997). Communication technologies<sup>8</sup>, recognized as a real standard of knowledge formation, in fact, influence the processes of social reproduction and representation surpassing the previous standards of distinction between the natural environment, social context and artificial world, outlining a symbolic universe able to influence the way to create and convey meanings (Meyrowitz, 1985). In fact more and more often they talk about *digital born* (Negroponte, 1995) that is the following generation of spreading and affirmation of new media, for which these technologies have always been an integral part of communicational processes of education of the person.

Therefore, starting from McLuhan's teaching (1962), it can affirm that the electrical-electronic instruments, born as a prosthetic response able to reduce the complexity to which the typographical reality had arrived, retroacts on the context in which they are introduced, changing it from the structural point of view and determining new behavioural-theory paradigms. In fact, the new communicative prostheses, made available by scientific and technological development, once introduced retroact on the same social body that generated them, imposing a new method of encoding / decoding of reality and ushering new cognitive styles, that become the possible premise of the action.

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<sup>6</sup> The reference is to the concept of *definition of the situation* developed by Thomas, that is the specification of the cultural system of beliefs, habits or values approved by a group, able to impose the boundaries delineating the area of acceptance and tolerance, making policy shared reality (Thomas - Znaniecki, 1918).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/rapporto\\_censis\\_2009/SintesiOttavoComu.pdf](http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/rapporto_censis_2009/SintesiOttavoComu.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> The dominant medium is not the typographic one (book), peculiar to modern bourgeois society, in which the standards of formation of knowledge are linear and one-dimensional and social organization is based on a process of codification of conduct rules, according to the position in the social ladder, which standardizes and makes behaviours and individuals' expectations predictable. The new dominant medium is defined neo-oral and multisensory, typical of new technological forms of communication, resulting in a communicative relationship that in many ways, while using structured language, refined some characteristics peculiar to orality (Ong, 1982).

## 2. Learning, new behavioral and communicational dynamic

As it's emerged from the previous discussion, the new virtuality is not a purely technological fact but cultural and it involves communication, relationship and behaviours, which are more and more characterized by a cooperative and immersive nature and by a-symmetric logic, according to H. Jenkins. For example we can consider the inferential mechanisms initiated by the metaphorical nature of the frame film: the effect of verisimilitude is due to associative capability with known portions of experience by the spectator, or analogical and intuitive capacity required for web browsing. Jenkins summarizes skills for the new mode of production and transmission of knowledge, as follows:

1. PLAY: ability to engage oneself as a result of a motivating activities, in the exploration of all the environmental resources to solve problems;
2. APPROPRIATION: ability to use available materials in innovative ways to re-elaborating them in a new product;
3. MULTITASKING: continuous partial attention ability that focuses if it's stimulated significantly;
4. DISTRIBUTED COGNITION: ability to think in a collaborative way within a collective and intelligent process through a horizontal and cross-cutting passage of skills;
5. JUDGEMENT: ability to judge the veracity of information, considered as a process and not as product;
6. NETWORKING: ability to find and disseminate information on the network;
7. TRANSMEDIA NAVIGATION: ability to reconstruct and to tell stories told on different platforms.

Peirce (Proni, 1990) defines the new cognitive mode as *abductive thinking*, that is a way of thought that systematized the sensory experience through a logical scheme that moves through trial and error. This mode makes use of analogy, combination, creativity, metaphor, intuition, interaction, symbolic image through an approach to knowledge construction of the hypothetical-experimental kind. In this regard S. Turkle (1995) talks about the figure of the *bricoleur*, the one who is able to learn doing something, to proceed even in the absence of theoretical knowledge, as an expression of the new way of organizing learning. This figure is opposed to the *engineer* one, who embodies, in the mind of the author, a nomological - sequential logic type. According to the author, younger people, that are bombed by multi-media messages, automatically they acquire the skills of *bricouler*, experiencing a way of thinking and learning that enhances reflection on the same experience, even if this is only simulated. Also more and more young people feel at one's ease combining the virtual territories, even if more and more often they can't recognize the consequences of their actions.



As Infante asserts, for the new generation, this new manner of building knowledge and, therefore, action and, therefore, of action<sup>9</sup> that is characterized more and more as fluid, asymmetric and multimodal, it seems natural, because it "corresponds to the setting phylogenetic learning, that is the sensory-motor ability based on direct experience of doing". (Infante 2000, p.125)

In fact learning can be defined as a process of changing in the organization of the central nervous system of the individual, and not only a specific activity of a particular situation of systematic teaching. This implies that learning can be considered as a circular and continuous process of interaction of the individual with the environment that allows him to create knowledge in the form of systems of representations<sup>10</sup>, and to acquire skills and tools that put him in a position to:

- a) relate to others;
- b) decode the various elements of the environment in which he lives.

In this regard, it should be noted that, especially for younger people, often parameter comparison and system relationships is not to find in the empirical environment, but also and above all, in the virtual environment, which is characterized as malleable, reversible, a-symmetrical, a-temporal, immediate, immersive, multisensory, interactive, pervasive, instantaneous. The great power of attraction of new media, which use a variety of stimuli integrated, helps to define new patterns of decoding / interpretation / behaviour, which become more and more common progressively. For example, the fact that constantly new media offer a lot of different and attractive stimuli, constantly presses young person to the action. This fact restricts the space for inactivity, which is perceived and lived as an occasion for dissatisfaction, instead of being considered as a possibility of deepening reflection and revision. The inability to tolerate and manage the frustrations emerges as an aspect that characterizes this young generation more and more often and it seems reinforced by psycho-social issues linked to family

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<sup>9</sup> I should underline that, from a socio-therapeutic point of view, Representations, as products of the decoding of the environment (even virtual), are possible engines of action. For further study see note 24.

<sup>10</sup> I refer to the concept of socio-therapeutic Representation (R), defined as a variable that is the combination of cognitive dimensions (I) and affective (Inv. Aff.). For a first study we can say that the Representations (RR) are:

- mental products that enable the selection and memorization of what is known through sensory perception in relation to "emotional space" of the individual;
- the knowledge base;
- the assumptions on which logic diagrams of the individual are constructed, that constitute a reference and a evaluating parameter for past, present and future behaviour.

In a first phase of the onto- and phy- logenetic development, they are characterized by the lack of differentiation (confusion) among the cognitive and the affective dimension: they will differentiate only with the development process of mass media. Also the Representations do not coincide with the environment itself and they are determined from time to time by the dominant mass media. Anthropologically, it is possible to explain the emergence of some new phases of crisis in human history, every time, a medium of communication entered into disuse and was replaced by another. (For further study, see Benvenuti, 2002).

education<sup>11</sup>. So emerges the picture of a vicious circle in which younger people are incapable of desiring anything deeply, especially if it takes time or effort to be achieved.

It is in this context that it should begin to ask what role the traditional agencies of socialization, family and school in the lead can have, in the guiding the learning processes of younger people in order to guide their formation process in a useful direction to the welfare of individuals and communities.

### **3. The crisis of traditional socialization agencies**

*"Today's children are growing up immersed in new media culture, while all of us are at most naturalized citizens"*: I open the paragraph with this assessment of Sherry Turkle because her words immediately detect the heart of the matter that I wish to treat, showing a strong intergenerational cultural distance on the ability to use new technologies. In fact, while the adult works and/or takes care of the everyday problems of managing family and home, the child has many opportunities to grow: he/she goes to school, plays sport, attends recreational settings, watches television, uses the computer, surfs the internet, "chats", uses the phone since a very young age, plays video games. In most of the cases, the space between what the adult has learned as a youth (education and media) and the knowledge possessed by the child, is an abyss: the knowledge goes ahead, and the adult, in many situations, remains back. From this follows that the child is often placed in such a position of power that adults, in many cases, could become increasingly insecure and feel less able to fulfill its role as an educator. A further paradox, it is that the youth in our society becomes a value in itself, while the child has not Knowledge, and, especially if very small, often acts on the basis of instinct: he has yet to learn things having priority in life and he will do so from communicational relationships that will live (Benvenuti 2008).

From these premises, it can be argued that the traditional agencies of socialization are in crisis and have lost authority (Colozzi 2009): they are struggling to understand and adapt to the current living conditions, very different from previous generation's ones, and to intervene effectively, when it was appropriate or necessary. The school finds itself invested with a social-emotional load that was previously unthinkable: the time at school has expanded exponentially and so the children will unload all their eagerness to socialize, without, however, find an appropriate framework to support it.

The parents, mainly because of work and acceleration of the pace of life, have less time to devote to their children and to know their interests, often delegating to

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<sup>11</sup> For example in this sense doing gifts to children continually without a specific reason helps to substantiate the perception of a surrounding world that gives them satisfaction without merits, efforts or other in return.

other people their care and are less able to transmitting cultural values , rules and reference points for their children.

The transgressive behaviour, individual or group, occur in ever younger ages, the space for spontaneous aggregation and play is restricted by a variety of courses and commitments of all kinds, the internalized image of parental figures seems to lose its leadership role that enables to transmit values and moral rules, so they lose in the multiplicity of stimuli to which the child is subjected.

There is a cultural situation that says: “the adult educator<sup>12</sup> is a loser”; but the adult should consider the child as a potential that needs guidance to learn and train, through the acquisition of knowledge and experience that adults should promote the growth of the child. This growth is all the most necessary considering that the sources of education are no longer just the school and the family, but also other agencies with a great persuasive force, in particular the mass media. Where once the formation of the symbolic universe of the youth was controlled by adults, now, after the advent of television, computer, web and video games, the child is in a state of undifferentiated fruition.<sup>13</sup> The family, as well as the school, such as protected areas for socialization and bureaucratic certification acquisition of knowledge-attitudes-skills in preparation for the participation in social and working life, seems to approach to a complete isolation. Teachers are discouraged, parents are confused, educators begin to feel inadequate in their role and young people are bored and passive.

In order to overcome this situation of incommunicability between generations, to ensure that the figures appointed to guide the processes of socialization of children recover an active and proactive role and that young people find reference points capable to guide their process of growth, in the next paragraph I will try to articulate some of the assumptions that may help to delineate the characteristics of a new socio-educational approach in order to enhance the distinctive qualities of contemporary communicational paradigm.

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<sup>12</sup> The above is compounded by the fact that the campaigns operated by companies marketing to children, as a category of consumers, now has a force even more pervasive and can impose consumption patterns that are transformed into cultural patterns, which often win over those taught by parents and teachers, becoming the standards of behaviour.(Linn, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> What has been said is confirmed by a 2010 research conducted by the People Research Partners on a representative sample of 502 parents with children users of new media (at least one social networking, gaming, Internet browsing and mobile phone). In particular, telephone interviews were conducted divided between mothers and fathers equally distributed by sex and age of the child (8-10 years and 11-13 years). The research shows that only two thirds of respondents (65%) say they know well how their child is using the TV, while the percentage drops considerably when it comes to the Internet (52%), mobile (46%) and above of social networks and Facebook (41%). In this context, one final aspect that I consider very important is the fact that parents tend to underestimate the emotional relationship that children have with some media.

<http://www.terredeshommes.it/download/DossierChildGuardianAward-2010-Terre-des-Hommes.pdf>

#### 4. Learning and playful orientation

In many cases the traditional socialization agencies were still accustomed to consider the formation process as a learning process based on the transmission of values, rules and culture, as a frontal, complete and definitive process. But, if it is true that the term indicates the cultural process, by which starts an auto/hetero-construction / remodelling of identity<sup>14</sup> that develops in interaction with oneself, with the people and the environment, then one can assume that the training is an evolving concept. This concept changes in a constant confrontation with the changes of the social and communicative environment, according to which it must be divided from time to time. Starting from an analysis of the characteristics of the new culture mentioned in the previous paragraph, I can therefore say that the above-quoted vision of formation is no longer valid. In particular, the use of the web and of some digital technologies - eg. videophones, cameras etc. - means that the person is formed in a context where the learning process is defined under the contribution of each to the group discussion, based on interaction, cooperation, multi-sensory, exchange, sharing the speed of the stimuli. It exceeds both the closure and the monomediality of typographical knowledge, and the horizon of traditional training that the expression conveyed. It becomes therefore necessary to develop new social and educational assumptions that go beyond the traditional patterns and propose new models of educational intervention, to be verified in the field, taking in mind the specificity of the new routes of cultural construction.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that someone who takes care of the processes of training and socialization of youth should:

- move from a conception of learning as a pure and simple transfer of information to one that considers it as a process of personal computing information storage based on mental operations through a strong involvement of the affective sphere;
- change any rigid cognitive models aim to revitalize the representative integrity of their knowledge.

The re-centralization of training course, shall not, therefore, come from a quantitative increase of information stimuli, but from a quality selection of communication strategies, according to methodological criteria, build upon the difference expressed by the new communicational paradigm. For example, if today the way to build knowledge is hypothetical-experimental and is organized by the experimental model of learning typical of *bricouler*, it is important to design experiments based on abductive type of inference in order to:

- Enhance the perceptual experience of the individual;

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<sup>14</sup> The reference is to the socio-therapeutic concept of *identity* as a system of representations of the *person*, whose basic features are the permanence of personal organization in a changing situation, the processional nature, the ability to self-recognition that does not require equality (Benvenuti, 2002).

- Provide empirical points of reference and methodological criteria that make the perception of experience able to move even in the unknown;
- Co-constructing an aptitude for critical thinking, which allows you to compare, problematize and contextualize what you experience with portions of acquired knowledge, through mechanisms of association;
- Bring to light the interpretive and training operations, on the one hand to recognize the logic of building a cultural product and on the other one to handle the emotional dimension involved in the process of perception and acquisition of knowledge;
- Make the empirical scope and context of exercise put to the test of knowledge.

In this sense it will be important to create situations sociologically oriented to ensure that continuity is guaranteed to training courses for young people from the construction of a virtuous relationship between family, school and subject to aggregate and promote socio-cultural territory. What I've just told should happen so that each stimulus which attracts the attention of the person and which has been affectively invested, could find the context to be revised in and, so, contribute to build the knowledge of the individual in a functional direction to ensure the welfare of its growth path. This means that professionals working in various agencies of socialization undertake a process of cultural growth that enables them to decode behavioural and communicational dynamics of young people in order to be credible and consistent with their role in steering the process of training childhood developing and testing new methods and new theoretical and practical interdisciplinary tools updated to current needs.

In this regard, it can be assumed that a useful methodology for the development of tools for effective intervention in socio-education can be given by game theory<sup>15</sup>. As underlined Rovatti (2005), in fact, the game, when it is not intended as a break or recreation, but as an educational orientation, can help to build an educational non-communicable, capable to facilitate the involvement of participants and to promote the processes of socialization, through the acquisition of skills and functional abilities with current needs. The game, in fact, has inherent aspect of pleasure that makes the acquisition of all skills and abilities integral part of a process, in which the cognitive and the affective dimension of the person are in solidarity with each other and this allows the person to pay more attention to the stimuli received and remember more knowledge. The recreational activity, in fact, as a driver of emotions such as excitement, curiosity, surprise, supports the learning process guided by the trainer, enabling the needs of discovery and exploration of each participant. Recreational orientation, understood as socio-educational approach, is able, therefore, to produce a vibrant culture, to fascinate, stimulate and engage people and thus achieve at least the minimum target of

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<sup>15</sup> As stated by R. Caillois, the game follows the mechanisms through which men construct social systems and to transmit their organization ways (Caillois, 1958).

attention, a prerequisite for obtaining readiness to accept the information as a precondition for exercising a function of educational quality. A training process that moves itself in the perspective of a playful orientation of knowledge's acquisition can also well fits in the contemporary socio-educational context because it summarizes and highlights the specificity of the new communicational horizons whose characteristics, as already described, promote cultural processes:

- Equity
- Cooperative;
- Multidimensional;
- Flexible;
- Analog;
- Collective (Levy 1997);
- On enough "learning by doing".

Similarly, in fact, the game promotes the discovery and reinforcement of acquisitions by comparison, discussion, collaboration, creativity, connectivity and testing in a secure environment. A playful orientation of the formation process of young people is, therefore, aimed to encourage the development of a new learning model to improve meta-competencies, such as flexibility, imagination, cooperation, participation, the ability to explore the potential and experiment (even collectively) more than one solution to a problem faced and overcome. This should be done in the light of a cognitive process accompanied by an expert who will support the construction of meta-criteria and guidance in decoding communications projects that underpin every cultural product and enable to develop an ethical guide to his actions.

This feature is also useful guidance in the game, as the unstructured model, in which there are no rigid and predetermined formulas, but an experiential framework and general guidelines that must be redefined from time to time from the circumstances and the specific contribution of players (conductor and participants)

In summary, I can say that the *Play Model*, which drives the learning processes of young people, helps them in the construction of the meta-competencies and meta-criteria needed to move in a functional way for the well-being of individuals and community in a changing communicational context and that, therefore, is able to continually redefine its own references points.

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