

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITH

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Abstract

Against the background of revolutionary digital technologies, mobile learning and the crisis of conventional paradigms in mass societies, the present study shows how innovative and multidisciplinary research – capable of both observing and interpreting reality as well as consolidating a pedagogical model open to inter-cultural dialogue with faith and ethics – will allow different cultures to re-appropriate the scientific, pedagogic, ethical and linguistic methodologies necessary for the formation of the ‘human being’. The post-modern condition of the ‘liquid society’, where only transient values are given, with the consequence of uncertainty and dissatisfaction, is the right time to return to the true moral values, i.e. those described by the classical philosophy and the Christian religion that fully realize the human being. This inspiration enables Pedagogy to overcome the uncertainties that afflict subjects in education; overcome the absence of languages and shared ethics; overcome the paroxysmal defense of freedom of thought and action; respond to the lack of model teachers who can have a positive influence on their students; discourage marked and more widespread individualism.

Keywords

Digital Revolution, ethics, Mobile Learning, education, christian virtues

1. The digital revolution and mobile learning: what's next?

In the last decade we have witnessed the sudden and widespread introduction of new technologies, all of which involve sophisticated and complex processes of communication. This phenomenon has been described as a digital revolution that, on a daily basis, transforms contemporary life. «The increasing spread of technologies for managing information and communication [...] runs parallel to the learning needs of individuals and the need to plan and organize new pedagogical structures» (Gallelli and Annacontini, 2011, p. 13). Innovations produced in the internet era, and the impact of the internet on science, commerce and entertainment, are certainly there for all. Less understood are the long-term effects of the digital era on man and human life. It will take many years, in fact, to fully understand how these changes affect human cognition (Veen and Vrakking, 2006) or to understand the changes occurring in the relations between individuals (Burgess and Green, 2009). For some years communication scholars have observed a trend towards media convergence, or multimediality, a phenomenon described as the total convergence of communication channels. One can take advantage of text, image and sound in perfect integration, with just a computer and a good Internet connection (Briggs and Burke, 2002). Digitization has reduced any type of message to a sequence of numbers, such that minimal data is capable of containing what we see, read, and hear. The convergence of communication channels into a single channel is producing in humans structural changes in cognition which require mental adjustments for even the casual use of these technologies (Sbardella, 2006). In addition to the Internet and social networks, there are widespread means of Digital Mobility: mobile devices such as PDAs, mobile phones, digital audio players and cameras of the latest generation, all of which create larger networks that promise high communicative potential but also require specific training.

2. New technology and digital mobility: some statistics

ISTAT report (2012) on communication provides informative data on media consumption that will be the subject of reflection in this research. In this regard we present the survey data on aspects and behaviour of Italian families in everyday life. 2012 remains stable compared to the previous year, when 55.5% of households had access to the Internet and 59.3% had access to a personal computer (59.3%); access to the web via broadband, however, increased from 45.8% to 48.6%. Families with at least one minor are the most technological: 83.9% have a personal computer and 79%

have internet access; 70.8 % use a broadband connection. At the other extreme we find families of individuals sixty-five years old and older: just 13.9% of them own a personal computer and only 11.8% have a connection to surf the internet.

Noteworthy is the fact that most of the families who do not have access to the internet at home describe this as the main reason for not using new technology (43.3%). Then there are some users who say they do not consider the use of the internet important (26.5% of the families interviewed). In addition, some families (15.8%) report economic reasons for not using the network; in such cases, the cost of having a connection and having the basic hardware needed to navigate the network is too high. 13% of respondents, however, do not surf the net from home because they benefit from a connection in another place. 3.6% provide reasons for non-use of the network related to physical disability, and 2.5% of respondents express insecurity regarding the respect and protection of their privacy on the network. In light of these issues, all related to limitations on uses of new technologies, a collaboration between the Implementation Committee of the Code on Media and Children and the Parliamentary Committee for Children was launched in June 2009 in order to draw up a new Code of Media and Children. The new Code on Media and minors is guided by the principle that the fundamental rights of freedom of expression must be carefully balanced with our concern for children (Caruso, 2010). But many challenges lie before this important goal which, together with the protection of children, could lead to greater respect for human dignity. The use of digital devices is obviously more common in families where the head of the family uses one or more of such devices at work. Young people, and especially students, in all parts of Italy, use the internet more frequently than adults.

Even the use of web radio via the PC (+2.3%) and by means of mobile phones (+1.4%) is more and more widespread. Mobile phones (now used by 81.8 % of Italians) increase their overall audience (+2.3%), thanks to the introduction of smartphones (+10% in one year) that use new, interactive technologies. Also tablets are increasingly being used by both the population average (7.8%) and those of the new generation (about 13% of those polled). According to the tenth Census Report, internet usage in Italy is the medium that has reached the maximum rate of increase of users between 2011 and 2012 (+9%). The figure is highest in the case of young users (90.8%), of educated people (84.1% of graduates) and residents of big cities (74.4%). Another important finding is also the decrease of 2.3% of newspaper readers in print. Significant is the fact that in 2007, 67% of Italians read a daily paper, while in 2012 this figure fell to 45.5%. More and more Italians, therefore, tap into the internet for their daily news. The application of new technologies, and especially the internet, appears in all areas where people live and work. The media

technologies that accompany our society in this transformative process offer many unexplored possibilities.

In the 'century of the media' (cinema, television, Internet), it is inevitable that the media and education are confronting each other. This confrontation has led to a vast movement of ideas and initiatives at local and international level, supported by researchers, educators, media professionals, that recognize a common commitment to Media Education (ME), a term which has now acquired a right to citizenship in the world. ME has come so to indicate activity, education and teaching, with the aims to develop in young people information and critical understanding of the nature and categories of the media, the techniques they use to build messages and produce meaning, their genres and specific languages. ME is not limited to 'protect', but rather it aims to provide a media competence (Baacke, 1997) and empowerment (Tyner, 1998) so that the child knows how to deal critically and constructively with the media universe and also create new forms of expression and communication (Educommunication).

3. Open-space and workshops: prime fallout

In this section we will examine some changes that challenge the world of education in the digital era and especially the fragmented liquid nature of a society impacting on the identity of young people. In the first instance it may be observed that the school is subject to change. Across Europe, classes are abolished and reborn in open-spaces and laboratories for work in small groups; teaching of a new variety occurs in virtual classrooms. The physical space of learning and the kinds of cultural objects that make up an education redefine themselves in light of the new opportunities offered by technology: the internet, iPod, digital boards and e-learning, alongside lectures and books, are transforming the way we learn. It is a profound change that involves all aspects of the school system and that goes far beyond the problem of the spread of computers in the classroom, both in regards to the training of teachers and for school policy. The arrival of virtual worlds (Gerosa and Pfeffer, 2006), a cross between social networks and video games, gave a strong jolt to the training and especially to its operators. Young people, however, have an increasing need to know more specifically the potential of the new tools of Digital Mobility and to be oriented to the proper use of them. Most of the time, however, they are left alone in the personal exploration of a continent still little known by scientific pedagogy as well as teachers/educators. For this reason, we believe that education needs new ideas and suggestions in a fruitful dialogue with the human sciences, in order to help young people to be aware and reflective thinkers of the new means of Digital Mobility. The data of the last two surveys on youth in Italy carried out by the IARD

appear relevant and reveal the anxiety and bewilderment youth express about these profound changes, and provide a wealth of data of particular relevance to pedagogy (Buzzi et al., 2002; Buzzi et al., 2007). A trait that characterizes the profile of young people is the lack of strong role models (Bellingreri, 2014, p. 14). Other traits that characterize the profile of young people include:

- lack of stability in interpersonal relationships;
- difficulties in communication¹;
- marked individualism;
- narcissism;
- paroxysmal defense of personal freedom;
- subjectivity and misinterpretation of social norms;
- relationship difficulties with parents and teachers;
- widespread lack of social and political identification;
- lack of guilt;
- sunset of the Super-Ego;
- aesthetic² culture spread;
- widespread hedonistic³ culture;
- attention to living in the present moment;
- great confidence in one's own possibilities.

We think that there is a relationship between these traits that characterize the profile of young people and the historical and cultural context of the digital age they live in. It is necessary to investigate the way they use modern technologies to encourage better uses and bring out the full potential of communication and training they have. The multiplicity of communication and sensory stimuli produced by modern technologies should be properly managed not to be harmful. The Austrian educationalist, Brezinka says that the cultural redundancy produced by cognitive capitalism (Bencivenga, 2007) becomes dangerous for life and spiritual health, if young people are exposed without a classical tradition (Brezinka, 2011). He states that educators have a duty to protect them from all that can be harmful and unnecessary and focusing on the essential teaching and ways of living and acting well good (Brezinka, 2011, p. 14). These characteristics of young people also appear in what Bauman (2004) calls a 'liquid society'. The metaphor evoked by the philosopher and

¹ The words are often ambiguous, that is, they lend themselves to misunderstanding.

² The contemporary individual, with an aesthetic that is increasingly disorderly and paroxysmal, often appears turned in on him/herself, in the continual pursuit of an ideal of beauty and individual well-being that is obtained without taking into account the needs and expectations of others. Contemporary aesthetics, then, often results in an individualistic ethics.

³ Gallelli cites the Canadian philosopher Bencivenga's idea of obligated fun, which is an instance of the typical post-modern society (Gallelli, 2012).

sociologist is used to describe the fragility of human relationships. Liquid, as opposed to solid, gives the impression of instability. The metaphor of liquefaction visually expresses the reality of liquefaction in which we live and underscores the difficulty of forming even minimally stable relationships. Interpersonal relationships appear increasingly fleeting and 'highly contingent' (Bellingreri, 2014, p. 14).

4. Lives of race

In *Vite di corsa (The Lives of Race)* Bauman analyzes the perception of time in the society we live in (Bauman, 2008). He describes the time of modernity as a time made up of many individual moments separated from each other. Each of these moments is an eternal present, where everything is entrusted to the experience of the moment. The sense of lived time is all that is related to, and limited by, the consumption of a particular moment. «Life is a life dedicated to the consumption of fast learning and lightning oblivion» (Bauman, 2008, p. 8): what is useful in a given time, could be useless in the next moment. In fact, the primary purpose and the driving force for prosperity and consumerism are an increasing demand for the satisfaction of needs and not to avoid creating a constant sense of dissatisfaction. In the consumer society, the business cycle, what really moves the economy, lies in buying, 'use and throw away' [disposable], the approach to new experiences in a continuous swirling and hectic transition from one novelty to another, so quickly done that you do not even have time to savour anything (Bauman, 2008, p. 8). This results in a depletion of the meaning of experiences. Everything is reduced to the transience of the here and now, and then even the materiality criteria that distinguishes the essential from the superfluous, what is lasting from what passes, is lost. It follows a new conception of life and of the person whose identity is not built on a project that develops steadily, and whose identity does not follow a path to long-range goals in which the effort and the wait for the achievement of the goal becomes valuable precisely because of the long and arduous journey undertaken in anticipation of it. But life is made up of choices and projects that can be freely assembled and disassembled instantly. The lack of prospects for the future, namely the lack of any perception of the future as a horizon of meaning toward which we direct our actions, means that the planning itself, planning as an essential aspect of existence, has no place. The attention to living only the present moment has also deeply undermined the very essence of education which by its nature is designed to take into account the past, and acts in the present with anticipation of the achievement of a future goal. The flattening of today has resulted, in pedagogical terms, in a concentration of efforts that only concern the present, neglecting - in this way - the realization that

education occurs throughout life. Today, in different educational contexts, only a concern reigns for what's concretely visible and valuable in terms of an immediate gain (Bauman, 2008; Morin, 2015). In a sense, this means the goal orientated approach of students is to achieve smaller, immediate gains, as in their cultural consumer habits, rather than view learning as a meaningful lifelong experience⁴ (Maritain, 1948; Colazzo and Petera, 2009; Morin, 2015). What is missing, then, is a real question of meaning that interrogates not only what could be the concrete result of our efforts, but also what we direct our efforts toward as an ideal of education. We are missing a pedagogy that is molar⁵ (i.e. the contrary of molecular, Tolman, 1976) and founding, an education with a solid epistemology anchored in human experience (Colazzo and Petera, 2009).

5. Issues of epistemology: towards a founding and molar education with the rediscovery of faith and a religious sense of life

After this brief reflection on the fragmented liquid nature of post-modern society and its impact on education, we emphasize the need to rediscover the religious meaning of life to promote the integral development of the human person. In this perspective, we view Christianity as positive reaction to the cultural transition analysed by Baumann; it could be challenging for media education and deserves further investigation and analysis. Already Salvatore Colazzo, Italian philosopher and educationist, has long called for a return to a kind of thinking that is more contemplative, that overcomes the limitations and constraints of pragmatic reason and allows for an approach to the realities that are increasingly complex and contradictory in our society. He also supports the need for a new founding and molar pedagogy that, beyond the technicalities and notions of some forms of pedagogy, faces crucial issues of education (what to teach, why and for what reason) and inquires about the possibility that there is a model of alternative thought that might compete with scientific thought⁶. Following the track traced by the Italian

⁴ According to young people's view, education is a product, not a process. For instance, Freire and Bruner have both discussed this problematic view (Bruner and Brown, 1956; Freire, 1979).

⁵ Molar is, in our opinion, a kind of pedagogy capable to ask questions of meaning, anchored in human experience and capable to direct its efforts towards a complete educational project with which to develop all human faculties: physical and spiritual.

⁶ This allows him to say that you probably have to curb exogenous (eg. The sacredness of life) to individual freedom deified to such an extent in post-modernity that one arbitrarily determines the good and bad.

philosopher and educationist, we wonder about the possibility of a pedagogical approach to the complexity of crucial issues in education that does not act autonomously, but in synergy with other sources of knowledge, particularly philosophy and religion. Leaving an epistemological pedagogy to the freedom of individuals, in a time when many have recognized the need for a return to the *paideia*⁷ of virtues⁸ (Samek Lodovici, 2011; Lanfranchi, 2011), we might consider the adoption of the recognition paradigm, which, as Bellingreri states, is to know again something, about Christianity that you knew before and now do not know because of the occurrence of great events (Bellingreri, 2014, p. 16). The paradigm of recognition will serve to deepen our understanding of what some human sciences and in particular philosophy and religion can offer to pedagogy in helping rebuild, in time of crisis, moral knowledge, a kind of pedagogy of care⁹, without which the integral formation of individuals and human coexistence and peace among people, are impossible. Perhaps educating to live is one of the most important challenges (Morin, 2015), for media education in post-modernity. After all, what is an accumulation of knowledge increasingly specialized and fragmented, without the support of right reason and faith, indispensable instruments to initiate a process of synthesis and to open new glimmers of light, in the bleak horizon of post modernity? This is, in my opinion, one of the major challenges that pedagogy must address in the planetary era (Morin, 2015).

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⁷ *Paideia* is a Greek word meaning education.

⁸ Plato and Aristotle affirmed the inseparable link between education and virtue. In the *Apology of Socrates*, Plato recalls that education has the task of guiding young people to take care of their souls. He also argues that virtue is not born of wealth, but that wealth comes from the virtues and all the other things that are good for men (Plato, 2000). Aristotle deepens this reflection and explains the role of the educator (Aristotle, 2000).

⁹ A pedagogy of care, by enriching knowledge with religious knowledge and classical philosophy, aims at erasing the deep wounds of contemporary humanity and encouraging a process of self-construction which produces the renewal of human society and that is the prelude to a time of prosperity and peace.

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