

Chapter 69

Empowering Creativity in Young People Through Mobile Learning: An Investigation of Creative Practices of Mobile Media Uses In and Out of School

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the potential of mobile learning for creativity in and out of school with a focus on media production. In doing so it attempts to move beyond binary choices around the nature of creativity (e.g., individual vs social) and the role of technologies for creative learning. To this end, it presents the literature on how creativity has been conceptualized, especially in education, and provides the theoretical underpinnings that supported the study by referring to the Vygotskian perspective of creativity as a transformative process of culture and the self. It then moves to a description of three experiences addressing young people and entailing the creation of digital artifacts through mobile devices. It also presents some results, exploring learners' and teachers' perspectives and showing how mobile devices serve as cultural resources that young people use for meaning making and transforming themselves. The paper concludes with some recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the reflection on the role of technologies to foster creativity has become central to much of the debate about creativity in education (Ferrari et al., 2009; Lucas et al., 2013). The

rapid development of digital technologies has led to the proliferation of tools that young people are increasingly appropriating for their use in everyday life. In particular, the recent rise in popularity of mobile and social media practices, from texting and sharing multimedia to social networking

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and online gaming, has aroused the discussion around the affordances of technologies for creative learning. On the one hand, there are scholars who claim that the use of ICTs by children will lead to a reduction of critical and divergent thinking. For example, in their recent critique of social media, Friesen and Lowe (2012) assert that the commercial nature of services such as Facebook would limit the opportunities to express disagreement: the implicit interaction model informing the architecture of this social networking site would bring users to manifest mainly agreement and ‘I like’. This ‘architecture of conviviality’ would be similar to that of television in the 1960s and would favor conformism rather than dissent or creative learning. On the other hand, the potential of new digital media for participation, creativity and media production is emphasized: as Jenkins and colleagues (2009) point out: “We are moving away from a world in which some produce and many consume media toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced” (p. 12).

These positions seem somewhat to reflect previous debates around the impact of computers on children’s creativity. For instance, as reported by Banaji and Burn (2007), in their critical examination of the use of ICT in education, Cordes and Miller (2000) asserted that “a heavy diet of ready-made computer images and programmed toys appear to stunt imaginative thinking [...] children in our electronic society are becoming alarmingly deficient in generating their own images and ideas” (p. 4). In replying to these claims, Clements and Sarama (2001) reported studies providing evidence of an increase in creativity and an improvement of peer relations due to positive interactive experiences with certain software. At the same time, they underlined that much educational software was not at all creative, being characterized by repetition and ‘drill and practice’ exercises. Therefore, they concluded that ICTs can enhance but not necessarily determine creativity improvement.

More generally, the views around the potential of technology for creativity in education can be situated between the extremes of ‘apocalyptic’, i.e. belief in a superior elitist culture at a distance to the media, and ‘integrated’, i.e. trust in the intrinsic and fascinating power of technologies to transform society (see Eco, 1964/1994); the rhetoric and practices of policy makers, individual school, teachers or educators may be positioned at different points in the continuum.

In this paper we want to move beyond these binary visions about the role of technologies in education and support the view that mobile and social technologies can be seen as cultural and learning resources available to people in everyday life (Pachler et al., 2010a); from the Vygotskian perspective, media production is based on the use of those resources and, like any creative activity, it entails the transformation of the ‘creator’ to some extent. With this in mind we examine in the first part of the paper the literature relating to creativity in education for learning. In the remaining part, we present and analyze three projects about the use of mobile devices in and out of school for media production, and then discuss the implications of these experiences for creativity, transformation and learning from the point of view of young people and teachers/educators as well.

Theoretical Background

Though creativity is a word widely used in many fields of human activity and society, it remains very often undefined, while discourses around creativity frequently draw on implicit conceptualizations and naïve visions (Runco, 2003). Common usage is full of sentences confirming this trend. For example, creativity is commonly associated with unique individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci or Einstein, implicitly assuming that creativity is a personal ability pertaining only to extraordinary people. Or it is linked to a specific domain such as the arts, for example when people conceive of creativity as typical of great painters or film mak-

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