

Is Electronic Knowledge a Plural Thought?

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INTRODUCTION

With the third millennium a new and attractive scenario has opened up, giving voice to an old face of culture: *knowledge*. Its “new” identity—holistic, multidimensional, and ecosystemic—was highlighted by the European Union in 2000 at the Lisbon conference.

In the 21st century there is a star carrying out on its tail these words: welcome to the knowledge society.

Knowledge is an immaterial good needed by any nation, because it’s like a bank account that any complex and changing society needs to have. It’s a capital with three faces: economic, social and human (Frabboni, 2006).

- a. As an economic resource, knowledge promotes a mass-school, a school for everybody: the competitiveness and reliability of a productive system are based on schooling and on the “well-made heads” of younger generations,
- b. As a social resource it promotes democracy, because knowledge provides all citizens with the necessary alphabets to create a widespread social cohesion; therefore education must be spread during all the seasons of life, from childhood to old age,
- c. As a human resource it helps the person-subject to move away from the devastating mass-subject. A school of knowledge and of values (i.e., of mind and heart) will have to invest on a person that is nonduplicable, noneasily influenced, and nonuseful; with his or her eyes open on dreams, utopias, and enchantment. School has the task of forming a plural mind and an ethic of solidarity.

But what is the meaning of this macroword and what are its visible signs which can help us to recognize knowledge? And what is usually meant in Europe by knowledge era? Is this the best way to form citizens with a plural mind and an ethic of solidarity, from a pedagogical point of view? We have many doubts in

giving a positive answer to these questions (Frabboni & Pinto Minerva, 2001).

First of all, we would like to highlight the cry of alarm recently raised from the European Ministries of Education in Lisbon. In this society of *immaterial economy*—informatics, telematics, robotics—it is important to promptly globalize literacy. This is the only way to ensure that everybody has a black box (i.e., a cognitive machine) able to register and use the *online* languages scattered in the global village of digital information. A *non-stop* circulation of languages on the Net (electronic) overwhelms the minds of the people living in this ocean of media. We need “life rafts” equipped with informatics compasses, to overcome the risk either of being driven out of the modern digital-based social communication due to illiteracy, or of being overwhelmed and swallowed by these esoteric and sometimes cryptic codes.

We agree with European Ministries of Education, but with some reservations (Frabboni, 2003).

We agree with the European Union, when it states that people living in the 21st century cannot risk computer illiteracy, otherwise they would be excluded from the most important parts of society (economic, social, cultural and scientific). But we have a pedagogical confutation to this statement: a singular and totalizing vision of communication and knowledge as only digital is just as dangerous as illiteracy; it is especially true when the European Report assigns to information technology the task of redesigning *culture* (Frabboni, 2005).

The Lisbon Report identifies the education equipment of the future with the “microset” of knowledge, which requires a monocognitive function. This is the ability of storing (assimilating), and selecting (by eliminating and/or memorizing) the floating “knowledge” one can find in the Internet. This knowledge is basically “exogenous”, that means that it is of social utility or use by the people living in modern information society.

In the Lisbon Report there is no reference to the “macroset” of knowledge, which requires a meta-cognitive

function, considered as an “endogenous function” of nonimmediate social utility or use. We are talking about a threefold tool: *hermeneutics* (the ability to understand and interpret knowledge), *investigation* (the ability to discover and generate knowledge) and *heuristics* (the ability to invent and create “new” knowledge). A widespread higher education—mono and meta-cognitive—is needed, if we want our future generations to be able to navigate in the modern sea, full of mass and personal media, and to reach the shores of human resource called “singularity” of the *subject-person*: nonclickable, not easily influenced and nonuseful.

In our opinion, the macrosset of knowledge is fundamental and we need to defend it as much as we can. It is the logical and formal command of endogenous nature, able to keep watch of *communication*, which is more and more hostage of a symbolic language (online and iconic). A prefabricated *symbolic-world*: frozen, metallic, without any soul.

Men and women risk to lose their direct contact with reality. *Image* and the *informatics code* (mail or chat) could exclude both “oral” and “body” language, and this could lead to the repression of those languages in everyday life: yet the formative potential of languages lies exactly in the plurality of their codes and functions.

Many languages are therefore at risk in their functions of *social communication* (talking with others), *cognitive communication* (thinking and representing the world in symbols), and *expressive communication* (expressing feelings and personal emotions).

The multiple intelligences suggested by Gardner are therefore fundamental for the people living in a semiological century. Men and women need to be able to grasp and connect together by using all the scattered links in this gigantic cognitive chain. But this will not happen if European politics makers will decide to abandon their citizens—dazed and helpless—in a world full of ambivalent signs, often difficult to understand and sometimes impossible to be used for communicating.

A self-service market of cultural goods seems to us a boundless mass-media and an electronic sea, with a huge “long-wave” able to wrap the consumer up—the children as well as the old people—in a nonstop cloud (24 hours a day), full of iconic and computerized alphabets. This “cloud” is currently in the middle of a fierce battle between those who avoid technology because of its cognitive toxicity (a vehicle of frozen knowledge

to be warmed up and eaten by consumers), and those who greet it as bearer of a benefic rain of widespread culture (because of the easy access to it).

The truth is that the technological cloud is already present in our life and everybody can feel it. The only thing we can do is to regulate, qualify, and evenly share out this abundant “rain”, but we definitely have to deal with it.

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KEYWORDS

Knowledge: An immaterial good needed by any complex and changing society. It’s a capital with three faces: economic, social, and human.

Metacognitive Function: It is an “endogenous” ability. It is a threefold tool: *hermeneutic* (to understand and interpret knowledge), *investigative* (to discover and generate knowledge), and *heuristic* (to create “new” knowledge).

Monocognitive Function: It is the ability of storing (assimilating), and selecting (by eliminating and/or memorizing) the floating “knowledge” found in the Internet which is basically “exogenous”.

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