Chapter 31
Create, Transform, and Share:
Empowering Creativity and Self-Expression through Mobile Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the potential of mobile learning for creativity in formal and informal contexts of learning with a focus on media production and self-expression. In doing so it attempts to move beyond binary views around the nature of creativity and the role of technologies for creative learning. It presents the literature on how creativity and its relationship with technologies have been conceptualized, especially in education, and provides the theoretical underpinnings that supported the study. In particular, it refers to the Vygotskyan perspective of creativity as a transformative (social) process of culture and the self, and looks at digital technologies' affordances to reflect on their potential for learning. It describes three projects addressing young people and entailing the creation of digital artefacts through mobile devices. It highlights learners' and teachers' perspectives and shows how mobile devices can serve as cultural resources that young people may use for meaning making and transforming themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, reflecting on the role of technologies in fostering creativity has become central to much of the debate around creativity in education (Ferrari et al., 2009; Kampylis and Berki, 2014; 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 own 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 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 in critical and divergent thinking. For example, in their 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, thus favouring 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, whereby some scholars (e.g., Cordes and Miller, 2000, p. 4) advocated "a heavy diet of ready-made computer images" to limit the risk of reducing children's imaginative thinking, while other scholars (e.g. Clements and Sarama, 2001) provided evidence of an increase in creativity and an improvement in peer relations due to positive interactive experiences with certain software. 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 from 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 schools, teachers or educators may be positioned at different points along the continuum.

In this chapter we want to move beyond these binary visions 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., 2010; Buchem et al., 2013); from the Vygotskyan 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 chapter the literature relating to creativity, learning and technologies in education. In the second 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 also teachers/educators.

Literature Review

Creativity and Learning

Though creativity is a word widely used in many fields of human activity and society, it remains very often undefined, while discourses around it 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 makers. Or, it is also considered as a natural and innate feature of talented people with the consequence that only those people can be creative, whilst the rest of humankind is condemned to be uncreative with no chance for learning to be creators. These common views around creativity have been sometimes qualified as myths or misconceptions (see e.g. Ferrari et al., 2009). As we shall see below, at times they reflect some conceptualizations that can also be found in the literature, while at other

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