Chapter 6
Learning in a "Classi 2.0" Classroom:
First Results from an Empirical Research in the Italian Context

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ABSTRACT

The "Classi 2.0" programme is a national applied research project aimed at investigating if and how new media and technologies for producing, communicating, and sharing contents can improve and change learning environments in Italian schools. In this chapter, the discussion centres on scientific sociological research connected to the project carried out by the Polytechnic University of Turin. The research aimed at exploring the main tendencies, expectations, and technological problems both for teachers and for students in coping with digital innovation. In particular, the chapter outlines: the main technological choices of schools, which devices and media are preferred by schools, and how these technologies have been used as tools for reinventing not only learning processes, but also school times and spaces; it also outlines the most interesting changes in social relationship and social challenges that have occurred through the use of such innovative technologies.

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INTRODUCTION

The "Classi 2.0" programme in Italy is part of a broader programme, based on the "Digital Classroom of Tomorrow" (DCOT) concept. This has led to the "Classroom 2.0" initiative, which is implemented in Italy through Scuola Digitale's and "Classi 2.0" programme. Complementing this is the "LIM" (i.e. IWB- Interactive White Boards National plan – in English) initiative. Both are discussed in this chapter.

The goal of 'Classi 2.0' is to check if and how many technologies have been integrated in the learning environment in Italy and if their presence has brought relevant changes to teaching practices, in order to support their widespread and sustainable adoption and embedding across the European Union.

The project in Italy is replicated at an international level in many European Union countries with various different private or publically funded schemes. There is for instance, "Escuela 2.0" in Spain, "DCOT" (Digital Classroom of Tomorrow) in Wales and "CAPITAL" (Curriculum and Pedagogy in Technology Assisted Learning) in England.

In Italy, the project was promoted in 2009 by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research. It began in 156 Italian secondary schools (level one - middle school) and it has been coordinated in each region by a scientific board with members from Italian universities, ANSAS (The National Agency for the Development of School Autonomy) and USR (The Regional Scholastic Office).

The Ministry of Education delivered a sum of thirty thousand euro to each school, to spend on purchasing technologies.

ANSAS and the University, in particular, were given the function of supporting schools to set up original educational projects, based on communication technologies and on the equipping of multimedia classrooms, which often deeply modified the physical classroom environment.

According to the Ministry of Education an innovative school has been defined as a school using ICT in the whole school (not only in some classrooms, by some teachers).

It has four principal objectives:

1. To implement innovative teaching and learning methods;
2. To re-organise school space and time management;
3. To support personalisation of the teaching and learning process;
4. To develop close relationships with the local environment (other schools, companies, associations, parents and families, and so on.

The 156 Italian secondary schools (8 or 12 for each Italian region) were selected according to criteria related to the technological infrastructures and equipment already present and on pre-existing teacher experience regarding multi-media technologies. Many schools already had a wide experience in conducting projects which deal with media and technologies and many Italian teachers already attempt to integrate the use of technology into the everyday teaching processes.

The classrooms involved in the project have been called "Classi 2.0", to underline the aspects of interactivity and participation that the new project should promote in classrooms, thus improving cooperation and collaboration between students and between teachers and students.

In Piedmont 12 classrooms have taken part in the project: Asti, Biella, Cigliano, Felizzano, Galliate, Grugliasco, Moretta, S. Antonino di Susa, Sommariva del Bosco, Torino, Tetti Francesi di Rivalta, Villadossola.

The 12 classrooms are distributed both in cities and small towns of Piedmont. Some classes, such as Asti and Torino are characterized by a quite good social setting, while other ones present different kinds of problems.

Villadossola, for example, has a peculiar geographical collocation: it is a town of the Val