

# EDITORIAL - DIGITAL MOBILITY. MEDIA EDUCATIONAL ENDEAVOUR IN OUR DISPARATE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The responses to the call under the headline *Digital mobility - Media education quo vadis?* concentrate on theory and practice over three topics. These three topics reflect major tasks of education.

- Transformation of culture
- Mobility of learning
- Disparate identities and values.

## Transformation of culture - theory as educational self reflection

The first topic is about education as culturally determined activities to promote, to support, to challenge, to organize learning. The broader task is about socialisation and enculturation as the way of human beings to develop within their pre-given circumstances of life. From this perspective of socialisation, education has to ask about the actual circumstances in which humans are developing their identity and in which they appropriate their values. These questions belong to the self reflection of education and are a genuine educational task. But there is no common way of reflection, there is no definite pedagogical theory of teaching and learning, there is no definite theory of socialisation. For example, the terms above: identity and values, carry ideology and traditional claims of power.

In our time of turbulent and convulsive transformation of societies and cultures, called globalization, we can't expect a common theory, nor any common practice. Yet we live with dominant ideas about education and media. Among others there is the promise of knowledge as an exploitable

economic resource within the economic streams of globalization. Standardisation with sustainable planning, continuous control and assessment are some of the salient features of this promise. Further, there is the hope to have education as a tool to synchronize divergent but traditional cultures in the streams of migration. These are disparate cultural streams to which education has to react and find answers, hopefully in the perspective of children and young people. In addition to this statement, a footnote: in a disparate culture in flux, the educational vision from the Enlightenment could reassemble practical educational endeavours: to have education as advocate of children.

## Mobility, a task for education and an active educational feature

In the industrial society, mobility is as much a result of transformations as it is dynamic. On the visible level, education met and meets mobility. For example, through cars it is met in the form of making school beginners fit for traffic on the way to school, with bicycle courses for elementary school children or speed awareness courses for car drivers. The moving images of film and TV, now moving as an abstraction in comparison with the car, provoked media education and its concept of media literacy, which signifies a shift from the book to the media of everyday life. Nowadays mobile devices, smartphones, tablets etc contribute to a range of computer-mediated activities, which are released from specific locations and times. Upto now, education commonly tried to keep the school as a mobile free precinct. Is it now time for education to keep in step with these new tools and put them in the hands of students?

Beside practical issues, education can and should discuss the gains and losses of the amalgamation of life worlds and life courses with mobile devices. But for such a critical reflection, we need a closer look to deeper layers of our culture to unveil the characteristics of mobility. One moulding characteristic of mobility is individualisation. In school we are confronted with individualization by mobility e.g. how to deal with personally owned smartphone, perhaps with an application such as Whatsapp into the classroom. In what age should parents fulfil the children's desire to get their own smartphone? From the motorcar runs the historical line of individualization to consumption. The car was probably the first mass tool for individualization in the sense of individual disposal over and by a standardized and personally owned mass product. Individual disposal within the frame of standardization: this is the feature of consumption which already regulated the reception of TV. The recent digital mobile devices amalgamated with the Internet and now accelerate individualisation e.g. by options like YouTube: 'I decide when and where and with whom I watch TV. I am the TV programme director'. But this goes

together with massive opportunities to become creative. I can produce my 'homework' video, my music video and deliver it to a mass audience by YouTube. Creative media production was one of the magic bullet of media education. We have it now. There is no turning back on the evolution of digital technology, but are the cultural costs too high?

The individual mobility by cars contributed also to the identity of people as consumers and decision makers with commanding control, as already said, over where, when, with whom and how to go. This individual disposability as car drivers has moulded our identity as citizens. This kind of citizenship is prolonged by digital mobility of the Internet, tablet and smartphone and creates new impulses, which now shape the identity of the next generation as citizens. The nightmare of such forms of citizenship appears at the moment in the combination of Google with the car navigation or in the form of the total control by the bio-tool of the Apple watch. The keyword for this development is BIG DATA. Not by coincidence Big Data and Big Brother correspond. The control and power system of Big Brother is watching you is the alerting topic of George Orwell's narrative *1984*. Here a caution: such a proximity of a critical cultural analysis to alarming narratives should switch on a warning light. We are leaving the precinct of theory and mix theory with alarmism.

The papers of this special issue deal critically with the cultural dynamic of mobility. In a clear opposition to this cultural dynamic, with a clear obligation for education standards, the paper of Viviana de Angelis makes a claim for «the challenge of faith» and her call for «true moral values, i.e. those described by the classical philosophy and the Christian religion and that fully realize the human being». The editors' discussion about this problematic approach lead to a paper from co-editor Howard Scott, who opposed explicitly this argument and responded with a paper based on the opportunities afforded students to assert their identities in learning processes, supported by a pedagogy that integrates the enculturation of disruptive tools. Our editorial conclusion: In our times of disparate cultural transformation, education has to - or should - confront disparate identities and values by supporting learners in their way of appropriating cultural resources in a society in flux.

## The educational potential and its critical reflection

Education does have the capacity to deal with this cultural legacy. Of course education can interfere in these processes by prohibition or by reinforcing specific practices. If we look backwards in the history of education we find interesting educational concepts to set courses for times in cultural turmoil. An impressive one stems from Jean Jacques Rousseau (*Émile ou De l'éducation*, Amsterdam 1762) who promoted, among others,

the idea of education as supporting the child's development. Child development was mainly seen as a process of unfolding what a human being inherits as the human essentials. This view challenges concrete practices, but on the basis of critically and historically aware reflections of the continuing transformation of our culture.

Furthermore, education does have the capacity to take a main role within the processes of disparate cultural transformation. Education can abandon its self restriction as a repair task force or a prohibition one. The proposal here is to promote the appropriation activities of children, young people and, of course, of adults. This idea stems also from the Enlightenment at the end of European feudalism and the educational endeavour to address and support humans as citizen, as citizen, its French historical version. Like Rousseau's claim for child development as the basis for learning, during the time of the French Revolution Wilhelm v. Humboldt promoted the option of appropriation of cultural resources for the development of humans; for humans were seen as the activity centre in the societal and cultural dynamic by means of their appropriation processes. In line with this concept, education transgresses the teacher-learner relation or the educator-educated one by intervening always to processes of civilization.

## The focal points of the papers

Of course, education is genuinely practical, which means to contrast all great ideas, hopes and desires with practice. The intersection of theory and practice belongs to all of the following papers but with different emphases.

### *Section Theory*

The Italian and British scholar Elisabetta Adami concentrates on social semiotics as access to explain what is coming with digital mobility when semiotic practices are changing. Adami's paper accesses education by means of learning as meaning making under the specific circumstances of mobile media. The globally active US researcher Helen Crompton's educational frame results from an analysis of school culture, which considers the affordances made possible by mobile digital technologies. Affordance is meant as reciprocity between ubiquitous mobile devices and institutional forms of learning. The Austrian educationalist Theo Hug concentrates on epistemology to frame 'media activism and adjustment by means of learning technologies'. He opens the historical field of pedagogy to get access to «education as an umbrella-term that encompasses a variety of analytic and normative perspectives on a wide array of phenomena including preparation for life, upbringing, learning,

transformation of self- and world-relations, capacity development, personal maturation, qualification... etc.».

The following theoretical-oriented papers focus on the affordances of mobile learning. Mobility is now definitely seen as part of and inherent in learning. The British scholar Jocelyn Wishart unfolds what was and is discussed under the label of Mobile Learning, presenting the case for mobile learning as extending beyond the classroom, rather than use of mobile devices within the classroom. One of the figures presented in this paper makes clear that mobile learning has meanwhile reached a very high level of complexity. Referring to Helen Crompton, she tries to put in order this variety and diversity by this definition: «learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices».

The co-authors Thomas Cochrane and Laurent Antonczak from New Zealand follow this concept of context as a sign post for «creative pedagogies». It orients the teacher's role on «creating ecologies where communities can interact». The paper of the Italian scholar Viviana De Angelis stands as counterpoint to this discussion about the transformation of culture, not the least about reducing the epistemological consideration to a clear educational security in times of cultural liquidity driven by mobile devices. The paper's theoretical reaction is to stabilize culture by traditional and religious values, which leads to an attitude contra mobile devices for learning. This attitude tries to reduce de-stabilizing factors for education and formal learning.

### *Section Practice*

Not all papers with an emphasis on practice address specifically the role of mobiles in general. The papers of the German researchers Klaus Bredl and Amrei Gross on avatars, as well as the paper of Giuseppa Cappuccio about an Italian research project on videogames, investigate the options of applications like games or virtual spaces which are - of course now - independent from desktop PCs and run on diverse mobile devices. This indicates the normality of a diverse range of mobile devices which now guide educational interests to the specificity of software. But in this special issue discussions about apps are not on the agenda.

The more practical papers make visible what - among others - Jocelyn Wishart's contribution says, that there are a wide range of practical models and options for m-learning. Michael Sean Gallagher, an Anglophone researcher in South Korea, develops and applies the concept of 'learning space' to mobile learning, not the least to understand concrete historical urban development. «Geodividing exploration and geocaching compositions» are the learners' activities in a mobile literary project in Higher Education in Seoul. The paper of Simona Tirocchi on mobile devices in an Italian school reports about the teachers' relations to mobile

phones in schools. One of the results shows a divide in «two different worlds», in the «technologically advanced» schools and the «traditional schools». The first one «promotes a reorganization of spaces and work in the classroom, so that affects also an open attitude in the teachers and the staff» in respect of mobile devices. «In these classes the phone is 'normalized', through a process of integration and appropriation».

The Italian team Letizia Cinganotto and Daniela Cuccurullo ask for the options of integrated and mobile-assisted language learning. In this European project, it became clear that «the use of handheld devices in digital learning... can have a huge impact on school curricula, with great advantages both for the foreign language and for the subject content delivered through that language».

The British scholar Howard Scott reports about a project for low ability learners. The students used two social media platforms, supported by mobile learning activities, to contextualise their research to a central question. With an agency orientation, the college project goes beyond learning and looks for how identity is performed in a liquid society. The education issue of identity is also central for the project of Klaus Bredl and Amrei Gross about avatars in virtual spaces, which are available on mobile devices. Identity is also the driving force for the endeavour of the Belgium institution for media education, Media Animation asbl in Brussels. Trying to enforce media education to support identity this paper of Yves Collard and Paul de Theux from Media Animation raises questions about the part selfiesplay. As such, the overall content represents international interests in mobile learning, with input from commercial, research and educator practice stakeholders all contributing to widening current debate and knowledge.

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