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DIGIKIDS: TECHNOLOGY MEDIATED DEVELOPMENT, BEYON FEAR AND STEREOTYPES

Laura Elena CIOLAN

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, 90 Panduri str., Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: laurcupi@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The social and pedagogical discourse about "digital natives", Millennials, or "digikids" is not so new anymore, but as the case with many serious, even dramatic changes, a whole range of stereotypes and prejudices developed concerning this new generation, seriously affecting the quality of interaction with adults in general, and the quality of educational interaction in particular. We will try in this paper to look the learning characteristics of the new generation of kids, as well as on their consequences in designing learning experiences. Quality of the new generations is not intrinsic, nor by default jeopardized by their immersion in technologically rich environments. Beyond fear and stereotypes, we have to see how the encounter with this new generation could bring the most educational benefits, in a world that reconcile their lived experiences and our (adults) care and concerns. The "light side" of technologies impacting on kids development at early ages cannot be neglected, and this is not to assume that, necessarily, is automatically balanced by a "dark side"...*

Keywords: *digikids, educational software, kindergarten*

I. SURROUNDED BY IMAGES, MUSIC, ANIMATIONS. WHT WE ARE HEADING TOWARDS?

The information explosion surpassed the boundaries of education long time ago. It is obvious that the focus cannot remain on knowledge, on information, as the acquisition speed and the aging phenomena cannot be controlled by any educational system. This continuous flux one needs steady references. This has determined a new interest for values, for flexible axiological structures which allow appropriate interpretations of various contexts.

Another contemporary dimension claims a continuous preparation of the individual to face new challenges, or imposed changes. It is obvious that all European countries initiate processes and projects to meet the requirements and the trend of the next century. An education for being is concerned with developing the capacities and the talents of the individual in the context of the community life. Such an approach to education cannot avoid taking into consideration the importance of values.

Debates on values in the context of institutional education are avoided for fear of controversies between personal and social values, between traditional and innovative values, between those who promote an education of being and those who promote an education of having. The purpose of the education is to develop individual capacities and talents, taking into consideration the hopes and the interests of each person and the sense of belonging to a interdependent community, the communication with the others and the active participation to social life, in the spirit of culture and society.

Through values, culture is known by the members of the society. "School imposes determining values that converge with basic statements" [1]. The values that impose school are:

- Trust and respect for the child;
- Respecting the truth;
- Justice, honesty and altruism;
- Cooperation and competition;
- Tolerance, equality;
- Respect for school;
- Professional loyalty, etc.

The fundamental set of values promoted and put in practice by the school is or should be the result of the balance between the requirements (values) of the society, of the political power, of the local community, of the family and of the individual. Previous analysis show clearly the existing interest at the level of the key institutions in the field of education in meeting the requirements to ensure the compatibility of the future school with the evolution tendencies of the society in which it will perform.

Among the priorities of the analyzed educational systems we encountered the constant preoccupation for aspects such as:

- Free development of the youth personality;
- Promoting education in the spirit of European and global integration;
- The necessity to ensure equality of chances for education;
- Ensuring competences which would allow graduates to access a dynamic but unstable labour.

Emphasizing these aspects in documents of educational policies, by recording them as principles, values or rules which guide an educational system, represents the first step in enforcing this level of desirability for coherent educational practices in the classroom.

The contemporary realities, the development of the contemporary challenges, as well as responding to them, involve the individual into an educational process closely related to the new set of needs. As a result of the close analysis, one tendency related to the educational profile of the young stands out:

Computer and technology skills are current needs, but the 21st century, when all life aspects will depend on technology, developing these skills will be impossible to avoid. The computer is a means of teaching the previously mentioned subjects. But it is considered that operating and using skills need to be completely included in the school curriculum in order to educate the pupils, the future young people who will face later the technological diversity.

The computer and the school data base can be really useful to allowing students to search for information in a variety of fields.

II. ADAPTING SKILLS AND FLEXIBLE ATTITUDES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DESIGN

In a fast changing world, students will need complex competences to adapt, to encourage different attitudes when facing various situations or people.

Why are children so different nowadays? Just because they are not interested in playing and the games us, the adults, used to play, or because it would mean a greater effort to understand them... the gap between generations, in this case we do not refer to differences in quality of living, in education for life. It is rather a change in the objectives of development and in the interest for the environment that occur early in the life of the new generations and differently of what we were used to believe.

Children remain children, having the same physical, psychological and emotional needs, they go through the same stages but at a faster pace, and the characteristics of each stage of development are compressed in time.

The ones born in the digital era prefer:

- Getting information faster from various media sources;
- Multitasking training processes;
- Processing order: image, video and sound, then the text;
- Access to interactive hiperlink model to media information;
- Interacting simultaneously with several people;
- Virtual environments;
- Getting information when is necessary;
- Getting feedback and reward immediately;
- Learning only what is considered relevant at the moment, useful or funny.

Playing is the complex activity, fundamental for the education and the development of the human personality, especially in the first stages of life. For the nowadays generations of children, playing remains also the fundamental activity that educates and develops personality. The difference is the attraction at a different intensity for games and playing materials.

How did we play? We played games that reflected directly the relationship with the environment, with the others, most of the time in partnership with other children.

How do children play nowadays? They play alone, they prefer games that determine strong reactions that they do not want to share with other children, they prefer games that they can finish without the involvement of the help of other people. Children are today what we the adults want them to be. This cliché is no more than the reality: adults do not have the time nor the interest to participate, to stimulate, to enjoy initiating playing activities with their children. And the modern technology is a handy alternative to hide the lack of interest or of capacity.

The educational software:

- The learning process becomes more enjoyable and more interesting because of the computer.
- The lessons accompanied by suggestive texts and expressive brightly coloured images, that allow language and vocabulary development, can be easily acquired by children.
- There is a new world offered to the child who has the possibility to develop at his/her own pace.
- Emotionally, stressful situations which can lead to loss of trust and inferiority complexes, are avoided.

Advantages of using it in the kindergarten:

- The novelty of the learning contexts offers the child a new;
- It stimulates the logico-mathematical, special and kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and emotional intelligence.

Disadvantages of using it in the kindergarten:

- From a medical point of view, working on computer involves a static position, tiring the spine and generating wrong posture.
- From a psychosocial point of view, working on computer does not encourage social interaction, generating the isolation of the child.

Dependence on computer leads to:

- isolation
- inability to socialize
- school failure
- aggressive behaviour

Dependence on computer can cause behavioural dysfunctions: insomnia, headaches, eyes problems, neglecting external look, depression and hysteria.

Aptitudes, attitudes, habits, appreciation and reward systems are the curriculum objectives, the starting point in its elaboration. The learning activities need to be enjoyable, motivating, stimulating and at the same time lead to desirable experiences with respect to future requirements.

This generation of children determines us to work differently, without constraints or masks, without rigidity, only with pleasure and commitment. For this reason, when one works with the pupils, one needs to pay attention to know and accept them the way they are, to help them go through this period of their life in a natural pleasant way.

The environment, the educational space, the working materials, the way they are employed, are necessary means in child development. It is important to consider the selection of materials which need to correspond to reality, to send the information necessary to the child and become a decisional factor in his/her development.

A modern approach emphasizes the use of interactive methods which focus on practical activities and playing (problem solving, learning through discovery etc.) to meet the educational need of the students, the requirements of the society, the wishes of the parents. Being a complex and extremely rigorous process, the basic principles which should be followed focus on ensuring to all children the possibility to participate to optional courses, the coherence, applicability, the flexibility but also the connection to reality of the designed course.

The design of an optional curriculum based on digital educational resources responds directly to children's needs for and interests in knowing and acting, determining an increase in intrinsic motivation for learning but also more participation to the learning activities. Employing the computer in educational institutions has benefic effects for developing spatial thinking, in images, for stimulating the left hemisphere of the brain but also for stimulating linguistic competences.

Children's age characteristics represent the selection criteria of the optional curricular content. According to these, the level of the information approached is established, the working methods and means are selected, the evaluation is done. Children's individual characteristics determine the elaboration of the optional curriculum with the appropriate contents for those with special abilities and interests, but also different contents for various subjects, according to the key competences we want to form. The optional school curriculum should encourage pupils to use and develop competences in all ranges of learning domains for more and more complex and new situations. Opportunities to do this can often be integrated into the existing programmes. There can also be offered opportunities in which pupils can initiate activities that can offer significant contexts for learning and selfevaluation.

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