

Media Educative Bricolage

Lorenzo Denicolai

Università degli Studi di Torino – Cinedumedia, Dip. Filosofia e Scienze dell'Educazione (Italy)

lorenzo.denicolai@unito.it

Abstract

The speech aims to consider multimedia language, free online environments and software as instruments for education. The progressive awareness of an online life [1] and “multi-lifting” [2] allow to teach differently with the Web and online communication and sharing. We can consider the Web as a ‘gym’ to teach with an innovative mixed use of multimedia languages, online environments and software. Starting by Lévi-Strauss notion of ‘bricolage’ [3], these instruments (already existing with their own function) can be re-used with another aim, to co-create (with students) new educative and experiential ‘places’, to favour the students’ attention and co-participation. Besides, teachers and students could experiment some alternative modes to use multimedia language and online platforms with an aggregative logic. As a language, we consider this method a potential mode of knowledge growth, communication and management, processed with a multi-code approach. Thus, it is also possible to grow students’ awareness of the technological strength and help them search and find out some modalities of meaning creation with media languages. The speech is based on upgrading courses for teachers on Media Education methods, in which teachers designed and tested some ways to use multimedia language and online software. Some of these elaborations could be illustrated during the conference.

1. Introduction

This speech introduces the ‘Media Education (ME) bricolage’ notion, starting by some easy thoughts about teachers and their daily teaching methodologies that I have collect during upgrading courses on Media Education methods (in which I am the trainer). I would try to summarize some opinions of teachers, who tell me about their feeling with media technologies. Some of these often complain their troubles with media and with students using media. Some teachers are not persuaded by the learning potentials of the media education systems, because they think these methods are distractions, not helpful to study. Maybe they are partly right. Others would use innovative ways to teach, but they haven’t got enough skills and practices with media technologies. Some teachers consider media education too complex to apply in classrooms; they often do not have the awareness of the media technology potential, because they are not used to think about with media, for media and through media. Many of them consider media as instruments but not as a language. Obviously, there are also enthusiastic positions about media and the use of technology in classroom. Some teachers use media as a valid support for didactics and they believe in these new ways of education.

I would illustrate some possible use of ME bricolage starting by my experience as a trainer in Media Education courses for teachers. The first part of this paper presents some philosophical and theoretical concepts about online life, experience and the Web as a lifting place, whence my reflections are started. After, I will try to explain briefly some practical experiments developed with teachers during upgrading courses and how the Bricolage theory (Lévi-Strauss) could be read in media education context. The main part of this speech should argue the ME bricolage as an idea to use knowingly media and technologies in class.

2. A Brief Nod on Online life

Nowadays our life is online. Today we can exist in virtual environments as Facebook, Twitter, other social networks, blogs, forums and communities and we can say to everybody our ‘status’ (that is, our being) and actions. Using a smartphone or a tablet with geolocation system, for example, all our Facebook friends can find out our position and what we are doing in that moment. However, we are in a “tangent virtuality” [4], because we live in the Web and Reality at the same time. Facebook profile could not fully replace our physical identity, but it could co-exist with reality. This particular virtuality is similar to the first order of Baudrillard’s Simulacra, because it is still possible to recognize reality from fiction [5]. This modifies our identity awareness and makes us part of an enormous global co-action. Each word, photo, selfie, video, content or action can be both personal and collective. Current virtuality could also represent identity in ‘multi-focal’ vision: if we consider each social profile as a part

of our physical person, we could recognize many parts of our identity. Profile can be viewed as a self-augmented-reality or another expression of Turkle's "multi-lifting" [6].

2.2 Gym on the Web

In this double condition of being, we can do many things on the Web: socializing, chatting, dating, playing, and, obviously, learning. I mean the Web as a 'gym', that is a place in which it is possible to try, experiment and simulate situations of realities. As in a physical gym (in which people take care of their body) as in a 'mind gym' (on the Web) students can explore, create or co-create with teachers platforms and exercises to enhance their own knowledge. According to Dede [7] and Jenkins [8], students could acquire technological and communicative skills through a peer interaction and co-participatory acting in virtual environments. Because, if in accordance with Floridi [9] we use technology to spelling (or use) another technology, I think it is the same with multimedia languages and online media.

I suppose students (and users, generally) can develop collective knowledge exploiting free online soft wares and existing virtual places, with the re-allocation of the functions and finalities. Many people do it unconsciously: now, awareness should be achieved. Thus, the Web can be a gym of opportunities and tests of new platforms and utilities, also for learning. That is: each student (or each class) could realize its place of learning and share it with others without having to buy anything.

2.3 The Bricolage and the creation of meaning

In Lévi-Strauss *The Savage Mind* (1962), the anthropologist analyzes two ways of thinking: the scientific one and the "science of the concrete", typical of "primitive people" [10]. If the modern way (according to the author) is characterized by a scientific approach and a deep knowledge of materials and techniques used to create something ("science creates its means and results in the form of event, thanks to the structures which it is constantly elaborating and which are its hypotheses and theories" [11]), the "intellectual form of 'bricolage' [...] builds up structured sets, not directly with other structured sets but using the remains and debris of events" [12]. Nowadays, I think that we always use a particular 'bricolage logic' for most of our activities on the Web and with the technology. We just do it on our Facebook home, when we re-publish other posts giving it another meaning, or when modifying a pre-existent message in something else (for example, when we use a YouTube video for communicating a different meaning from the original). Many of our online actions are based on a co-creation and re-creation of meanings, also as Jenkins' Participatory Culture theory [13] argues. Online users co-produce materials that can be immediately changed by others; we use edited contents as scraps of published posts (that is "events") and build new meaning structures. I think students can build new meaning and knowledge structures at the same way. Because this logic allows students to re-invent and re-use online spaces and free software for learning activities, in a continuous process of re-utilization and re-creation as well as a bricoleur who builds a new wardrobe with old wood already used. Starting by this theory, it is not necessary to have particular software or environment to teach and learn on the Web and, at the same time, it is possible to create congenial learning activities, declined by each didactic demand. Rather than words, videos or contents, here we use platforms and free software originally designed to specific functions and, now, reconverted to teach and learn. This logic is the same to multimedia languages, like photos or videos, that can be used to express contents and didactic objects.

3. Educative Activities with ME Bricolage

Teachers involved in my upgrading courses have not usually considered using Web and its platforms to create educative places and activities. If I think about technology as a whole, only few participants have ever used multimedia languages with educative aims. As I said, the 'bricolage logic' can be useful because it is not necessary to buy software or know specific programming language. It is adequate to use those existing.

It is important to think about 'ME bricolage' as an expressive field for students, who should be involved in all steps of an activity. They should have the main roles of the co-creation of their own educative tools. Because, their aim is to learn didactic elements and, thanks to bricolage, to experiment the use of technology and media language. In this situation, teachers should give the class the know-how and be a guide, in a continuous connection among parts. As the theory of Dede, also this type of education should be characterized by "co-design" [14], it should be "informal" (Cross [15] and Jenkins [16]) and based on the gamification principle. With the 'bricolage logic' I want to suggest some possible correlated activities with media and multimedia language, starting by the New Media Consortium's definition of media literacy: "the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy

overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms" [17]. Thus, in a media education bricolage logic, we should realize a multi-code platform on the Web in which it is possible to show multimedia languages and some products of students. Let's start to describe some cases of ME bricolage (tested by teachers during my upgrading courses). In those situations, teachers try activities that they propose to students in class, so as to understand proceedings, needs and declinations of each exercise (at schools, students will replace teachers as performers of activities). Results are obtained by the team-work. All activities of ME bricolage can be realized by teachers to students or by teachers and students or by students only (to themselves or to others students).

The group usually starts to realize a didactic video (almost with stop-motion technique). In this case, participants hold all production tasks, as a role play situation. The aim is to understand the logic of visual language, the making of a product (that is the Lévi-Strauss "structure") and how it is possible to organize a team-work with the class. Teachers (and then, students) should concentrate on the process of video making and how they can use daily technologies, as smartphone, tablet or camera. Normally, I ask teachers to think of a real and concrete finality for videos: it is more simple to motivate students to do something if it has a useful aim. This is one of the levels of ME bricolage: the use of daily instruments to create educative video. This is achievable also with tablet and apps, as Apple's iMovie pre-edited trailers: students could realize didactic video changing the meaning of these phrases. These can be enriched by other products. For example, educational sites or environments, also as systems to publish these creations.

CMS's Wordpress, Blogger, Joomla are some famous systems to create sites, blogs and environments to publish, manage and share contents. These are potential software to increase media education. There are some modalities: they can be used as site/blog to organize news and materials about school subjects; they can be a thematic site on a specific theme, or a blog to comment and interact. But, as platforms like Sophia or Schoology [18], with CMS we can also build educative environments and give them more functions rather than their normal uses. On Wordpress, for example, students can realize school journal, webradio or webtv channels aggregating other free online software (Spreaker, Ustream or YouTube) besides uploading their materials. Thus, if they have made a thematic video on a subject, they can upload it on their expressly created page. And it is possible to insert surveys or quizzes (by free software or sites [19]) to test the learning level. If students want to enrich a theme with visual and interactive presentation, they could insert a Prezi project [20]. With this application, it is also possible to create conceptual maps (as slides) and insert them in the site dedicated. Applying Buddypress plugin, Wordpress becomes a social network: in this case, students can try many modalities of uses and modifications of the basic blog platform (maybe they could also work on the source code of Wordpress, trying the php language).

3. Conclusion

These are some exempla of ME bricolage; each can be changed or modified by experience and necessities. Each activity aims to allow students to test and grow knowledge and skills about technology and media. That's why students should be actively involved in creation steps. According to Jenkins "youths must expand their required competencies, not push aside old skills to make room for the new" [21]: the ME bricolage logic aims to help students to use media and technology with awareness, giving them the possibility to grow communicative and technological competencies and skills, that will be useful in their future professional fields. Working on a media product, with aggregating and re-creating original meanings and finalities, helps students to understand and test technology potentials, experimenting media languages at the same time. These methods should allow to teach all subjects and give students basic notions on cultural themes. With media and social skills, they can share and collaborate to create a collective knowledge and test their participatory culture awareness. With ME bricolage logic, teachers and students experiment more uses of existing platforms on the Web and enrich their own know-how with an informal approach also in a formal context like the class.

References

- [1] Floridi, L. (2014). *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. Oxford: University Press.
- [2] Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Perseus Book Group.

- [3] Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966). *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (or. 1962). Available at: <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/levistrauss.pdf> (last access: 01/04/15)
- [4] Denicolai, L. (2014). Riflessioni del sé. Esistenza, identità e social network. *Media Education – Studi, ricerche, buone pratiche*, 5, 2014, 164-181.
- [5] Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. The University of Michigan Press (or. 1981).
- [6] Turkle, *cit.*
- [7] Dede, C. (2005). Planning for Neomillennial Learning Styles. *Educause Quarterly*, 1, 7-12.
- [8] Jenkins, H., et al. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture. Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- [9] Floridi, *cit.*
- [10] Lévi-Strauss, *cit.*, p. 2 (pages numbers referee to the digital version)
- [11] *Ibidem*, p. 14.
- [12] *Ivi.*
- [13] Jenkins, *cit.*
- [14] Dede, *cit.*, p. 10.
- [15] Cross, J (2006). *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways That Inspire Innovation And Performance*. New York: Pfeiffer-Wiley.
- [16] Jenkins, *cit.*, p. 11.
- [17] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
- [18] Sophia Learning: www.sophia.org; Schoology: www.schoology.com (last access: 01/04/15).
- [19] FreeOnlineSurveys; Hot Potatoes/jQuiz; KwikSurveys.
- [20] Prezi: prezi.com (last access: 01/04/2015)
- [21] Jenkins, *cit.*, p. 29.