



The VI Sle-L Conference sessions - Salerno September 16-18 2009

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The sixth Sle-L Conference was characterized by sessions of high quality and all pertinent to the topics which are emerging and are being discussed in the TEL sector. These sessions, 5 in total, distributed over the day dedicated to the academics and the industrialists, were coordinated by Maria Beatrice Ligorio, President of “Collaborative Knowledge Building Group”, Maria Rosaria D’Esposito of DISES – University of Salerno, Francesco Orciuoli and Pierluigi Ritrovato, both from L&K, and Mirella Schaerf, member of the Sle-L executive board. The topics faced were:

- GenY revisited. Media practices and learning strategies of digital natives between University and the labour market
- E-Learning as a training policy
- Ontology Based e-Learning systems
- Industrial solutions for innovative e-learning systems
- E-learning as a strategic stimulus for local administrations

The day opened with the session presided over by Prof. Maria Beatrice

Ligorio and which had as main speaker Prof. Lorenzo Cantone of the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the University of Lugano, director of the laboratories New MinE (New Media in Education), Webatelier.net and e-Learning Lab.

Lorenzo Cantone's speech¹ recalled the results of some of the researches he has coordinated to prove that the more or less intensive use of technologies does not depend so much on generational differences but rather on the perception of efficacy of the tool considered. In particular, Prof. Cantone mentioned an interesting research concerning the use of Information and Communication Technologies among the religious congregations belonging to the Catholic Church². From the research it results that there is no statistically relevant relationship between the average age of the churchmen and their propensity to use technologies, but that this propensity is influenced rather by the mission of the congregation they belong to. In other words, the choice to use digital and telematic technologies is influenced and determined not so much by the age of the churchmen, but by the perception they have of the efficaciousness of the technological tool with reference to the objective the congregation wishes to reach. Cited is also the research "Brazilian e-Learning Teacher training K-12", «whose objective is to study the advantages in and the obstacles to the introduction of e-learning to favour the constant training of primary school teachers in the economically disadvantaged area of Brazil»³.

The critical and accurate reflections of the paper on the current tendency to reduce everything to technology and on the technocentric perspective predominant in scientific literature and in psycho-pedagogical research, end with the statement: "Considered a certain technological scenario, this can be interpreted according to modalities very different from one another".

Prof. Maria Rosaria D'Esposito, coordinator of the second session, held on the 17th of September, presented Gráinne Conole, e-learning instructor at the Open University, who, moving from the observation that e-learning is today going through a phase of "normalization" in all educational organizations, focused on the national and international policies of the sector. She pointed out the striking contrast between the exaltation of the potential of technology in terms of personalization, flexibility, adaptiveness, involvement, meaning and its effective use in practice.

The third session, coordinated by Prof. Francesco Orciuoli, discussed the topic of Semantic web and the educational Ontologies. Prof. Adorni of the University of Genoa, scholar and expert in the planning of multi-agent systems,

¹ Vedi: <http://www.slideshare.net/lorenzocantoni/geny-revisited>

² Cantoni, L. & Zyga, S. (2007). The Use of Internet Communication by Catholic Congregations. A Quantitative Study, «Journal of Media and Religion», 6/4: 291-309.

³ http://www.usi.ch/ricerca/research_dettaglio_progetto?id=209

of mobile automatons, of artificial vision and distance learning, was the main speaker. He explained the function of ontologies, that is information-technology formalisms for the specialized representation of a particular field of knowledge, which will determine the passage “from the information web to the knowledge web”; in other words to the Semantic Web, an environment in which documents will be associated with information, capable of specifying the semantic context, understandable and automatically processed by machine. Adorni’s speech described the development of research on web applications, with particular attention to web-based education from the 1990s till the most recent adaptative systems which have improved the quality of the pedagogical model, of the technological infrastructure, of the technological services introducing adaptative typologies for contents, for content presentation (interfaces) and in function of the kind of student. Adorni efficaciously outlined also the possible scenarios to the application of ontologies, defining an Educational Semantic Web based on Intelligent Pedagogical Agents. The session “E-learning Ontology Based Systems” ended with the presentation of Dr. Nicola Capuano, a CRMPA (Research Center in Pure and Applied Mathematics) researcher, who illustrated the development of the research on ontologies carried out at the CRMPA. Capuano explained that in 1998 the need to face the limits of the traditional environments of e-learning and to plan systems capable of automatically personalizing the didactic offer considering parameters such as the previous experiences and the learning preferences of the students, was strongly felt. The next phase of the research then brought to the integration of the so-called “didactic model”, that is of the possibility to determine automatically the modalities of presentation of concepts and contents, which varies according to the “didactic model” taken as reference. In recent years research has focused on the possibility to simplify the management of ontologies especially thanks to the elaboration of a system capable of extracting ontologies from the contents themselves. At present the CRMPA researchers are involved in the creation of a wiki prototype for the editing of ontologies which draws information from the tagging activities (in Italian “taggare” which consists in attributing and assigning key words, called “tags”, to the resources) of the users in order to facilitate the process of creation of the main ontology.

Prof. Pierluigi Ritrovato opened the sessions of the so-called “industrial” day of the conference, introducing the speeches of Dr. Fabrizio Cobis, from the Head Office for Research Coordination and Development of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Prof. Ernesto Damiani, from the University of Crema.

Cobis presented the National Research Program and the actions the Regions can carry out (by using the European funds). His speech placed attention on the Ministry’s course of action for it intends to sustain strategic and operative

interventions capable of determining “structural” social and economic changes. To meet such ambitious goals, the Ministry intends to adopt a policy which valorizes merit, quality and excellence and which aims at overcoming obsolete fragmentations in favour of synergies between the various disciplines and of the integration between basic, applied and industrial research. Ernesto Damiani, testifying instead his long experience in the planning of e-learning courses for the training and re-training of company and organization employees, then made some interesting reflections on the fundamental role of e-learning in company training because it is the only system capable of favouring the development of competences within the working experience, without forcing the employee to leave his/her working place. Recalling his experiences and researches, Damiani illustrated how in specific conditions a didactic model based on experiential learning can be particularly efficacious in terms of learning and acquisition of competences, more than can be a methodology based on the rigid organization of contents or role games and simulations which offer a rather simplified vision of reality.

The session “E-learning as a strategic stimulus for local administrations” was opened with an interesting consideration of her coordinator, Prof. Mirella Schaerf, who pointed out that in the public administration, e-learning is the only way of training personnel at all levels, not only because a classroom course is impossible with so many course participants, but also because the need is to have continuous and prolonged rather than sporadic and occasional training. Of course, as Mirella Schaerf stressed, it is necessary for the e-learning to be of quality because its aim is not only to update competences, but especially to change the employees’ approach to work, obtaining this way an improvement in the services offered to the citizens. Schaerf proposes in particular a concrete and efficacious web didactic model, that of the online communities of practices, of the communities that “talk about” their experiences and share the documents, projects and models, result of such experiences. To discuss this topic Mirella Schaerf invited Mauro Sandrini of the University of Teramo and founder of the journal “e-learning per la PA”⁴, Caterina Lupo of the CNIPA, Graziella Testaceni of the Consorzio per il Sistema Informativo in Piedmont and Gianni Biagi of the Progetto Trio – Regione Toscana.

According to Sandrini there are two training project models in the Local Public Administration. The first one, the top down model, is the institutional course thought and carried out to introduce elements of efficiency into the system; the second one is, instead, a bottom up model and it regards a single employee or a small group of employees who choose to attend training courses in order to satisfy the need felt to keep oneself up to date. In Sandrini’s opinion it is necessary to imagine a modality that makes these two dimensions meet

⁴ <http://www.elgov.org/it>

in order to start up processes of organizational change, to facilitate moments of confrontation among the organizations and especially to “give value to the knowledge of people”. Sandrini’s speech was centered in particular on the problem of incentives, pointing out that the economic ones have not always been useful; his proposal is to “rediscover the emotional side” and to stimulate motivation, also with strategies which sustain the effort and the time dedicated to training.

Caterina Lupo talked about the experience of the project “Scuola Virtuale della Pubblica Amministrazione” (The Public Administration Virtual School)⁵, developed by the CNIPA in collaboration with other Administrations, which aims at creating an e-learning system for the training of public workers. The project has created an e-learning portal for the Public Administration and a repository of didactic projects and materials.

Graziella Testaceni described the training projects of the CSI Piemonte⁶, organized in a blended learning modality. The training model adopted by the CSI Piemonte includes a tutor for the online courses when the trainees are studying by themselves or when they are in group. In addition, serious games and web 2.0 tools are used (For example, blogs, wikis, social networks). The classroom courses aim instead at presenting case studies or at facing difficult situations, similar to those encountered everyday by the course participants in their job.

Finally, Gianni Biagi presented TRIO⁷, the distance learning portal of the Regione Toscana (Tuscany), which contains a catalogue of about 1500 courses divided into 13 thematic areas. In particular, Biagi focused on three of the most significant projects developed by TRIO, For e-gov, Biblioteche Toscane and Progetto Sanità, anticipating, in addition, that TRIO is working to offer a more and more personalized level of training.

⁵ http://www2.cnipa.gov.it/site/_files/Quadernino%20n%2015.pdf

⁶ <http://www.csipiemonte.it/>

⁷ <http://www.progettotrio.it/trio/jsp/contents/homepage.jsp?view=home&service=ktrio>