



This issue focuses on French e-learning research and experiences and would not have been possible without the precious contribution of Serge Agostinelli, who promoted and coordinated the works of the French authors involved in this issue. Thus the issue starts off with an introduction by Agostinelli (Six questions aux approches françaises des didactiques scientifiques appliquées au e-learning), which stimulates French colleagues to reflect from various perspectives (pedagogy, technology, communication) on some key problems regarding e-learning theory and practice. The author particularly highlights the contribution didactic reflection can/must give to e-learning. This is a still very relevant remark considering what generally occurs in practice. As known, the didactic dimension is often sacrificed or disregarded in most parts of e-learning courses in favor of other dimensions, firstly the technological one, to the detriment of the pedagogical quality of the educational programs on the whole. A good part of the French authors' works focuses around this crucial issue, introducing a particular perspective of analysis traceable to the French tradition of didactic research.

The "Methodologies and Scenarios" section starts with a paper of Chevillard and Ladage (E-learning as a touchstone for didactic theory, and conversely), which trying to overturn the commonplace that online teaching results in nothing more than teaching with other means, introduces two concepts made possible by the development of the network: didactic hyperspace and didactic hypertime. Both are analyzed within the conceptual framework of the anthropological theory of didactics, and are regarded as notions that could allow to seize the new potentialities e-learning can offer to traditional education itself - without neglecting at the same time, to stress the shadows still hovering around e-learning.

In line with Chevillard and Ladage's approach, Ravestein (Didactique et e-learning: une théorie pour poser de bonnes questions) and Delamotte (Liens faibles, méfiance et apprentissage collectif) also propose a theoretical reflection

on e-learning. By referring to the framework of the new scientific didactics on which the notions of didactic system, contract, institution and time are based, Ravestein underlines the need to question oneself on how these notions can be reconfigured in that new learning situation which e-learning has been generating. In particular the author discusses the following issues: how are teacher-student relationships changing? What happens when traditional systems of transmitting knowledge are replaced with new tools that allow for distance communication of knowledge? The author offers different ideas, calling for further researches in the field.

By starting off from similar premises and assigning a pivotal role to the concept of didactic contract, Delamotte questions the relationship between technological and pedagogical culture, focusing the analysis on the implicit norms governing social relationships on the network and on the concept of trust. More specifically, the author suggests the hypothesis that a slow, gradual and partly contradictory affirmation of a system of diffidence is now occurring in the educational field. The signs of this can be detected in the instrumentalisation of the efforts and in the preference for anonymity shown by a major part of the students.

The “Methodologies and Scenarios” section concludes with a more experimental study proposed by Caussanel and Soulier (*Le StoryTelling pour l’apprentissage et le partage de connaissances*). Grounding on cognitive psychology studies on the impact of expectation failure in story-based learning, the authors present an experience conducted in the field of corporate education based on the use of stories to promote soft skills development. Technologies are known to offer the opportunity to relive failure experiences in safe contexts and precisely because of this, their role may be very important for those approaches that acknowledge the positive value of errors in learning processes.

The “Applications” section includes four papers, the first two of which conclude the focus on e-learning in France, presenting two experiences conducted in French-speaking countries, whereas the other two regard research conducted by Italian authors.

Sidir (*E-learning face aux collectives d’apprenants: de la dévolution didactique à la régulation du dispositif?*) invites us to consider the new and diverse communication schemes generated by the use of ICTs and to investigate the new forms of training regulation, made possible by the group mediation which modifies the traditional relationships between the individual and the educational system, increasing its importance. This last aspect stands as a work hypothesis which the author suggests, demonstrating the results of a research conducted within the university and based on the content analysis of messages posted by the students in a discussion forum during an e-learning course.

Leroux’s study pertains to the research field of CSCL (*La conception d’en-*

vironnement informatique d'apprentissage fondée sur une démarche de recherche-développement). It regards a research and development approach to the design and implementation of virtual learning environment, oriented towards supporting the management of distance collaborative projects. The applications designed and presented here try to conjugate a variety of instances (pedagogical, technological, economic – with respect to the large-scale spending availability of the product) with the aim to develop a technological-educational tool able to sustain and nourish interaction between students, and facilitate the teachers' role in activities of control, support and assessment.

The paper of Rigutti-Paoletti focuses on web 2.0 (Web 2.0: which usability issues?) and faces problems concerning the usability of web 2.0 instruments. A comparison between new and old web tools is proposed here and the interface quality is regarded in relation to the user's physical and cognitive characteristics. The research was conducted in light of the now classic rules of web design formulated by Nielsen and the picture obtained is that web 2.0 tools, though innovative and fascinating, are still far from being usable.

To end, Gallo (E-learning in the Mediterranean area: the MEDA-ETE project) shows the results of an international cooperation project created in the context of the Barcelona Process (1995) and intended for ten Arab countries of the Mediterranean area. The project was promoted with the purpose of improving the socio-economic wellbeing of the area. The study in particular takes into consideration the results of an e-learning training course for educators, through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, marking out the slow but growing improvement of the socio-relational atmosphere and the persistence of some critical points connected above all, to linguistic barriers.

This issue also includes a bilingual (French and English) glossary to facilitate the reading of French studies, which contains many references to theoretical notions characterizing didactic research in French tradition.

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