



Chapter VIII

Adolescents and the Internet: Media Appropriation and Perspectives on Education

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Abstract

This chapter deals with young people's digital media appropriation in an education perspective throughout Europe and Quebec. The comparative study, Mediappro, shows that 12 to 18-year-olds develop numerous and shared uses in fundamental domains such as ethics or social issues of IT, but their appropriation remains incomplete, mostly in information and creative activities. The study also highlights such a significant gap between home and school appropriation in all the countries that for the adolescents Internet activities in school are not part of "their Internet." The benefits of this research study lay on a more precise knowledge of adolescents' attitudes and skills and therefore the possibility to elaborate recommendations towards the main participants in education issues, parents as well as school systems.

Introduction

To better understand the impact of digital media in the context of its social and cultural environment, it is essential to study the use and the modes of its appropriation. At the same time, to foresee or even modify its evolution in the future, it is imperative to analyse the habits of youth with regards to digital media.

Mediappro (Media Appropriation) is an applied research project focusing on the appropriation of new media (the Internet, mobile phones, and video games) by 12 to 18-year-olds. Between January 2005 and June 2006, a number of associations and foundations, universities and government ministries from nine European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and the UK) collaborated on this project, coordinated by Thierry De Smedt from the University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium, in the framework of the European Commission's Safer Internet Action Plan.

These various institutions (1), specialising in media education, aimed at proposing different recommendations. A similar survey was also carried out during the same period in Quebec, Canada. This complementary approach allows for comparison and a better understanding of the situation in Europe and North America.

The study of the appropriation of new information technology is central to the thought processes involved in how to advance and put in place learning techniques. Information technology is not simply an "object" of knowledge. Familiarity and a certain level of skill are required. Moreover, the education of these media, as either a project or a process, inevitably demands the observation of how they are appropriated by youth, taking into account their specificities as well as their unknown factors.

Using a straight-forward approach and a combination of methodology, the Mediappro study draws on the statements of young Europeans to elucidate and propose recommendations in the learning of these media, coherent with the modes of appropriation observed. The results of the Mediappro study serve as a strong reminder of the educator's role. For the first time, in light of the statements of the youth who participated in the study within nine European countries as well as in Quebec, it has been possible to establish the use of the Internet within schools. Indeed, the project dramatically underlines the fact that neither the views of the educational institute, those of the educator, nor of the student superimpose. The differences are further accentuated with regards to the Internet.

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