


Edited by Pierpaolo Limone & Michele Baldassarre



ICT in Higher Education and Lifelong Learning

Proceedings
November 14th-15th, 2013
Bari (Italy)



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ISBN 978-88-6194-227-1
DOI: 10.12897/02.00001
Proprietà letteraria
Progedit – Progetti editoriali srl, Bari (Italy)
Via De Cesare 15 – 70122 BARI
Tel. 0805232627
Fax 0805237648
www.progedit.com
e-mail: info@progedit.com

Published in July 2014
Reprinted October 2014

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Baldassarre Michele

**ICT
in
Higher
Education
and
Lifelong
Learning**

**SIREM 2013
Conference
Proceedings**

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Table of contents

Introduction <i>Limone Pierpaolo, Baldassarre Michele</i>	p. 4
 <u>Section 1: Full Paper</u>	
The TQM Project: e-Portfolio as “process” and “product” <i>Angelini Luigi Rossano, Buono Rosanna, Basco Federica, Consiglio Teresa, Massari Maura, Parrucci Giulia</i>	p. 7
Digital storytelling: social dynamics and participation paths <i>Baldassarre Michele, Brunetti Immacolata, Brunetti Maria</i>	p. 14
Electric pedagogy. Hybrid environment as cognitive educational space <i>D'Ambrosio Maria</i>	p. 34
e-Highlight: a tool 2.0 for collaborative learning in a Social Media Platform <i>De Pietro Orlando, Muio Pierluigi, Frontera Giovanni</i>	p. 41
Web Generation 2.0. Teens and communication in the age of Facebook <i>Fornasari Alberto</i>	p. 53
Action Research to support the evaluation process of the eLearning platform at University of Milan <i>Milani Manuela, Pinelli Iris</i>	p. 62
The use of Facebook in informal contexts: what implications does it have for formal contexts? <i>Nuzzaci Antonella, Costa Sebastiano, Cuzzocrea Francesca, Murdaca Anna Maria, La Vecchia Loredana</i>	p. 70
Documenting at school: the research training "Scritture Bambine" between transmedia storytelling and mapping <i>Perla Loredana, Schiavone Nunzia</i>	p. 84
Videoresearch and teacher education: giving practice a voice <i>Perla Loredana, Schiavone Nunzia, Amati Ilenia</i>	p. 93
Learning how to “incorporate” technologies in ordinary classroom teaching. The ongoing multidisciplinary experiences carried out by the DidaSco research project group <i>Perla Loredana, Vinci Viviana</i>	p. 99
Dyslexia and young adults. A case study: from assessment to intervention with Reading Trainer software <i>Pinnelli Stefania</i>	p.107

Collaborative Learning Design: university teachers interactions to support quality teaching in blended courses	p.117
<i>Raffaghelli Juliana Elisa, Ghislandi Patrizia Maria Margherita</i>	

Section 2: Short Communication

“Those who can, teach”: pedagogy and the pivotal role of the teacher in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the learning environment	p.128
<i>Calaprice Silvana</i>	

School, University, informal contexts and ICT: is lifelong learning addressing teachers towards new professional skills today?	p.134
<i>Campanino Mario, Iavarone Maria Luisa</i>	

Touch-screen-based assessment of fine motor skills for handwriting: a pilot study	p.138
<i>Carlomagno Nadia, Di Tore Pio Alfredo, Corona Felice</i>	

Social reading. An opportunity for new ways of learning	p.143
<i>Pireddu Mario</i>	

The use of social networks in public bodies: a research direction, between laws and praxis	p.146
<i>Ragone Maria Morena</i>	

University as an extended context for the “dispersed communities” and for lifelong learning	p.150
<i>Ravanelli Francesca</i>	

Romany children: digital culture and educational experiences	p.155
<i>Santelli Beccegato Luisa, Carrera Letizia, Cassano Andrea, De Vito Gianluigi, Ferro Rosa, Fornasari Alberto</i>	

Reflecting on prior learning in higher education. Using an e-portfolio with students in the post-secondary age group	p.160
<i>Ugolini Francesco Claudio</i>	

Lifelong and lifewide learning online and offline: informal 2.0 education university teaching for Permanent Learning	p.165
<i>Zara Vincenzo, Altimari Francesco, Costabile Angela, De Carlo Maria Ermelinda, Caria Maria</i>	

Section 3: Experience

eLearning experiences at University of Turin	p.171
<i>Cantarutti Sara, Caprioglio Enrica, Ferraioli Maria</i>	

Recognition of informal competences.	p.175
The Slp Cisl trade-union education case	
<i>Di Rienzo Paolo, Proietti Emanuela</i>	
The school Dumas: the narrative between past, present and future	p.181
<i>Ena Anna Erika</i>	
Tablet pc: an educational experience in Emilia Romagna higher school	p.186
<i>Guerra Luigi, Ferrari Luca</i>	
How to develop learning and competence for an audio-visual- kinetic expression. Case study of video-filmic writing lab teaching in the Master of Science in Theory and Methodology of e-learning and media education (E-Media)	p.190
<i>Luciani Luca</i>	
An experience of collaborative construction of rubrics with adult university students	p.196
<i>Maniero Sabrina</i>	
The Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Dialogue Laboratorio (E-MIDIA LAB Project)	p.204
<i>Palomba Elisa, Simone Maria Grazia, Marselli Giuseppina</i>	
The Mahara platform at the core of a professional training course for teachers in “trial” year	p.211
<i>Quattrocchi Stefania, Rossi Pier Giuseppe, Giannandrea Lorella, Magnoler Patrizia</i>	
Master of Laws in International Crime and Justice: an application of eLearning methods	p.218
<i>Rivello Roberto, Spadaro Cristina, Lasala Tina</i>	
University Orientation: the experience of eLearning preparatory Courses for the admission test to access the degree in Education, University of Foggia	p.222
<i>Sannicandro Katia, Cirulli Federica, De Santis Annamaria</i>	

Introduction

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The present proceeding collects thirty-one papers exposed during the scientific meeting SIREM 2013 “ICT in Higher Education” held on November 14th and 15th, 2013 in Bari, Italy. There are another ten full papers presented at the conference that were collected within the Volume VI, no. 1, June 2014 of REM - Research on Education and Media Journal.

The conference engaged in an interesting interdisciplinary debate about the role of technology in higher education and lifelong learning, presenting an accurate analysis on new strategies for instructional design, innovative teaching approaches methods, and effective assessment systems.

The conference also enabled SIREM scholars to collect the state of the art of the Italian scientific research and the best teaching experiences on the following topics:

- Technologies in higher education
- Digital skills and lifelong learning
- Technological innovation and vocational training
- Digital literacy and adult education
- Technologies for lifelong learning
- Innovative methods and techniques for e-learning
- Models and assessment tools of e-learning
- Mobile learning environments (M-learning) for adult education
- Social learning and lifelong learning.

The conference has been a very important scientific event to establish a dialogue among scholars from several Italian universities. During the conference, they met to examine and discuss emerging issues in the educational field, presenting different but complementary points of view and studies, aiming to map an evolving scene.

This proceeding is divided into three main sections, representing three categories in which contributions were organized during the conference:

- *Full Paper*: contributions referred to results of an original research work.
- *Short Communication*: information about research projects not fully completed.
- *Experience*: innovative educational experiences.

All contributions collected here represent an important record of the interesting ongoing research courses and live cultural debate around educational technology and media education in the national scientific context. In addition, many of the researches presented here demonstrate how collaboration and openness to international environments can bring significant benefits in terms of intercultural development, in order to weave paths with unprecedented and innovative thinking.

Diana Laurillard, a scholar from the Institute of Education in London, participated in the conference with her keynote presentation “*Teaching as a design Science: investigating the integration of technology with pedagogy*” and with this contribution opened the space for international research and reflection about innovative strategies in learning design.

The annual conference organized by SIREM represents a fruitful discussion about new frontiers on media research in the national and international scene with a significant openness to innovative lines and research horizons.

Documenting at school: the research training “Scritture Bambine” between transmedia storytelling and mapping¹

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Abstract

The project, in cooperation between the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology & Communication, University of Bari and *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale della Puglia* (USR, Regional School Office), involved seven Primary and Secondary schools located in Bari and its district as well as Institute Karibu, Panzi (Congo) in a collaborative research&training project aiming at experimenting autobiographical activities for intercultural training practices in primary and secondary school. Starting from an analysis of the different stages that made up the final project, this paper is meant to offer some considerations on the relations between narrative processes and transmedia education documentation. In particular, the core focus is on the driving role played by the development of technologies in fostering new narrative media, with particular emphasis on storytelling activities. At the end of this article a series of devices used to “provide documentary evidence of laboratory activities” carried out by the research project DidaSco within the research itinerary adopted by schools which have joined the project will be showed. These new devices combine writing skills (words, images) with the potential offered by transmedia. Each medium has its own potential and peculiarities which may be used in educational settings appropriately. Nowadays, a new “universe” of writing can be created; the common thread can be developed in different - though coherent - ways on different media, thus creating a new “archetype for communication”.

Keywords

Interculturality, Storytelling, Educational Documentation, Transmedia

1. Introduction

The project is in cooperation between the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology & Communication², University of Bari and *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale della Puglia* (USR, Regional School Office) and involved seven Primary and Secondary schools located in Bari and its district as well as Institute Karibu, Panzi (Congo) in a collaborative research&training

¹ This article has been developed jointly by the three authors. **Loredana Perla** wrote paragraphs 1 and 2; **Nunzia Schiavone** wrote paragraphs 3 and 4.

² In particular, the research group is called *DidaSco - Didattiche Scolastiche*, headed by Professor Loredana Perla.

project (Perla, 2010; 2011; 2012) aiming at experimenting autobiographical activities (Demetrio, 1996, 1998, 2003, 2012; Cambi, 2002; Formenti, 1998, 2009; Castiglioni, 2008, 2013; Biffi, 2010, 2012) for intercultural training practices (Demetrio, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003; Demetrio & Favaro, 1997, 2004; Farello & Bianchi, 2001; Giusti, 1998; Portis, 2009).

The main aim of the project is to transform autobiographical narrative techniques in a communication gathering in order to build something *about* the Other and *for* the Other based on cooperation and solidarity (Pinto Minerva, 1996, 2007; Cambi, 2012, 2001; Bertolini, 1993; Levinas, 2002). Therefore, autobiographical narrative is fostered in the light of an intercultural education in order to stimulate children involved in the project to “unveil” their memory by writing and learning stories and memories of others. The project also aimed at creating adequate conditions to understand the relationship between *periphery-centre* by gathering different cultures, as experiential knowledge narrated by children (and teachers) of two different environments (Bari, Italy and Congo, Africa) met together.

The following are the research-related questions.

Question 1: How is it possible to share a school-life experience of a totally different environment – a mission in Congo – with Western school class and vice versa?

Question 2: These two different environments share the same “existential malaise” being both peripherals realities even though they are at different latitudes and conditions. How is it possible to develop adequate conditions so that they may gather, thus sharing values such as solidarity and brotherhood?

Question 3: What are the educational tools which can be used in order to favour the gathering of different cultures and to *leave a tangible mark* of the resulting narrations? In other words, how to avoid the oblivion which is typical of any educational experience?

Question 4: Is there a specific “child memory” that can be unveiled by means of narrations? How to grow it through narrative activities, the latter being the device used to carry out this research?

To answer these questions, the research-training group tried to test an innovative project aimed at reworking the relationship childhood-secondary school (*scuola secondaria di primo grado*)³, but it also aimed at favouring a renewal of teachers’ documentation practices (Perla, 2012; Schiavone, 2011) by means of the new digital and online tools which can develop new modalities (transmedia) of experiential narration.

2. Research protocol

The research-training project was developed on a two-year basis. In the first year (2012-2013) the main aims were:

- stimulating teachers towards autobiographical techniques meant as valuable tools to renovate ordinary language educational practices, specifically those concerning intercultural education;
- favouring a *narrative attitude* (Bruner, 2001, 2003, 2006; Smorti, 1994) in children so that everyone may discover their recollections, feeling and practices again, as they form the core of one's everyday life and identity;
- providing documentary evidence of the whole research-training project by means of several devices (audio, video, pictures, writing).

The methodology used has been split into three stages.

³ This name is consistent with the official text of the “Indicazioni nazionali per il curriculum della scuola dell’infanzia e del primo ciclo d’istruzione”, Legislative decree no. 254, November 16, 2012.

1. In the first stage, a training session addressed to Italian and Congolese teachers on autobiographical methods has been set up. The session was made up of three modules. The first two modules aimed at introducing the theoretical framework of autobiographical methods in school training environments. Then, teachers have attended some narrative-based workshops in order to be acquainted with this “new” approach. In the final stage teachers have co-created ten subject matters to be developed with their classes and using the autobiographical approach. The training session was developed in eight sub-sessions on a weekly basis and dealt with the following subject matters: introducing narrative-autobiographical training; a theoretical framework; creating a workshop of autobiographical writing: a methodology; autobiographical writing at school: the project “*Scritture Bambine. Laboratori di narrazione interculturale*”.

2. In the second stage of the project, the classes involved in the project attended workshops on autobiographical techniques. This session allowed children to analyse some subject matters which could favour a “culture for writing” from an intercultural perspective. Workshops were organised in three macro-units: *Personal identity*; *Cultural identity*; *Interculture*. By means of these units, children could discover identities that now need to be recognised and favoured in communication more than ever. Each module was developed simultaneously both in the Italian and Congolese classes and allowed the identification of particular moments of children’s life. These events were included in the autobiographical memory thus enriching the narrative framework⁴. In particular, the subject matters developed were: *Mandala* (who am I?); *The origin* (family); *Places* (home); *Traditions* (celebrations); *Flavours* (food); *Multiple belonging*; *Pen pals*⁵.

Each workshop session had five sub-stages:

- a. *starting ritual*: it includes recreational activities meant to favour the acquaintance of participants and to start working sessions;
- b. *introduction*: a reading session or a relevant picture is meant to stimulate reflection and to discuss the subject matter;
- c. *writing*: children recollect relevant, personal autobiographical moments on a space-time axis;
- d. *return*: after the writing session, texts are returned in order to look for recurrent, unusual, missing, similar elements and further discussion. This stage is fundamental as children find both common and distinctive elements in comparing their experiences.
- e. *conclusion*: a final reading ends the return session.

3. During stage three, the documentation of the research-training project has been created. Teachers were requested to create and validate ongoing and ex-post documentation models with the DidaSco research group. From an operational point of view, we had to distinguish some documentation formats to be used for monitoring different processes and those used to narrate and mapping stories and experiences. Three methods have been tested.

a) Professional writing. Writing has a great clarifying and organisational value: it lays out one’s practical activities (Perla, 2012) and it represents an important element to characterise information. This is the channel through which processes, actions, choices are made explicit, as well as it represents a point of view (De Rossi & Restiglian, 2013b).

The practical devices used to provide written documentary evidence are:

⁴ Though preserving the same scheme, workshops for Congolese classes were redesigned in order to adapt contents for that specific cultural and educational context.

⁵ The workshop session ended with an epistolary exchange between children from Bari and those from Congo in order to favour an exchange of childhood stories from different environments, as well as to favour writing as an enjoyable activities which could also allow children to re-discover themselves and others.

- an *examination sheet* of workshop sessions, that is a documentation format for ongoing activities. This sheet, which was filled in each workshop session, aimed at supporting teachers in the description of the activities he/she carried out in order to analyse the educational progress, to retrace actions, problems or difficulties they had during the creation of modules, as well as strong and critical points and opinions on materials and activities being carried out during the different workshop sessions. In detail, the aim was to analyse relations and interconnections between the autobiographical approach as an innovative educational methodology and inclusive approaches in class activities. The entries in the examination sheet were:
 - Development of individual differences among pupils (daily life stories, competence, needs, resources etc.);
 - Creation of an environment in which pupils and teachers could share and listen to experiences;
 - Strengthening of relationships among pupils;
 - Fostering cooperation activities in contexts with diversity;
 - Reduction of discrimination episodes.
- a *professional daily record*. This is an educational, ex-post documentation tool completed by teachers who attended all workshop sessions. A daily record allows a deferred recollection of experience; it also allows the analysis of the relationship between “declared” contents and “experienced” information from educational, relational and organisational perspectives;
- *pictures*. Using pictures is part of visual-narrative documentation used to value the communicative power of visual rather than written contents. We provided teachers with a guide that explained how and when to use picture-based documentation throughout workshop sessions. All digital pictures taken by teachers during workshop sessions were included in PowerPoint slideshows, thus combining visual and written contents efficaciously;
- *audio-visual contents*. The spread of new digital audio-visual technologies allowed easier educational documentation experiences, in which the “making of” of the whole process has the same importance of the final product⁶. Nevertheless, the creation of digital audio-visual contents involved the designing and the realisation of specific operational procedures that could not be used systematically. In detail, video footage included the beginning of workshop sessions (recreational activities and sharing of the “autobiographical agreement”), writing sessions (pupils are stimulated to recollect relevant autobiographical events), reading sessions (pupils read and shared their texts with the class), return sessions (analysis of written texts carried out by teachers) and the final session (end of workshop activities).

The resulting documentation process allowed the creation of a product in which different communication codes are included: voice blends in words, pictures are both steady and dynamic. The explicit aim used was to create a *collage* of “perceptive situations” (Anichini, 2007). On the contrary, the underlying aim was the so called “convergent culture” (Jenkins, 2014): storytelling by different, decentralised authors sharing the same subject matter, using different devices and platforms. In the light of the new opportunities provided by the digital world, narration possibilities are enhanced thus overcoming the traditional, “linear” pattern of narration made up of an introduction, a core part and an end. The main concern, in this new

⁶ Video contents may be also used to analyse and meditate on some specific contexts: video footage, if analysed together with researchers may represent a valuable starting point to favour both explicit and auto-assessment processes. In this sense, see Tochon (2009) and Perla and Schiavone (2013).

sense, is to understand how the same subject matter may be read and analysed by means of several codes and devices & tools. The final aim is to involve children in this experience but also to confirm this involvement; this also strengthens the individual involvement within a group and in comparison with cultural differences. In this way, children learn that technological transmedia can be useful to assimilate information only if they are associated with values such as brotherhood and cooperation.

3. Collaborative timeline

We also found a device which can be used to share all shared and created contents: the so called *collaborative timeline*⁷. This tool guarantees a chronological organisation of all documents created during a series of workshops or activities in order to retrace all activities: what is more, hyperlinks may be generated and Web resources may be integrated. In detail, this timeline is an immediate and effective view mode of events arranged in chronological order: for this reason, it may be functional for providing documentary evidence of educational experiences⁸. Irrespective of the modalities of a timeline creation – automatically, by linking a feed resource or by inserting single events manually – one may edit contents by adding pictures, Youtube videos, text comments. Once a timeline is posted, all digital sharing features can be accessed: comments may be posted in the timeline's main page or in a single event, or the timeline may be shared in different social networks (Facebook, Twitter etc.) or embedded in a website, blog, forum in different view modes. In other words, the “communicative potential” of a timeline may be an effective tool that allows a twofold intervention. First of all, by means of a timeline one may be aware of all activities he/she carried out and a personal reorganisation may be done. This favours a sort of remodulation by means of a multi-item itinerary which can be edited and used several times. Secondly, it allows teachers to choose and gather various contents (writings, video contents, pictures), thus creating new digital contents. The final stage of the methodology was the collection/sharing of the letters written by Italian and Congolese pupils. We received almost 60 letters from Congo; these letters were translated by people within the school community or by students themselves. These letters (five for each class) were shared in the different classes and each pupil has in turn written a letter to a Congolese pupil, as provided for in the last module called “Pen Pals”. At the end of all activities, pupils have filled in a sheet of workshop sessions⁹ (a further documentation device).

At the end of the module, teachers and pupils stressed they have experienced the potential offered by writing as it gave them the possibility to *voice* their own stories as well as they could experience and listen to other stories, with particular emphasis on stories of foreign people who are experiencing the same growth. All letters written by Italian students were translated and sent to Congo. We collected all kinds of documentation:

- written texts created by the pupils (arranged in different modules);
- ongoing and ex-post documentation by teachers;

⁷ For a detailed review of the tools used to share multimedia contents, see Perlmutter (2012).

⁸ More generally, a timeline is used to view events over a time span; nevertheless, it may be used to provide documentary evidence of ongoing educational contents, that is by updating content on a daily basis, like a daily record.

⁹ Children have developed an ex-post documentation format, the “final experience sheet”. This sheet has been used to recall meta-reflective information about the whole experience. Each format was filled in by all teachers and Congolese pupils involved in this research project.

- final experience sheet filled in by pupils;
- audio/video content (uploaded to DidaSco platform¹⁰).

Paper documentation (children's writings, teachers' writings) was qualitatively analysed following the procedure indicated in the Grounded Theory (Strass & Corbin, 1990; Cipriani, 2008; Tarozzi, 2008); audio/video contents were video-analysed (Tochon, 1999, 2001; Goldman, 2007; Thochon & Hanson, 2003; Altet & Vinatier 2008; Altet, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008; Altet, Bru & Laville, 2012). After the analysis stage, all contents were returned. Nevertheless, further activities have been designed such as the creation of a research group called "Scritture Bambine" made up of representative teachers of each school, school heads and the DidaSco group.

4. Final considerations, further perspective

This intense research-training project allowed us to draw some interesting observations developed during the research stages.

Providing educational documentary evidence has always been a need, but it has rarely been performed. In this sense, the words used by Elio Damiano are predictive. He states that teachers lack a "documentary culture" (Damiano, 2007). Nevertheless, there is a distinction between *product-related* and *process-related* documentation (Schiavone, 2012; Frisch, 2010), as the former has always been more widespread than the latter. Many teachers involved in innovative projects have published or posted their successful experiences both on traditional and digital channels; by the way, the resulting documentation is connected with the explanation of "their" products rather than the process that led to their fulfilment (De Rossi & Restiglian, 2013a). Documenting processes means leaving an accurate mark of the whole operation: this implies that all methodological choices and the adopted educational solutions are made explicit, with reference to all cultural, pedagogical and educational requirements as well as the educational needs of a specific environment. In this sense, documentation processes have a mere diagnostic value; it is used as a way to explain educational tasks and most of all as a planning device, as it defines and supports the whole project.

Starting from this framework, how can documentation practices contribute to stimulate processes of an educational project? Here, a thorough and complete question cannot be answered. Nevertheless, some hints can be provided.

Narrative genres and types have been evolving into several forms of communicative mediation. Visual and audio/video media, as well as digital and IT codes provide a huge potential to narration techniques; therefore, together with verbal communication, can be properly considered adequate channels used to develop mindsets (Lévy, 1999).

Throughout the years, the evolution of Web technologies have shaped the modalities through which documentation contents provided by teachers are shared, discussed and stored. This approach should not be seen as a centralised approach but a personal, well-distributed contribution (De Rossi & Restiglian, 2013). Starting from these "contaminations", a new form of documentation comes out. Here, different narrative modalities converge: written texts are enriched with several devices, thus increasing and strengthening their communicative potential; this documentation is no longer static, made up of paper or digitised documents in a repository, but it is an interactive device. Perceiving the potential in developing a

¹⁰ DidaSco platform is available online at (registered members only): http://didasco.nbit.it/phpbb_didasco

documentation process is undoubtedly the best feedback teachers may have to inspire their job.

Undoubtedly, the evolution of communication and information technologies is causing important effects on documentation processes. In particular, Web 2.0 tools and social software are more and more used to interact with communities, to create products to be shared online and to cooperate for the creation of common projects (Petrucchio, 2010; De Rossi & Restiglian, 2013). New technologies increase communication potentialities and written communication as well, the latter showing unprecedented forms in the light of digital and Web environments.

In this sense, though narrative texts still remain a valuable documentation medium, there are some other documentation forms able to merge with traditional narration forms of educational contents (Perla, 2011, 2012; Schiavone, 2012) thanks to the new potential offered by transmedia processes (Petrucchio & De Rossi, 2009, 2013). In other contexts narrative genre and types (Bruner, 1992) are included in multiple communicative forms; *narration for documenting* has nowadays different sides with different communication and development modalities as well as new devices.

What is more, the use of new technologies led to a gradual redefinition of educational documentation modalities, allowing sharing and knowledge building processes to be enabled (Ardizzone & Rivoltella 2008; Rivoltella, 2003). The most interesting feature to underline is the fact that these processes unveiled new perspectives for the documentation of educational innovations: any experience in school environment may be narrated, presented, commented and discussed while in the making, therefore they may also be built, developed, edited and reformulated according to any possible interaction, in different digital environments and among different participants. Transmedia techniques are therefore validated¹¹, and a new paradigm in documentation practices may be defined.

According to Jenkins (2007), *transmedia communication* is a form of narration that makes use of different devices and formats in order to offer a pervasive experience as well as different *doorways* in a story. This definition may be completed by stating that in transmedia narrations all the different devices and channels do not tell the *same* story, but they rather describe different points of view or different moments in time of the story itself. In this sense, transmedia or cross-media narrative documentation¹², as defined by de Maurissens (2013) can be meant in different ways, such as visual documentations, or visual recollection of the same field, or teachers or pupils; they can also represent the global memory of a whole school community involved in a common project. Transmedia activities entail different perspectives. For this reason, there are different points of view and not only a single voice: here, an environment in which imagination can be stimulated and in which narration is built according to one's interests can be created (Jenkins, 2007). Due to its innate potential, transmedia may become an effective communication form to foster intercultural education and innovative forms of representation, sharing and spreading of educational experiences meant to promote a *culture of participation and sharing* (Jenkins, 2010; Ford, Green & Jenkins, 2013) of best practices.

We still need to understand whether this approach needs further inducement in educational research environments. In this sense, ongoing research projects are being developed.

¹¹ For a definition of *transmedia* see Giovagnoli (2013). For the relation between transmedia and educational practices see Limone (2012).

¹² Further reading on cross-media: Giovagnoli (2005; 2009).

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