



## *Around the experience...*

When we were asked to edit a special issue of JeLKS devoted to the perspectives of the DULP vision (Giovannella, 2009; Giovannella & Graf, 2010) our discussions tried to identify a high level integrated vision to connect the different backgrounds, mindsets and perspectives contributing to Technology Enhanced Learning, educational processes, and instructional and technology design. As a basis we had the contributions and the discourse of several workshops (DULP@ICALT2010, DULP@ICALT2011) and special issues on DULP and we intended to find a theme that provides an opportunity for further reflections and abstraction.

Since at that time we were, and we are still, fully convinced about the relevance of the equivalence “*learning = experience*” and, at same time, of the need to have a model of *experience* that may serve as a basis to design, develop, manage and evaluate educational experiences mediated by technology, we came to the conclusion that it might be the right time to stimulate a comparison between “models and frameworks” that assume the *experience* as focus for Technology Enhanced Education (TEE).

Now that we came to this further milestone of our “DULP journey” we may state that a first step towards the achievement of the above goal has been accomplished: in this volume, in fact, different approaches and emerging lines of thought are illustrated and offered to a comparison, from which both authors and readers can move, whenever they would like, toward further insights and integrations.

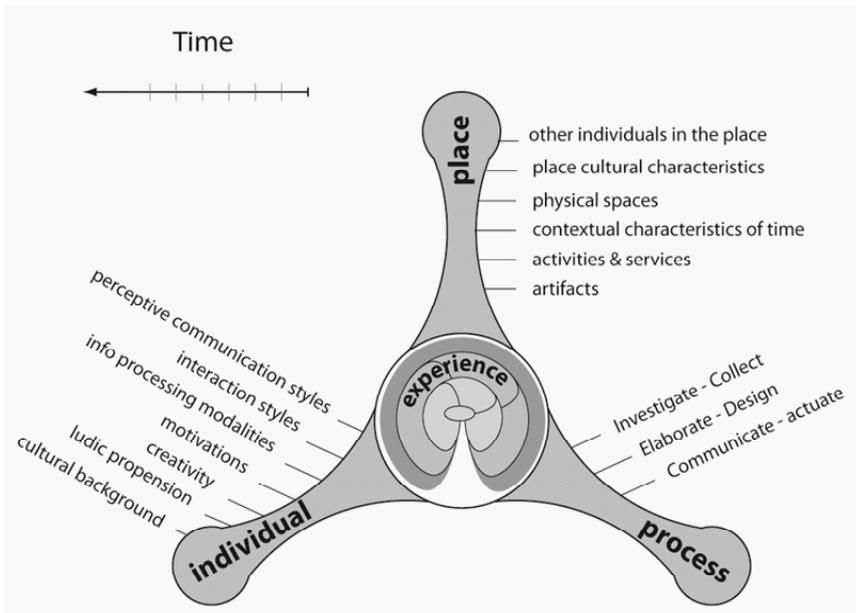
In fact, it is quite clear that the contributions, while highlighting common elements, come from different cultural contexts quite unrelated to each other (it is enough to take a look at the lists of the publications cited). In that perspective certainly more time is needed to develop a mutual understanding, and to integrate the perspectives, models, and frameworks not included in this volume. Probably the way is still relatively long but we are very happy to have had the opportunity to kick the process off.

Coming to the volume's contributions, a first element that seems well established and accepted is the increasing relevance that in future educative practices is going to be assumed by "open" educational processes. These processes are characterized by being person centered, immersed in a context (Specht, 2009) – we prefer to call it "place" - and individuals are always in interaction and mutual co-evolution with it. In our understanding in these places knowledge is stratified in open processes and these make them culturally recognizable, whatever their nature: physical, virtual or integrated.

While the relevance of the person and the place is universally accepted not equally accepted appears to be the definition of their characteristics/dimensions, that are essential to the development of any model. Moreover, despite the strong attention paid to the design of educative experiences and their modalities of undertaking, the interest in the definition of models of the underlying process seems quite limited. One gets the impression processes are determined in an implicit manner, by defining the activities that are expected to be undertaken, instead to be defined "a priori" as frameworks - possibly flexible ones – able to inspire the design of phases and activities needed to achieve given outcomes. Sometime such an approach may lead to a strong mixing among personal, place's and process's characteristics and make things more complex, especially if one wishes to monitor the progress of the learning experiences.

On this respect, we would like to note that other approaches in which the characteristics of the process are defined as clearly as those of person and/or place are also possible. As shown recently by one of us (Giovannella & Moggio, 2011), such approaches may lead to define a three-dimensional space of representation of the experience – process, person and place - that dynamically evolves as a function of time, see Fig. 1. In this approach, the modalities according to which the process will develop (methods, tools, duration of each activity, sequence, etc..) are defined on the basis of the characteristics of the specific operational context, paying attention to remain within the P3BL (problem, project and process-based learning) approach.

Not by chance each elemental portion of the space of representation, voxel, may be more or less densely coloured to represent the filters that modify an ideal representation of the experience to make it more personalized and contextualized. Filters make an experience unique, more personal and intimate and, thus, potentially able to contribute to the change/growth of our cultural background, through an appropriate processes of internalization.



Another element that is common to many contributions is the active involvement of all stakeholders - students, teachers (more and more considered as trainers), etc. -, an involvement that can take various forms, including that typical of the participatory design. It seems quite evident, moreover, that the mode of participation can not be determined once and for all, but have to be redefined from time to time to take in consideration the specific context and, especially, the age of the learners.

All authors agree, and could not be otherwise in such context, on the mediating role of technologies and their ability to support the process in all its phases up to the achievement of its objectives.

Two aspects that, in this regard, are repeatedly highlighted in this issue are:

- the need to make the mediating role of technologies more evident to the actors to stimulate a more conscious and optimized use of the latter; not by chance some authors devote a particular attention to the definition of relationships among technologies, actors, resources, contexts, etc.. their dynamical and tensional evolution; it is worth noting that technologies like every other element that contributes to the definition of experience are able to act as a *filter* and it is therefore necessary to acquire critical skills and a sufficient degree of awareness to be able to act as meta-designer, also of her/his own

- destiny;
- the need to create visible and tangible positive effects catalyzed by the use of technology; in fact positive effects are not always easily quantifiable in the case of “open” or at least a highly complex processes.

Very often, the assessments are made using qualitative methods that inherently cannot go beyond interpretations characterized by a certain degree of subjectivity. In our opinion it is the right time to work to the integration of methods derived from the cultural anthropology and the use of questionnaires with: a) the quantitative monitoring of traces produced during educational process to derive the emergent properties of the latter, b) a participatory evaluation of some of the dimensions that define the quality of an experience (see figure).

According to all the above considerations, we can state that a technology is not just a technology and that a tool is not just a tool. Each technology and each tool are first of all the product of a design intention and whatever we do to keep it neutral we cannot avoid to in-form it by needs, expectations and cultural background of a given context and historical period. Technology and tools, therefore, are in-formed by methods and even more by models and/or visions. They maybe characterized by the highest level of flexibility but they will never be not in-formed artefacts.

Flexibility, however is important, because it will allow us (authors and readers) to discuss and define role and relevance that technologies may assume for a given action in a given context with a given person, that is, to “design” the “filters” that would be applied by technology to future educative processes. In our opinion technology can never supplant the role of man, but should support more conscious participation and facilitate the development of natural experience, rich meaning and the peculiarities of each individual.

All above, should not make us forget the enormous gap that separates the most advanced researches and the expectations of teachers who are involved in daily educative practices, from primary school to university and, also, in vocational training (Giovannella *et al.*, 2011). The research on new models for a sustainable future of TEE can not avoid to consider the everyday efforts of teachers and should include the design of suitable dissemination campaign to foster the diffusion of a sufficient awareness about potentialities of technologies that, actually, go far beyond the practices fostered by the diffusion of the mass technologies, and of the methodologies and visions that inspired their development.

In closing this introduction we would like to bring to the attention of the

reader a problem that starts to assume a increasing relevance also in TEE, especially when the processes are based on participatory practices: the level of trust that each one has in their peers and in the technologies used. The problems connected with trust emerge in all their relevance during the practices of monitoring and evaluation (more in people than in technology), but also during the design and development phases (more in technology than in people) and can be partly mitigated by an appropriate problem setting.

Enjoy your reading... and your thinking about!

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