Indice

Summary

This special issue of Qwerty is devoted to explore the topic of so-called "Generation Y" or "Digital Natives": are these only labels? Is it true that young generations think and learn differently from their predecessors just because they were born and are growing up in a context widely permeated by the diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), as these labels could suggest?

In the introductory article, a map of the debate on the topic is drawn. First the main players who have promoted these expressions are categorized, as well as their critical counterparts; then, the debate is inserted into the more general discussion about the relationship between media and persons, and about the possible different approaches towards technologies, in particular determinism and instrumentalism. Finally, a more integrated approach to the topic is proposed, by paralleling it with the relationship between history and geography in human societies and civilizations.

The second article presents one of the critical voices, which offers an extensive overview on empirical studies on the media diet of young generations. The article intends to counter balance many naïve approaches, and to help abandon an *aut-aut* approach, in favor of an *et-et* one: leaving apocalyptic narratives like "young learners are completely different" – often used as an easy self-justification of teaching/learning failures – and adopting more integrative narratives like: new learners use a lot ICT beside other pre-existing media, and they use them also to satisfy never-ending needs of socializations and social recognition.

Two other articles present specific studies, rooted in given socio-geographical contexts, and provide useful insights into specific aspects of the adoption of ICT in learning and socializing. In the former, a pedagogical perspective on the GenY issue is adopted, in order to show that the concept of "generation Y" is inadequate to describe the population of nowadays learners. To support this claim, the results of a research conducted at the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies are provided, offering interesting findings, both quantitative and qualitative. The latter aims at analyzing how new media influence the processes of identity building in youth, observing in particular the presence of political issues in the online interactions of a group of Italian 18-years old young people on a social network (Facebook) in the week before the first local elections in which they could vote. It emerges that the political use of Facebook by young people is fragmented, and that offline political participation of youngsters may be only somehow promoted by a tool like Facebook.