

Partnerships of families, schools and communities in Italy

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Computers and new technologies are entering our families and schools with greater and greater force.

The world is quickly changing its ways of communicating and if the world changes, then we can not think that our children's world remains unchanged.

Today, children are sunk, at a sensorial level, in a multimedia world, where television, computers, mobile and videogames become more and more their tools to understand the everyday life. Their universe is characterized by a common element: the presence of an all-embracing relationship with the media. The child builds his own identity and his everyday experience integrating various languages. He learns to use new technologies in a different way and he uses them in another way than adults do. Children use these new codes to think and define themselves as individuals. They learn quickly and become immediately more skilful than their parents. Children are growing up in a historic moment which is permeated by multimedia aspects. Their identities are built in this world and are influenced by it.

But as they are bound to these tools, so parents are disconcerted and disoriented. Adults admit that computers can offer great opportunities for the outer world, but they have many doubts and problems about the relationship established between their children and new technologies.

Parents are puzzled. On one hand schools offer and often impose the use of PCs, on the other hand, young people show an excessive attraction towards this instrument. The use of computers is such a widespread phenomenon that it concerns

not only the family or the school but the whole community.

Risks

New technologies are very important resources for society, but they bring various risks that must be carefully assessed.

Major fears are due to the dangers connected to the use of The Net, to possible negative effects and to the distorted way (according to adults) of communicating on line.

Another risk is the isolation and the consequent loneliness of the child and the possibility that the frequent use of the new technologies causes a poor development of expressive and manual abilities.

Anxieties are related to the ways of introducing computers in the children's education. It is important to know when, how and how much let them use computers.

Doubts are originated by the question about whether the chats, the use of videogames and The Internet are a valid way to communicate.

Can young people face the challenge of the new communication instrument alone? Can they question themselves about the validity of this source of information? Are they able to use The Net without having an exact destination or goal? Beside these psychological and psychopathologist risks which are connected to an unsuitable use of the Internet, there are risks of social outcasting and maladjustment to whom non-users are exposed. They can not benefit from the informative and communicative potential which characterizes the telecommunications.

Furthermore, they lose important opportunities for cultural socialization.

From the point of view of community psychology, which brings prevention and promotion of well being and quality of life, we face the need to work on community dynamics as these are likely to produce problems.

The change in technology can consequently be interpreted as a possibility for the community to push a promotion of the individuals and of the citizenship pro active. We must look at the context where organizations and people work together to strengthen the power of the community to meet the needs and solve the problems of its members.

The family has a role of 'filter' and acts as a medium between their children and the experiences of the world they face. Parents are supposed to exercise a function of control over their children. This control must not be an indiscriminate an oppressive one. They have to be like a guide to offer a chance for dialogue. For parents it is important 'to be there', to take part in the experience of the telecommunication world of their children, to talk with them and help them understand the meaning of this experience. To make it possible, parents have to receive and adequate education in order to be able to establish a good relationship with their children. Such education must come from the school. This will be considered as a source of information necessary to handle the relationship children-new technologies in the best way.

The positive effects will then be reflected on the whole community. There is the idea of a 'only one child', supported both in a familiar sphere, both in a scholar and community one.

Educational aspects of the new technologies

With reference to the considerations above, our project is called [Med@teca](#) and we are working with the major aim to push the whole community to charge of the educational aspects of the new technologies. This is achieved working on different fronts:

- *With children:* it operates both in schools and outside them in order to offer the instruments necessary to have access to the N.T. in a conscious way. This is considered as a sort of 'alphabetization' to the N.T. to understand the language of these new instruments, to be active partners with them. One of the most important goals is to provide a safety on the Net. The project is meant to give basic information for a conscious use of The Internet. The final target is to encourage a critical attitude of children towards N.T., that are permeating their social and affective lives. To achieve this programme, schools and the families work together to emphasize the importance of N.T. for the educational and learning aspects.
- *With schools:* there are actions of education, training and work with and for teachers, to focus on the way teaching and learning is changing, together with the new dynamics in communication and role.
- *With families:* some practical/operative programmes are carried out to examine closely some aspects about:
 - The relationship between N.T and children in learning and growth processes;
 - Educational aspects and risks connected to the excessive use of videogames by children during their spare time;
 - Internet and its dangerous effects: loneliness, dependence, pornography, distorted way of communicating and considering reality, etc.);
 - Positive effects of Internet and N.T.

Practical work

This practical work is based on parents' experiences and it is carried out starting from the idea that the entrance of PCs inside the family, hugely modifies both the communication dynamics both the relationship between generations. This causes great difficulties for parents, that are in trouble when they have to identify their role as guides.

Medi@teca is based on this methodology:

- Practical learning for parents;
- Practical learning for parents and teachers, together;
- Practical learning for parents and children, together;
- Guides, informative booklets and teaching aids to all families.

Putting the child into the centre of the whole community (school, family and other organizations) is an important way to recognize the enormous impact of N.T. on children's lives. This is also a way to acknowledge adults' responsibilities to help children in their growth with N.T. without being manipulated by them.

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