

## ADOLESCENTS BETWEEN TWO WORLDS AND MULTIPLE FRAMES

**Sophie Willemin & Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont**  
 (Institute of Psychology, University of Neuchâtel, SWITZERLAND, www.unine.ch/psy)  
 contact: sophie.willemin@unine.ch anne-nelly.perret-clermont@unine.ch  
 Espace Louis-Agassiz 1, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, + 41 (0)32 718 18 56

**In collaboration with Dieter Schürch**  
 (LIFI, Università della Svizzera Italiana, SWITZERLAND)  
 contact: dieter.schuerch@lu.unisi.ch

«Until now we were used to be fed with a spoon»

comment from an adolescent, Gianri, to his teacher who was blaming the students about their lack of autonomy during the E-learning project

### ABSTRACT

In the context of an E-learning project, twelve adolescents following a dual vocational training program worked during 4 months at home. We followed the setting-up and the progress of this project. By observations in the field and interviews, we have investigated how they experience the modification of the traditional school frame.

### INTRODUCTION

In Switzerland, a number of adolescents from relatively isolated mountain regions have to leave their families at an early age for vocational training in another region, where the language and culture may be different. This means that in addition to the usual problems of adolescence, when they enter the world of work they are on their own, far away from family, friends, and familiar places. Within the movingAlps project (www.movingalps.ch), Dieter Schürch has set up a pilot scheme with distance learning and ICT for apprentices of the building trade in order to test alternatives to this difficult situation.

#### What?

The dual system usually consists of 4 days in a company and 1 at school. In the present project, during 4 months, the school day was replaced by E-learning at home.

#### How?

Laptop; unlimited internet access; free work schedules; 1 day at school every 3 weeks; bilingual platform (German-Italian).

#### Where?

Trilingual area (Swiss German, Italian, Romansh) of the South of the Swiss Alps (Graubünden).

#### Who?

A multilingual class of apprentices of the building trade (16-18 years old).

### RESEARCH PROCESS

We followed the progress of this pilot class of twelve male adolescents (16 to 18 years old) from Graubünden via observations in the field, individual interviews with each adolescent, a visit to each family at home and regular contacts with the teachers. We pay special attention to how they handle the emotional, social and cognitive challenges arising from the lifestyle changes that this form of training encourages them to make.

#### Methodology

Participant observation (school, home, etc.) with field notes (written, audio and video);  
 on-line observation of the platform use;  
 individual semi-structured interviews (adolescents, teachers);  
 semi-structured family interviews.

### FINDINGS

One of the main results is that the disappearance of the classical school «frame» during the periods of distance education is much more disturbing than foreseen for the adolescent's behavior and identity. And sometimes it creates unexpected tensions within their families.

#### PARENTS

«Where is the teacher during this time? On holiday?»  
 a mother  
 «I told him, I have my job, I can provide for the needs of my family, if you need help come and ask us, but remember that you have to build your own life.»  
 a father  
 «I didn't know what to do on Friday morning, do I have to go and wake him up? I saw he was sleeping and I told myself « he should be doing his work for the school...» a mother

#### TEACHERS

«The subject I teach until now is dry material, with the project I could make it more attractive.»  
 «It's our role to introduce them to ICT.»  
 «I'm a teacher not a technician»  
 «I like to work in my classroom, I missed the direct contact with my students during the E-learning period.»

#### ADOLESCENTS

«I don't want to send an email, it takes too much time, at school it's easier, I just raise my hand.»  
 «At school, you have the teacher, the student and the book, it works, it's like chemistry.»  
 «At the beginning I told myself, «yippeee ! I can go skiing.»»  
 «I miss discipline. I need the teacher to tell me what I have to do.»

### INTERPRETATION

Despite a positive attitude towards the project and the ICT, we found most of these adolescents destabilized and not very studious. The same was also found for the parents. Why?

The change of frame is not only a change of place and of tool, it also modifies the training situation on several fundamental levels such as: prevalence of reading and writing, asynchronous communication, greater autonomy expected from the students, work at home, free schedules. In particular we noticed:

- lack of know-how in ICT and computer literacy;
- reading and writing difficulties;
- discovery of asynchronous communication;
- abrupt «weaning» from the teacher and from the peer group with feelings of loneliness;
- double-bind message of autonomy and constraints («you are an autonomous learner but must comply with the following requests...»);
- with the mix of school and home, the parent's roles are confused and the share of educational responsibility between the teachers and themselves is unclear.

### DISCUSSION

During the vocational training, the adolescents have to handle multiple frames such as family, school, workplace and friends, while at the same time they are in balance between the child and adult worlds. The task is not an easy one. The school, the home, with the adolescent's room and hobbies, are «frames». They are structured by rules that are sometimes in conflict. These frames cannot be «mixed» without an appropriate socialization.

### CONCLUSION

This research leads us to understand the importance of the school frame for the adolescent's motivation and possibility to learn. Understanding better the multiple hidden functions of the traditional school frame could help in designing learning environments.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beach, K. & Vyas, S. (1998). *Light Pickles and heavy Mustard: horizontal Development among Students negotiating how to learn in a Production Activity*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Cultural Psychology and Activity Theory, Århus, Denmark.
- Carugati, F., Emiliani, F. & Palmorati, A. (1991). *Tenter le possibile: una esperienza di socializzazione d'adolescenti*. Berna: Peter Lang.
- Grossen, M. & Perret-Clermont, A.-N. (1992). *L'espace thérapeutique. Cadres et contextes*. Lausanne; Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé.
- Perret, J.-F. & Perret-Clermont, A.-N. (2001, new edition in print). *Apprendre un métier dans un contexte de mutations technologiques*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Perret-Clermont, A.-N., Pontecorvo, C., Resnick, L. B., Zitoun, T., Bruga, B. (2004). *Joining Society: social Interaction and Learning in Adolescence and Youth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schürch, D. (2003). «Communication Technologies and new Prospects for rural Youth». In: P. Attewell & N. Seel (Ed.), *Disadvantaged Teens and Computer Technologies*. Münster; New York: Waxmann, 137-154.
- Zitoun, T. & Perret-Clermont, A.-N. (2002). *Esquisse d'une psychologie de la transition*. *Éducation Permanente*, 36 (1), 12-15.