

# INTRODUCTION

## New times for learning

The increasing presence of media and digital technology plays a key role in many aspects of our daily life. Computers, video games, internet and mobile devices are essential tools to communicate, share, consume and create knowledge. All these technologies significantly affect the development of our social, cultural and educational skills, i.e. the way we interact, play, work, study or solve problems.

One of the dimensions of daily life deeply affected by digital technology is time. As David Harvey<sup>1</sup> points out, developments in the speed of technological processes, including technologies of communication (telegraph, telephones, fax machines, internet), travel (rail, cars, trains, planes) and economics (new markets, speed-up production cycles) resulted in a “time-space compression”. This has radically changed the way the majority of us experience the world. Following that path, a diverse range of thinkers such as Stephen Kern, Manuel Castells, Pierre Lévy and Andreas Huyssen have been improving our understanding of social experiences generated by new technologies, and how they affect our relationship with time and space.

Experience of time and technology also has an important impact on learning. The drastic reduction in lifetime of knowledge, connected with the overflow of information and fragmentation of sources, are just some of the features that are changing the way we learn. This situation challenges us to think more creatively about the interaction between communication technologies and learning, and to explore how our educational models are being impacted by the processes of social change that come with digitalization, the emergence of social media and the web 2.0.

Since February 2011 the group ECO (Education & Communication), driven by teachers of Information and Communication Studies at UOC, has been providing a forum for researching communication and learning, and for sharing teaching innovation through e-learning environments based on collaboration, creativity, entertainment and audiovisual technologies.

The five articles in this edition of eLC Research Paper Series reflect the short but intense trajectory of the group. Some of them are a selection of papers presented at the International Conference BCN Meeting 2012, organized by ECO. The other articles were written specially for this issue by members of the group and give a picture of the themes and questions we are now exploring.

*Breaking boundaries in entertainment and learning*, written by Lluís Pastor, belongs to this second group of articles. Pastor discusses one of ECO’s research interests: the role of entertainment in the

1. Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990.

improvement of students' motivation in learning. His article contributes to a deeper understanding of conflicting theoretical arguments that have historically placed entertainment beyond the boundaries of valuable learning.

In *Digital Literacies for Engagement in Emerging Online Cultures*, Steve Wheeler points out that we are living in a period of technological advancement that is both unprecedented and widely disruptive. The author invites us to think about how new media and digital technologies offer opportunities for learning and how the disruptive nature of the internet requires us to conceive an entirely new set of literacies.

Amalia Creus and Ferran Lalueza offer an approach to another group interest: teaching and learning innovation. In *Learning through professional environments: The ComCity project*, the authors present UOCom, a virtual communication agency designed to implement professional practices in e-learning contexts. It is a 2.0 platform where students and teachers work as a team, developing real communication projects for non-profit organizations.

Still in the field of teaching innovation, in *When time is running out: e-students under pressure with the UOC Kronos application*, Sílvia Sivera-Bello shares the results of an original innovation project which enabled the creation of a web application for carrying out time-limited exercises. This paper analyses the results of its implementation in the Creative Thinking & Writing course of the UOC Degree in Communication.

Finally, in the border between reality and simulation, *Real-Time Political News: Designing information flows in an online scenario* by Mary Griffiths discusses how access to public information has broadened, and how web 2.0 technologies have impacted on speed, transparency and accountability in journalism and political practices. The author presents a case study based on an educational-blended scenario that replicates flows of political information run by students from the University of Adelaide.

Digital technologies are causing dramatic changes in the way we learn. Both the abundance and disorder of information are impacting on the process of knowledge production, transforming the value of time and the meaning of learning. These are new times for education: times that challenge us to find new answers to old educational problems and invite us to ask new questions. This is what we address in this special issue.

Sandra Sanz and Amalia Creus