Adolescents and social networks in French high schools: Is it possible to build a community of citizens?

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Abstract

Digital and web culture has invaded and transformed our lifestyles in recent years. The impact of this trend and the concerns it raises or fascination it holds for us in terms of the technological revolution, makes us wonder about human relations, building social links and one's own self-construction. What are the relationships between adolescents and digital or web culture? What kind of education is being considered today in high school? Should the school be the only source of training in this area? This article investigates the link between the customs and practices of pupils and social networks or digital culture. We aim to do this, firstly, through the analysis of two hundred student testimonies, aged between eleven and eighteen years, taken from a survey conducted in the western regions of France and in Paris during 2011 and 2012. Secondly, we investigate the role school can play in new technologies education, by comparing the national curriculum to classroom practices. And, finally, we compare the adolescents' position with that of the institution. Our findings reveal the technical influence on education and the difficulty of implementing the educational act in citizenship education.

Keywords: media education, skills, web, citizen

1. The current social and educational context

Research on social networks is still something new marked by the rapid development of technology but also the evolution of individual and collective behavior. This technology and these lifestyle patterns influence all areas of daily life. They transform interpersonal exchanges, codes, professional practices, personal and cultural practices already acquired. No one can get away from this cultural phenomenon in either the private or public sphere. Faced with this dominant trend, can we really avoid the subject? Can we be concerned about it, seize it or ignore it? This technical and technological advance or this revolution is at the heart of social relations and the construction of society. In this context, what place do we give to the building of communities and identities? To look at the problem is specifically to examine the relationship between man and technology, between men and also man and his relationship to the world. Furthermore one must take a closer look, at what happens before, in education and experiences acquired in this way among the younger generations. What kind of processes are operating in the construction of adolescent identities (Dubar, 1992; Dubet, 2007)? What links can we observe between youth culture and school culture to bring about a responsible and autonomous individual capable to found a democratic Republic? This reflection remains crucial in these times of individualistic behavior (Gaillard, 2000; Dubet, 2002; De Singly, 2002); when more traditional social links are disintegrating (Chauvigné, 2011) and when the education authority is being impugned (Dubet, Duru-Bellat, 2000). It is important to highlight a

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number of representations and practices related to internet and see how it contributes to building the adolescents' identity in their foundation and structure.

2. Social representations theory to the central core: the social networks' concept as part of the construction of individual and collective identities'.

The implementation of new technologies (internet, cellular phone, ...) in our environmental space leads adolescents to confront these tools daily, either in their speeches or in their practices or their projections. From a context that has an early education in the digital world, the digital natives or "*chip kids*" (Blocquaux, 2010) have developed a form of common knowledge, socially elaborated and shared around the new technologies called social representations (Moscovici, 1961; Jodelet, 1989). They allow for communication, experience and reference standards to shape their skills to fit the world around us. They are accustomed to acting upon it and interacting with others. Through highlighting these dimensions, we seek to develop a set of opinions, beliefs, images, attitudes or values that allow teens to define a common sense of the internet and virtual world. This objectification leads to the first definition or anchoring of these new technologies in the teenagers' lives. Their content will help us to understand and explain attitudes, the choices that affect relationships with others (adolescents between themselves, adolescents and the world ....) in the interactions or behaviors developed. "*A social representation is organized around a central core*" (Abric, 1976) that determines its meaning and helps clarify the network's approaches by the younger generation, their significance and their uses. These representations are the forms involved in the construction of adolescents' identities', as *inter alia* students and future citizens.

3. Identity construction in adolescent socialization process.

Beyond the representations they have of the world and of themselves, students pass through during their school career and life a number of experiences to build their identity. They will seek to build as subjects and evolve in their social environment by developing strategies, its own logic and diverse rationalities (Dubet 1991.2007). In a world where technology and especially internet has become a part of the social bond, what place do the adolescents allow for this new communication tool in the construction of their identity? How does the use of the Internet d help them to define themselves as such, as a person or a group of people?

In this social identity construction, interactions between the individual and his or her social environment are various. A lot of socialization processes are in construction. What are they? This different links in their progression will develop both cognitive and emotional attitudes (Dubar, 1992/1998). The game of these interferences will determine in one way or in another way, the ways of being together. Based on their experiences, teenagers will develop an image of themselves in relation, in tension or conflict with those images that others attribute to them. Thus, the recognition or non recognition by peers is essential in one's own identity construction or in the shared identity. So, how teens take into account the image others have of them on social networks? How they look at their use of social networks? How does this practice affect individual and

collective behavior? How far do these uses meddle in students' lives? What impact can we expect? Here, institutions, especially schools and families have an influence on the process of socialization. Can we see the citizenship education's references, basis of living together or the social link' dilution? The link with the children' digital culture in school or out school can now empower and build a community of citizens? Firstly, we state our methodological approach. Secondly, we try to provide answers to questions posed in specific contexts, representations and uses of the social networks before seeing their effects on the construction of oneself and a community of citizens. Finally, we will deal with the tension and the need for media education in citizenship education.

4. Methodology

Local questionnaires were given to eight junior high and sixth form school classes that is one hundred and ninety eight students from September 2010 to September 2011. Our first objective was to offer as many different representations as possible of digital culture and its approaches by adolescents. Social representations give to see students in their behavior and reliance on the web. They provide a knowledge base "*socially elaborated and involved in the construction of a common reality and a social group*" (Moscovici, 1976, p. 410). So, through the questions, we sought to identify their world view, the approach of the virtual tool, attitudes, values and cultural codes but also the types of reasoning. The interest was beyond the representation result in relationships between young people and their environment, to see their web use outside or within the school and collect the construction of identities, the process of socialization. To determine what is at stake in the current concerns for community cohesion, our selection was guided in two ways.

First, we supposed that the socio-cultural and school affects t students' behavior and practices. That's why we have chosen to interview teens from all categories and geographical areas (Middle school, sixth form schools, vocational or technical schools, in education action zone). Next, we focus on two levels of population, the 9th and 12th grade students, each corresponding to one end of the cycle in France:

- They are old enough to leave the school system to work from 16 years. They are behind these levels, rituals or passages, "sort of" "*cultural rite of initiation* "(Pasquier, 2005/2007). Moreover, the choice of two-level middle school / sixth form schools is interesting because the social diversity is more developed in middle school and in sixth form schools teens are more self sufficient.
- The generations that have marked the evolution of the web in our social history (Blocquaux, 2011): the web' explosion and access to the general public between 1992 and 1997 and its use became standard from 1998.

Focus on these different levels has the advantage of seeing whether there is a possible gap between ages, digital cultures to determine how it affects or changes the relationship between adolescents inside and outside of the school today. This work on sociability feeds and improves all aspects of teenage life at school or out of school. It is not a general work on teenagers and web, but a reflection on the cultural practices and communication in social and identity' construction and in citizenship education building.

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This work on the sociability is building with all aspects of teenage life at school or out school. It's not a general work on teenagers and web, but a reflection on the question of cultural practices and communication in the personal and social construction within future citizenship education.

5. Results

5.1 Offers of connection and frequency: the teenagers' choice

The first results of the survey prove great interest of youth people for new media and specially the web because 100% of middle school students and 97% of upper secondary school students say they have a connection. It's not new at home and is sometimes more recent within schools. It is often initiated by parents or older brothers and sisters in middle school. In upper secondary school school, this notification is sent by the peer group for more than five or six years say 86% of the students in final year. "The *Web has beenpart of our life since we are twelve or thirteen years old. This is an important moment for us when we go over friends' houses. It's a way to always be with them all the time... you know!* ". We observe therefore that media education was practical before being concept (De Smedt, 2007), a practice that students are mostly at the entrance of the school, the transition from childhood to adolescence. It takes shape outside the classroom, as a ritual, a habit, once back home. This use at your fingertips is visible by the connection' frequency rate; 90% of middle school students talk about daily connection compared with 50% of the upper secondary school students whether they are girls or boys. This usage gives us two things. On the one hand, form an economic point of view, an ever-growing accessibility through places and offers available on the market development of high tech tools and a rather easy acquisition. Relationally, these practices reveal an essential element in building the social fabric: technology and networks are now becoming universal (Hétier, 2010). On the other hand, a culture of permanent link (Lardellier, 2006, 2008) is set up as a substitute or a distancing from the adult world. That how, we observe, as if one core' family was replacing another. Form a cultural and historical point of view, the individualization of behavior and virtual activity transfer moves contact away from others and keeps everybody at the distance. The technique, in fact, determines the values, especially the well-being for 66% of middle school students and 63% of the upper secondary school students.

5.2 Representations to the customs

This freedom felt by the use of social networks contrasts sharply with the school and family practices that are rarely mentioned by the students surveyed. They oppose both worlds: that of pleasure and immediacy with that of the stress and effort. "*In school, the web is not essential. We do math, French, ... we use the web in technology, once a week. We are shown how a computer runs, it creates files, it's very technical [...] otherwise, at home we go on wikipedia to do our homework, it's faster [...]. But for me, the key is to have friends.* "The statement illustrates the trends that are taking place since the web has become the symbol of the social link's creation. The technique seems to develop new relationships and modify interpersonal relationships. 30% of middle school students use

the web to "*talk*" and secondly to make friends (33%), while secondary school students use this tool to "*exchange and dialogue*" to 58% against 20% related to have new friends. In this usage, a number of relationships take place through Facebook, MSN, blogs and builds new forms of exchange but also new forms of intimacy (Pasquier, 2005/2007). Indeed, 13% of middle school students and 43% of the upper secondary school students are seeking new ways of being together, from their rooms and their screens. Social networks are a tool, a base of social practices disconnected from the school (Dubar, 1992). They represent a kind of link, the cord which binds them to the teenagers' world and bringing away with institutions such as family or school. They want to develop a community, a "*between us*" with its codes, its language defying all laws spelling, grammatical or argumentation of the School's written language. This independent period of distancing and the construction of one's own representations (Dubet, 1991, 2007) underline this commitment, while remaining at home, to find areas of experience outside the family, in virtual meeting spaces. There is this need to exist for the others and the peers; otherwise they can be excluded if they don't participate in these communication modes. This is the risk of forgoing other relationships and the social reality of the moment. There is no doubt in the words of the adolescents: social relationships are at the heart of their concerns (Dubet, 1991). A kind of synergy, an integrated usage, animates teens seduced by having more friends (social life) and immediately (transmission efficiency), whatever the content of this relationship (Tisseron, 2008). Adolescent behavior is like social networks 'definition in which groups of people or organizations are linked by the exchange between them. However, if the goal is to get in touch with the highest number, and that of popularity that is sought, what isthe impact of these social relationships that have been created? Can we see alienation or emancipation of the future citizens? The importance of the web in the teenagers' lives questions the value and the links between them. It also questions the identity construction of these young people as well as a citizens' community in the future.

5.3 Socialization and identity construction at the web time

The socialization and identity construction issue is important matters to discuss in all times in the teenagers' lives. From the testimony, we observed two important times: that of the school and outside the school. Socialization and identity construction through the net needs to be considered and questioned throughout the teenagers' lives. From the testimony, we have observed two important areas of time spent: in school and outside.

5.3.1 Web and teenagers in the School

Middle school and high school students don't talk about web at school in their survey (less than 10%), leading a double meaning. On the one hand, "the *web at school*" doesn't seem to correspond to the representations that they have in their daily usage. On the other hand, the use of information technology and communication at school is still underdeveloped in learning and their use is quite different. She is highly submitted to the law. We can speculate that these digital cultures are opposed in spite of social and economic pressure to bring these tools into the school.

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Indeed, in middle school as part of the common base[1] or lessons such as technology, it's to use social networks and understand different types of speech in media[2]. In high school more concentrates on bringing into focus different sources on the same event[3]. This teaching is diluted in all knowledge and responds to codes, standards peculiar to school. There is a considerable gap between the youth's digital culture and the uses in School. Usage patterns (Rabardel, 1995) are different between use for oneself (social relationships, job activity, ...) and school use under constraint. The net's use is upsetting knowledge and education for citizenship.

It raises the question of values and the fit between the school/ the citizens training and students who have an individualistic relationship to new technologies. There is a dichotomy between an inclusive school and more individualistic and behavior, leading adolescents to make choices in the construction of their identity or in their social construction. Thus, the identity construction commits the teenager in his relationship with himself, the others and the institution. The contexts, actors encountered, and peers influences socialization processes (Dubar, 1998).

5.3.2 Web and teenagers outside school

Individualization is necessary in adolescence, but asserting one's place in the group leads to imitating peers' rituals and the integration of standards (Dubet, 2007). However, a notable distinction exists between the students interviewed in middle school and high school students or more precisely, there is a difference with age and education already acquired (school, family, ...).

For example, this 14 year-old, pupil, said: "*I'm on the web every day. I just left my girlfriends but we have lots of stuff to say about so and so, about our evening ... how we are going to dress tomorrow. Before falling asleep, I always chat with my best friend [...].* "

We observe the need for adolescents to exhibit self-image, a need for reassurance about whothey are. This fragility to expose their private life without restraint shows that the watchful eyes of the peer group of the peer is essential to building one's own identity. Without the approval of other teenagers, the "*staging of oneself does not comply with current standards arouses contempt or lack of peer recognition [...]*" (Lebreton, 2008, p. 63). This situation has sometimes dramatic consequences such as isolation, loss of

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[1] The "common base of knowledge and skills" that shows all that students must know and master at the end of compulsory schooling (16 years). Introduced into the law in 2005, they are the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for successful educational outcomes, for an individual life and a future citizen. Competency 4 (ICT skills) should enable each student to learn to make responsible use of information technology and communication (ICT). At school and middle school, computer and Internet Patent (B2i) confirms the mastery of these techniques.

[2] Circular relatives at the use of new technologies in France BOHS No. 6 of February 29, 2007 at BO 29/04/2010

[3] Circular relatives at the use of new technologies in France BOHS No. 6 of February 29, 2007 at BO 29/04/2010

confidence or even harassment. Developing privacy or a private sphere, however, is not considered dangerous until such abuses occur. "*It doesn't matter*" say 90% of students surveyed since the judgment is for entry into these social networks and not on content. The important thing is being able to access and not to exclude the greatest number. Thus, group identification gives an individual strength but at the same time it forces others into conformity. The customs, codes (clothing, language, leisure, music, ...) majority is required in a individual and collective construction as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1960). The group imposes its law on the individual: *the tyranny of the group* as denounced Harendt Hannah (1986). Teens share cultural practices and relationships where the group dictates its codes. Although this process is established in middle school, the possible misuse of such usage is only perceived by 26% of them. However, isn't this "*virtual sociability slightly artificial, as might suggest the brevity and the sometimes anecdotal exchanges*?" (Bedin, 2009, p. 157) What values can we see behind its uses? What kind of self construction? What kind of citizens' community? But do teens   live this experience in the same way? Each of them develops himself in relation, in line with or in contradiction to others (Dubar, 1998). Therefore, identity and social structures depend upon the context, actors met and peers assessment. 47% of middle school students and 73% of high school students recognize the superficiality of exchanges on the web. They claim that the contacts on Facebook are acquaintances, not long term friends refound once their studies are over. Can we then speak about socialization, common world, discussed and built on shared values? 36% of the high school students recognize that such relationships can lead to misunderstandings, misunderstandings that will affect their school life or dangerous or threatening encounter (16%). They are well aware more than most middle school students, of the obstacles in building true links. Social networks are possible ways to facility daily life (free times, contacts, ...) but don't lead to sustainable construction. 76% of high school students could do without Facebook and MSN.

6. Challenges and tensions for citizenship education

Analysis of the data questions the socialization processes and emphasizes the individual behavior of adolescents in social networks. Issues of interpersonal dimension are important. Young people often took the habit to coordinate their activities around new technologies to avoid being excluded from the teenager's world. The link is continuous as an authority that replaces that of parents in which the group would make its law and where freedom of each individual would be limited. Everyone shares or displays his private life without complex. Separation of the tool and its content only occurs much later in the adolescent's. One's well-being is more important than building a society to live in together with the same values (political dimension).

Thus, the bases of citizenship education is on the road to ruin favoring immediate pleasure (living together) and technique more than a critical look at the practices that have become habitual. What is the sense? What kind of citizenship education can evolve without critical thinking or reflection on the virtual world? A difference must be made between technical use and a reflexive use of the web which seems rather complex for teenagers. The issue of rights and freedoms as well as taking a step back from these new technologies must be discussed from a personal and collective point of view (identity and social construction of these future citizens). It is fundamental because it questions

the place of the school and the relationship to knowledge in education that allows students to become what they are and help them become citizens. It remains imperative to articulate personal development and social development in order to create autonomous and responsible behavior.

The development of a philosophy of a human condition (Morin, 2008) at school to understand others, endeavoring to avoid a digital divide and making a media culture such as a culture or subculture to work on bringing values into the space. We must establish training in traditional teaching and need more content.

Conclusion

Through this research on teens and social networks, we wanted to show both the uses and tensions between young people, institutions (family, school) and society around various digital cultures. The result is a reflection on identity construction and social links facing the mostly individualistic practices (immediacy and well being). The question of education must be evoked, as well as the values to be passed on in a virtual world; a world that exposes people more than it helps in self construction. The link remains to be found in establishing a media education within school to give meaning to adolescents' actions and train them to acquire more responsibility and autonomy. Building human and social links must remain a central concern and should not to be neglected because of by the technical links?

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