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Mobile experiences of an adolescent learning Spanish online in a twenty-first century high school

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on a case analysis based on the experience of an adolescent having to further Spanish learning through the Spanish 3 (third year) distance course of a twenty-first century high school program. Autoethnographic reflections mediate the storyline of the experiential report, as conversations and observations are internalized by the researcher in a process that allows deep critical thinking on what the adolescent lives and what the researcher experiences through this contact. The findings suggest that mobile content programming may create a situation in which malleable minds are molded in a threatening environment that contributes to modify their habits through operant and respondent conditioning, behavior modification, behavior analytics, enslaving their way of life, as their identity is constantly under challenge.

Introduction

This article is a continuation of the transdisciplinary reflections presented in Tochon (2011, 2012) on the technological problems related to multimedia-assisted and mobile language learning from a safe user perspective. Balancing possibly euphoric statements about how good new technologies may be, this reflective case study explores the experiences of an adolescent who is learning Spanish through the online courses of his twenty-first century high school.

Literature review

With the large number of mobile device owners, mobile learning – also known as m-learning – has become a focus of research in education (Cho, 2009). Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is also attracting attention with its perceived advantages over heavier computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) note "MALL differs from computer-assisted language learning in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasizing continuity, or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" (p. 273). Thus, in the last 10 years, the acronym MALL has changed from multimedia-assisted language learning (MALL) towards mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), yet hand-held

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computer-based devices may be more and more inclusive of multimedia learning. MALL focuses now on five mobile technologies: mobile phones, MP3 players, personal digital assistants, pocket electronic dictionaries, and ultra-portable tablet PCs. Mobility defines various aspects of the learning environments, such as mobile technology, mobility of content, and learner mobility (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009).

When it comes to analyze the use of mobile environments and smartphone learning, the notion of interaction should be questioned. Interaction is very different in a distance learning environment, whether on a laptop or on a smartphone. The term interaction emphasizes the importance of an environment in which the learners must both interact with input and modify their output on the basis of feedback. Such interaction can either be interpersonal or intrapersonal. As in typical in CALL, smartphone applications most often offer situations in which the learners must focus on the form of the linguistic materials and gets feedback to process the materials or reconstruct responses, which may only be considered a negotiation of form (Cotos, 2011; Heift, 2010). This is but minimalist interaction, which may help beginners but soon enough students may need deeper coaching and more complex negotiations. Where the real interaction lies may be hidden: often such interactions consist in power relations of the learner with the learning institution that pushes the students to learn some materials against their will, an aspect that does not transpire from usual mobile and flipped classroom studies.

Most of the literature available in this field is focusing on technology conceived as a commodity, but the impacts of its use on deeper aspects of learning, character, body reactions, neurological development, and health are left aside. But before entering into experiential aspects, let's quickly skim this literature of more than 400 titles as of December 2014, based on Burston (2013).

Smartphone L2 learning

On the positive side, Vihavainen, Kuula, and Federley (2010) pilot tested a web-based reading system using smartphone to support L2 English among elementary school learners. For three weeks, pupils would take a picture of a page from a book and send it to the server that returned to them tutorial exercises such as missing words, crossword puzzle (out-of-class), and text listening (in-class). The system was highly rated by the students. Wang, Chen, and Fang (2011) analyze the attitudes of high schoolers towards smartphones as L2 English language learning tools. Students were using them to capture images of English street logos and prepare PowerPoint presentations. The students reported they learned a lot from this activity.

However attitudes are not always as positive, when compared to the use of laptops or Tablet, for example. Stockwell (2008) evaluated the use by 75 university students over three months of an L2 vocabulary program available on both PCs and web-enabled mobile phones. The study identified how and why mobile phones were used in language learning. 61% of students did not use mobile phones at all; 23% tried them, but quit. PCs were faster and easier to use, students felt. They were not prepared to use smartphone for non-recreational purposes. Stockwell (2010) repeated the experience on a web-based L2 English vocabulary program over a three-year period. Smartphone usage was higher in the third year (36%) than in the first (17%) and second (14%) years. Lessons took much more time to be completed on smartphone, but the scores achieved were not that different. Chu (2011) explored for a week learners' uses of two L2 Smartphone vocabulary applications, with the intent to discover the program features that were liked by college students. Most of them used it while commuting, but did it rather rarely. The most wanted features were the tracking of memorized vs.

non-memorized vocabulary, examples of pronunciation, and control of vocabulary repetition. Students felt the smartphone was an addition to more substantial aspects of learning that were done while face to face or with their laptop. Stockwell (2012) compared again smartphone vs. non-smartphone and desktop PCs to access an L2 vocabulary application on the Internet for one semester. Most students preferred PCs to either smartphone because of time and expense. There was no noticeable difference in the achievement scores.

To sum up, newness may stimulate learners to use smartphone for language learning for a while, mainly when they are commuting, however it does not bear the comparison with Tablets and laptop when it comes to convenience, rapidity, and ease of use. That is what the literature reviewed expresses.

Self-editing and error correction in mobile L2 writing

There seems to be two types of researchers in this field: those who have computer engineering expertise, and thus have a limited vision of applied linguistics, may focus on grammar tools, as if it were a key aspect of language learning. Some among them, however, have intriguing accounts of the importance of self-determination in the process of mastering grammar. Research on second language writing is but an example, with its focus on grammatical errors. The effect of corrective feedback has been thoroughly studied, however research mainly focused on teachers' written corrective feedback. The efficacy of such feedback has been challenged by a number of researchers and the debate is not over (Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 2007). A series of researchers explored self-determination in this arena. Self-editing is a key to metalinguistic awareness that appears crucial when students use mobile environments, however it is only the focus of some rare studies (Diab, 2011). Bitchener and Ferris (2012) consider self-editing as a source of corrective feedback. This competence is even considered as the internalization corrective feedback and thus would represent the goal of such activity. It would be a critical step in L2 learners' writing and grammar development, facilitating acquisition, and promoting autonomy (Cresswell, 2000).

Some comparative studies focusing on self-editing and peer editing shed light on learners' performances during the editing process. Suzuki's (2008) qualitative study analyzes self-editing and peer editing among 24 Japanese College students. Peer editing generated meaning negotiation whereas self-editing resulted in more text changes focused on word choice and grammar error correction. Another study by Diab (2010) showed that peer-editing reduced rule-based errors, compared with self-editing practice. Learners can notice their errors while self-editing but need training for that purpose.

Taking a so-called interactionist approach to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) based on the Noticing Hypothesis, *Grammar Clinic* is an application designed by Li and Hegelheimer (2013) as a set of grammar exercises on sentence-level error identification and correction to be used for the flipped classroom. Grammar Clinic requires users to identify sentence-level errors and correct them, providing instant feedback. It also includes a small grammar e-book. In that study, students were permitted multiple reviews of each assignment during the semester. The purpose was for them to self-regulate grammar learning. The analyses in the study show that performances on *Grammar Clinic* were correlated with their score gains, with increased correction rates in verb use, preposition use, and word choice. Increased correction rates indicate learners' improvement in their English grammatical precision, which was supported by the decreased error rates in the final drafts. Thus, *Grammar Clinic*, as a form

of mobile-assisted language learning, was perceived by students as a useful application complementing the ESL writing class. It helped learners raise their metalinguistic awareness and improve self-editing in English.

Intercultural competence

A second type of researchers in the field tends to focus on pedagogy, with a neat grounding in applied linguistics and SLA. Among these researchers, quite a few try to explore mobile learning as a tool for intercultural learning, as the motivation to learn may emerge from the understanding of cultural difference. In this respect, with the reservations that were made at the beginning of the article on the limited types of interactions that may occur in a smartphone environment, mobile technologies may increase intercultural communication competence (ICC), a concept derived from Hall (1966) and defined as "the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini, 2005, p. 1). "Culture-specific topics receive considerable treatment – often from a fairly superficial, tourist-inspired perspective – but there is typically little or no presentation or discussion of culture-general topics" (Godwin-Jones, 2013, p. 2). Thus, culturally specific understandings may be supplemented by culture-general abilities to learn to interact with individuals from various cultures in different contexts, what is usually referred to as ICC (Byram, 1997). Such "knowledge of self and other, attitudes of openness and curiosity, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness" are indeed components of deep language learning (Schenker, 2012, p. 450; Tochon, 2014).

In terms of the impact of culture on language learning per se, Canagarajah (2006, p. 3) emphasizes the need for "multidialectal competence … acquiring one specific and special-ized register, suggested to be universally deployable in all and any social environment." For Blommaert (2013), communicative competence implies that register change is recognized and the speaker adapts to these registers as relevant (at a Coffee shop, at a restaurant, on Facebook or Twitter). In this regards, textbooks are oversimplifying the complexity of daily situations, while mobile learning with the access to video and streaming media, as well as visual and aural communication may ease the path towards learning the subtleties. Smartphone usually has video capture and sound recording; many provide video editing. Video sharing projects allow for encounters that may be linguistically and culturally rich. Video mashups and projects that combine language and culture may use subtitling, close captioning, or transcribing.

Most studies point to the need for advance preparation in order to avoid intercultural conflict and encourage deeper cultural insights and as Godwin-Jones (2013, p. 4) notes,

> telecollaborations may imply real language use far beyond what any textbook might be able to propose. Then the way such tandems and exchanges are used requires reflection: … Students may need to step back from intercultural exchanges or experiences within the target culture to reflect on the significance of the encounters. Personal or shared journals, learner logs, or blogs can play this role.

Behavioral modification techniques at the core of mobile instruction designs

Behavior can be empirically changed to increase or decrease the frequency of certain behaviors. Altering the reaction to stimuli through positive and negative reinforcement forces

the person to adapt to the constraints of the environment that rewards certain actions and punishes other forms of action that are not welcome in the system. Behavior modification, terms first coined by Thorndike (1911), is an application of operant and respondent conditioning initiated by Skinner (1974). Skinner was the first research to inquire into machine learning and program learning. Most distance education program inherited some form of behavior modification techniques in their analysis of student results and ways of providing retributions or sanctions as forms of feedback to progress or failure. Operant behavior is selected by its antecedents and consequences; its conditioning is the result of reinforcement and punishment (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). Behaviorism has been criticized for being "denigrating to the human spirit" (Holland, 1976). To reduce the negative connotations of the terms, a euphemism is now used with the name *Applied behavior analysis* (ABA, Mulick, 2006). ABA creates environmental events that are prompting specific behaviors (or antecedents) and then the program develops consequences, as sets of strategies to modify behavior. It is typically present in programmed learning in which rewards and punishments are provided depending the responses of the learner.

Gee (2013) states that the world's complexity "come(s) to the limits of individual human intelligence and individual expertise" (p. 170). Computers are disconnecting humans from each other and isolating them, rather than the contrary. He suggests we should use each others' minds as tools. "What if human beings are not meant to be individuals," [he wonders], "but rather, are meant to be parts of a bigger whole?" (p. 152), "A mind of minds" (p. 153), a higher level problem-solving mind could emerge from "affinity spaces" that universities are nowadays unable to stimulate this, even though they might use xMoocs or top-down expert mass online open courses. In the anti-education of James Gee's way, "proper" education should be for a person "to be a producer and not just a consumer, a participant and not just a spectator, an agent and not a victim in a world full of ideology, risk, fear, and uncertainty" (p. xii).

This article proposes to explore this enslaving of the mind through new technologies. Since there is now evidence of technology problems that the industry has chosen deliberately to ignore for profit, as attested by recent governmental decisions in some countries, it is argued here that our role as educators is to anticipate the spread of these issues in all the schools that add Wi-fi and mobile use to their curricula, and to envision possible solutions to such forthcoming issues that may affect generations of children. Thus, the article offers an experiential overview and a critical examination of the state of the art in fields that are quite unexplored, with some concerns for the side effects of intensive technology use by children as well as adults and the available solutions.

Research methods

Setting

The general setting was proper to a family traveling abroad for one semester in various countries. Attending 2d year (sophomore) high school online was a condition for the family's adolescent son to being able to travel with his parents. They visited a number of countries for three weeks each. The countries include United States, Australia, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Switzerland, and France. Each country presented specific issues regarding the internet connections, broadband, and the ability to swiftly connect online. As well, there were university

campuses locations and hotel locations that differed in broadband and quality. For example, connection speed and broadband was limited in China University settings and better in four-star China hotels; connection was excellent in Thailand and Vietnam Universities and poor in some hotels of Thailand or Vietnam. Swiss and US connections were outstanding, and French connections were handicapped with Orange surveillance and cumbersome server requirements.

Technology environments

Mobile computer: Laptop 2014 Lenovo y40 part of Lenovo Y series notebooks, with 8 GB RAM, Intel Core i7 with 64 bit OS of Windows 8.1; hard drive hybrid HDD SSD with 1 TB HDD and 8 GB SSD for the operating system. Graphics card is AMD Radeon R9 M275 GPU with 2 GB of video RAM.

Mobile phone: Apple iPhone 5, IOS7 Jailbroken

Mediated participants through authors' personal experience

Mediated conversations with an adolescent sophomore doing his high school online through a twenty-first century distance high school program, and his mother. The author of this article, in his contacts with this family.

Autoethnography

The research methodology combines life stories linked to larger social issues (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnographic self-narratives situate the researcher's self within the social setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002), combining autobiography, writing research, and ethnography in the autobiographical study of various observations (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Heath, 2008; Jones, 2005; Pennington, 2007; Tochon, 1999, 2002). Researchers have used autoethnography to provide detailed accounts of the nature of lived experience in the studied settings, and of how humans are affected by them (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Kaufmann, 2014). Thus, autoethnographic research connects the autobiographical study with the social, the political, and the cultural observations. It represents a post-positivist, subjective effort to demonstrate the nature of interactions and document learning processes:

> writers are now free to excavate the personal in the name of the political … These texts must also work as cultural criticism, as tools for critique and political action. At this level they … work as venues for ground level criticism aimed at the repressive structures of everyday life. (Denzin, 2003, pp. 137–138)

"Why did introspective data have to be hidden in our social-science studies?" asks Ellis (1995, p. 7). Nowadays, such validation of subjective understanding and personal ways of knowing is becoming increasingly accepted in academia (Grumet, 1991).

Author's positioning

I believe that humanity can find new and healthy solutions to help humans communicate together. However, I deplore that the current state of technologies is detrimental to the health of individuals. Medical research has repeatedly demonstrated that cell phones are

detrimental to youth health and hazardous to the brains of young people, so much so that the Russian National Committee on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection proposed to forbid their use to people less than 18 years old. As an educator, my aim is to guide society to a better world, not using instruments that are damaging to their health. I believe that new technologies may appear soon, based on infrared connections, which will be more efficient than microwave radiation and that will be healthy to human brains and bodies. Therefore, research must continue in this direction. Philosophers such as Aristotle and then Immanual Kant and Jürgen Habermas expressed that technology should never be used without prudence and wisdom. Using technologies without prudence and wisdom may lead to chaos in society. My goal is to bring such prudence and wisdom to the societal debate.

Data analysis and synthesis

Data analysis consists in gathering subjective longitudinal perceptions into a coherent storyline that aimed to represent adequately both objective and subjective life of participants mediated by the auto ethnographer.

Analysis

The themes that emerge from this critical reflection are shaped by the sense that the adolescent is being pushed not only by the School distance program but mostly by the way mobile learning is formatted and molded as a field of constraints that creates intense pressure on the learner in terms of threats related to deadlines and assignments, apparently increased by behavioral modification techniques. Being constantly "plugged-in", the adolescent is eight hours a day, because he is specially conscientious, exposed to ionization fields produced by his laptop and smartphone. He develops an increasing sense of loneliness and may manifest signs of depression. The boy develops a tendency to work alone and reject others, and reduces interest in sports and activities with others. The mobile becomes an omnipresent partner creating a dependency, a form of day-dreaming accompanied by loss of short-term memory, daily loss of items (keys, sunglasses, shirts, and even one costly camera), losing sense of environment and responsibility over others in daily tasks. The constant habits of multitasking on both laptop and smartphone increase a change in the reading habits that were gain from youth reading long fiction novels, and what develops suggests skimming rather than reading, reading to test, and shallow learning, which may profoundly affect future accomplishments and the philosophy of life.

Adolescent preparation of the online course environment

When I discuss it inquiring into how the student prepares for e-learning, he tells me something like: The first thing I do would be to log in, I can see all my classes and grades, then I choose my class I want to take, maybe it's a class due today, or if I am done with my classes that were due, may be a class that I want be more advanced in. Then, once I choose, basically it's a three-step process: firstly going through the lesson, then understanding the lesson, taking notes, testing myself, and the third part is the assignment. I either have an assignment to review what I have done or a small quiz or an exam for the lesson. That's basically what

I do for all my classes, he would say. However, when I observe what really happens, I have the perception that the kid is forgetting important aspects of his learning environment.

I note the presence of multiple screens, suggesting he is taking two classes at the same time, maybe he is bored after a while and switches to the other class, like from geometry, which he declares being a nightmare, or chemistry which he says he won't ever use in his life, to Spanish which seems much easier and restful. Thus, he can switch across classes abruptly, and the reason for that is keeping his interest alive or, in less nuanced terms, interrupting the overwhelming perception that what he is doing is losing his time and losing his life doing things that have no meaning to him and won't contribute to anything constructive in his life, if it weren't for the high school diploma, which may give access to what he imagines to be even more boring courses at the university level but, at the end, these might bring the money he needs to do things that are fun. Eventually.

Often but not always, there is a video page, such as YouTube, or streaming TV, or Netflix open that keeps him alive and helps him jump out of the gloom and depressing feeling of being stuck on his computer when he could be swimming outside or going to a party with friends. Then the ongoing TV series of his choice is constantly active but hidden from parental view at any time they show their nose, but will pop up in full-screen mode when he sees an episode that is particularly entertaining, even if he watched it numerous times already. In China, he keeps connecting with his friends using Facebook and Gmail through his VPN, which also helps him getting streaming videos that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Besides the multiple course screens, there is iTunes, which is constantly open and/or a webpage with streaming music. The iPhone plays a role of music page as well and his ear phones, the professional type, the last Chinese fake of the best and most costly professional headphones you can imagine, bought from Hong Kong through special delivery, are connected alternatively to both the laptop and the smartphone. Here is probably what he would say about it if he dared: I am all the time listening to music while working on my courses. It helps me distancing myself from environment noise; it's like, he once explained, having two parts of the brain, one who wants to focus on work and the other one who wants to have fun, and satisfying both of them with music helps keeping somewhat focused.

Nonetheless, there are times searching for some motivation using other sites: watching video, looking at iPhone lists of Reddit online networking front page and various subscription lists such as AskReddit, World News, News, DIY (do it yourself), Festivals, videos (again), Music, Futurology, Deals, BodyweightFitness, TodayILearned, and doing classes at the same time.

Well … then what is the use of the smartphone, other than music and entertainment? He would probably reply: I can use my iPhone to quickly talk with my teachers through email, receive updates on my work and progress. I can rapidly view messages sent and received with my device, which is more portable than my laptop. Once I viewed these messages, I can either respond quickly with my iPhone or go on my laptop and answer.

The smartphone is perceived as a complement, not as the main course. Useful when the laptop is off and there is a need to keep up with what teachers say. It is too small to do courses but enough to communicate on the go, while being in an airport or on a flight, if texts have been downloaded for certain projects. iPhone would not be convenient for courses, he would evaluate. To keep in touch as a complement, yes. But navigating and multitasking, such as having course pages on the left side and Word on the right, is not possible on an iPhone.

Whatever its complementary role in distance learning, the Smartphone is an important contributor to a situation of stress for the student, in the case being analyzed. Figure 1

shows a picture of a real learning interaction on the smartphone by the participant. The document (excerpt on the screen of Figure 1, transcribed in Table 1), based on an existing template, indicates:

This message is revised and sent at the end of each day of work to the high schooler and to both parents' email addresses. Each night the parents, separately or together, will make some remarks to the kid on his progress in each class, worrying how he can best succeed with the constraints of their travel, when they will be for one day busy with flights, and moving to new locations. Then the kid who had reached a level where he had no assignments left to do has the feeling of starting back on square 1 being late with 10 new assignments. He will
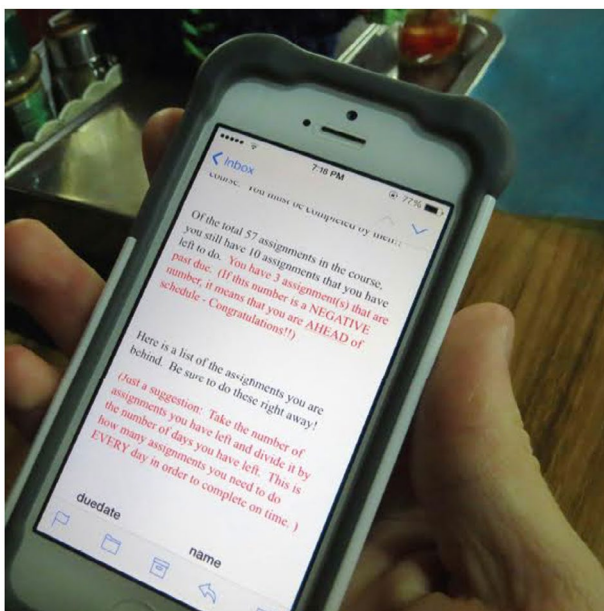

Figure 1. Picture of the Smartphone while receiving a pressing daily message from the teacher.

Table 1. Transcription of the teacher's message present on Figure 1.

To: (name of student)
From: (name of teacher)
My goal is for all students to reach their course completion goals by successfully **completing all assignments based on the due dates** that appear in their grade book within the course.
The following is a weekly Grade Check for (Student name) in (Discipline), based on the work that has been submitted. This email is to inform you of your progress in this course. You currently have a 89.86% grade in this course. This is your grade on the work you have completed. **It is NOT your Final Grade!!** As a reminder, your end date is 12/20/2014. **You have 2 weeks left to complete this course. You must be completed by then!!**
Of the total 57 assignments in the course, you still have 10 assignments that you have left to do. You have 3 assignments that are past due. (If this number is a NEGATIVE number, it means that you are AHEAD of schedule – Congratulations!!)
Here is a list of the assignments you are behind. Be sure to do these right away!
(Just a suggestion: Take the number of assignments you have left and divide it by the number of days you have left. This is how many assignments you need to do EVERY day in order to complete on time.)

Note: The same message is sent for each of the six courses the student must finish by the end of the semester, for which similar emails are exchanged through the Smartphone.

Figure 2. Sisyphus (Image courtesy of Vlado at FreeDigitalPhotos.net).

fight hard to win this impossible battle and feels like Sisyphus, confronted with impossible tasks that must be re-done every day, with no end in sight (Figure 2).

He expresses it clearly on his blog, posted online:

Clearing Up a Few Misconceptions (existing document on blog)

I'd like to clear up a few misconceptions about me and my travels. I've been told how lucky I am, this part is certainly true, but also how it must be awesome to be living life to the fullest and being on vacation. The thing is, my parents are travelling for work, so they are constantly working and so am I. I am a full time student and don't just get to take a break because I'm travelling. I have to decide whether I want to stay inside and work the whole day, then go out at night, or do something other than sit and my room and finish classes, then come back and have to work until 2 am to finish stuff. Whatever I don't finish also piles on to the things I have to do, bad internet connection, travel, car rides, all these things postpone my work and I have to work double to make up for it. I do post some pictures of times when I am visiting and exploring the places I am in, but this is just the fraction of the day and is the only part shown. I thought about doing vlogs every day, but it would be quite boring since 85% of it would be me working towards school or my own projects. I just wanted to clear up some of these things, let me know in the comments if you have any questions. Just remember, what is posted isn't always what my life is like 24/7, just the better highlights. Thanks :)

Discussion of smartphone learning as a new Panopticon

Users nowadays download all kinds of applications on their smartphone that increase their own surveillance. For example, their pictures allow precise location through a GPS device, and face recognition programs send information to the program designer on who is behind every face at which time in which location. In addition, the satellite localization of each smartphone allows new statistics, for example the precise number and names of people participating in a political demonstration. Therefore, it is not much of a metaphoric extension to express that the smartphone is an electronic *Panopticon* (see Figure 3).
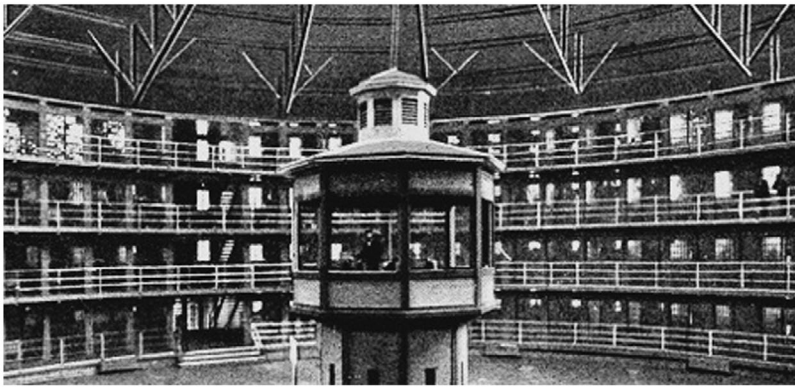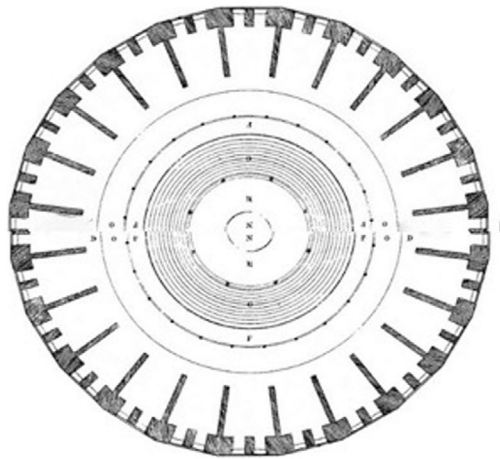
Figure 3. Panopticon plan.

Panoptes in Greek mythology was a giant with 100 eyes, similar to Indra in Indian mythology, who had 1000 eyes, thousand arms, etc. In the eighteenth century, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham created the plans of the *Panopticon*, an institutional building allowing a single watchperson to observe (*opticon*) all (*pan-*) inmates of a jail in which nobody could tell whether or not they are under scrutiny. Although omnipresent surveillance is rather unrealistic, the impossibility to verify who is watching and when creates a situation in which everybody must behave in conformity with the imposed rule.

The idea was that a circumference could be submitted to the observations of a core center. Making sure everybody knew they are being watched, they then ought to behave properly. The Panopticon was "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example." (Bentham, 1955). Here is Letter V or Bentham in this respect:

> the most important point (is) that the persons to be inspected should always feel themselves as if under inspection, at least as standing a great chance of being so … What is also of importance is, that for the greatest proportion of time possible, each man should actually *be* under inspection … the discipline actually has the effect which it is designed to have: … the business of inspection, like every other, will be performed to a greater degree of perfection, the less trouble the performance of it requires. Not only so, but the greater chance there is, of a given person's being at a given time actually under inspection, the more strong will be the persuasion – the more *intense*, if I may say so, the *feeling*, he has of his being so.

Figure 4. We tell you: You are being watched.

What appears surprising is that instructional designers have no shame using the electronic Panopticon as a deliberate instrument in the closure of the mind into their own programming. The student I was discussing to had repeated automated messages along the day that he was under constant evaluation, he was being watched. His daily results for every six branches of learning he was taking were emailed to him and his two parents, with warnings and threats written in *RED CAPITAL LETTERS*, mentioning the consequences for him of potentially not keeping up with his assignments. He was induced into a rat race – another circular metaphor – from which he admitted he had the sentiment he could never ever escape. So much so that the system did not allow him to have free days. He was in charge of his free days, but each free day he would really take would add a list of six missed classes, which would increase his anxiety level to the point that from September 1 to December 20 he allowed himself only to take two days off, while traveling for Thanksgiving and on his birthday. The situation was such that it generated a light form of paranoid state, of being perpetually watched over. Each period he would complete an assignment in one discipline he would receive a message in red capital letters emphasizing what was still missing in his cursus, for him to feel some possible relief. His experience was to keeping afloat. This reminds me of my own situation, constantly trying to keep afloat with so many duties, papers to write, deadlines for chapters and research reports, recommendations, administrative paperwork, and impossible tasks, and repeated reminders being sent by all parties involved, expressing how deep I was in a hell of burning duties, in the rat race to reach eventually nothing but a temporary equilibrium before the wheel would turn again at high speed, with memos indicating I was late with paying for department Happy Fund, with Faculty CV update, with University administration reports, with addressing prior reports, planning future reports, verifying the reports of others, and meta reporting on all these reports … all that would be gathered on my smartphone if I did own one. I tried the electronic Panopticon for a while, and one day decided this was not for me (Figure 4).

Conclusion

What we learned from these critical observations emerging from experiential conversations shared along the story line of an adolescent pursuing his sophomore high school year in a

so-called twenty-first century school is a bit alarming. Mobile content programming may create a situation in which malleable minds are molded in a threatening environment which contributes to modify their habits through operant and respondent conditioning, behavior modification, behavior analytics, enslaving their way of life, as their identity is constantly under challenge, with evidence being provided to people in charge that they didn't learn as fast as they could have, with emails being sent almost every hour to instructors and parents.

The issue of whether the instructional designers and the instructors of each separate course were aware or not of the concatenated impact their set of measures would have on the mind of the young is irrelevant. They created a new reality for the adolescent, that is based on constant pressure, omnipresent surveillance, electronic harassment, threat and internalization of fear, privation of free time, deprivation of sleep, a systematic attack against the genuine motivation to simply live and be happy, and a form of invasion of the private sphere in which there is no place to hide and to escape, creating insomnia, to the point that one day the adolescent disappeared for a night, but came back early in the morning, having had no sleep, making sure he would start very early to being able to cope with the assignments of the day.

A new form of slavery has been invented for humankind, in the form of online learning and the constant use of smartphone. You only have to watch any young people doing any form of activity to notice the new appendix that keeps them umbilically connected to some form of psychological compensation for their overwhelming feeling of loneliness. A few professionals largely benefit from such psychological dependency, as they become the dispensers of the manna or godsend of priceless knowledge: computer engineers, instructional designers, … and us, educational researchers. A whole industry was created to generate and perpetuate this addiction at any cost. Mobile learning along with distance programming through devices such as smartphone constitutes the perfect electronic integration of the Panopticon in modern times.

Nonetheless some people feel really good about it and have been totally acculturated to the new way of thinking. If like them one accepts to enter the logic of a omnipresent surveillance society as an ideal of what humans should become, then one may inquire into the appropriateness of the mobile technologies being used, and evaluate the devices, instruments, and content in the terms proposed by Blumberg Corwin, Frome, and Groark (2014, p. 5):

(1) Is the tool friendly? Robust mobile experience is critical to serve those who may need assistance. Is the environment that has been created friendly as well?

(2) Does the mobile device cost money? Students tend to reject using their smartphone when it will need to pay communication costs.

(3) Does the instrument apply to the students' concerns? Students like personalized tools and their concerns may differ. Can they choose their pacing?

(4) What are users' experiences? Substance is not all. Students tend to compare environments, and sometimes compare them with gaming experiences. Platforms providing high-quality experience may attract engaged learners and their loyalty will drive actual results. Do the instructors really care for their students?

(5) What about the quality of content and the intentionality behind the content proposed? Website information must be up-to-date and accurate: any market-driven information may lose its audience and be highly questionable in education practice.

While I am writing these lines, I hear in the background that the adolescent who was the focus of this discussion cannot take time to do sport this evening, because he was so unfocused today that he could not do more than two classes while he had seven classes to do (six for the day and one left from the previous day). He did not understand the contents and feels he never had the chance to strengthen his basics because he had to rush from assignment to assignment, with no opportunity to develop a bird sight view of his knowledge. He may need to compensate for his lack of concentration today in spending large part of the night on his courses, while listening to music on his smartphone, with headphones not to awaken his parents, to be able to cope with the stress he is enduring, day after day, and the loneliness.

At a time MOOCS are trendy, instructional designers should inquire into ways to be faithful to the origins of these repositories of knowledge, which were constructive, adaptable, and creative resources, to do self-determined projects rather than being imposed top-down expertise. Face-to-face teaming in the project-based use of online resources may provide new solutions for distance language learning that may reduce systemic coercion and increase human contact.

Acknowledgments

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