

BUONE PRASSI – BEST PRACTICES

DEEP DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL DOCU- MENTS AND STUDENT VOICES

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Il contributo propone un’analisi critica delle indicazioni e dei documenti europei e internazionali sulle competenze digitali e l’educazione alla cittadinanza con particolare riguardo alla cittadinanza digitale.

La nostra prospettiva di indagine è dettata dagli esiti di una ricerca esplorativa “student voice” che ha fatto emergere le rappresentazioni e le riflessioni di studenti universitari di fronte al potere e alla seduzione dei media digitali. Dal confronto con le policies dei documenti abbiamo evidenziato alcune dimensioni che ci sembrano rilanciare i bisogni educativi emersi dai nostri dati. Questa analisi affronta quindi tre percorsi di riflessione critica: a) la prospettiva pedagogica sui media, dall’approccio della protezione allo sviluppo di partecipazione, riflessione e responsabilità; b) la dimensione digitale globale, dalla teoria della discontinuità comunicativa (online-offline) all’approccio olistico (“onlife”); c) la competenza globale profonda, dalla comunicazione mediale all’interazione globale fra cittadini consapevoli, responsabili e riflessivi di fronte alle sfide della rivoluzione mediatica.

This proposal presents a critical analysis of European and international indications and documents on digital competences

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and citizenship education with particular regard to digital citizenship. Our perspective is dictated by the results of an exploratory “student voice” research that has identified the representations and reflections of university students in the face of the power and seduction of digital media. From the comparison with the documents, we have highlighted some dimensions that appear, to us, to relaunch the educational needs that emerged from our data. This analysis therefore addresses three paths of critical reflection: a) the pedagogical perspective on the media, from the protection approach to the development of participation, reflection and responsibility; b) the global digital dimension, from the theory of communication discontinuity (online-offline) to the holistic approach (“onlife”); c) deep global competence, from media communication to global interaction between conscious, responsible and reflective citizens to the challenges of the media revolution.

1. The students’ voices: digital representations and challenges

The results of an exploratory “student voice” study conducted among the students of the Bachelor’s in Communication Sciences and Culture at the Faculty of Education of the University of Bolzano revealed interesting representations and passionate reflections on the power and seduction of digital media.

For some years now, an increasing number of studies has emphasized the importance of the students’ point of view on learning and co-designing new teaching perspectives, in the direction of a real student participation (Cook-Sather, 2002; 2013; Fielding, 2011). For this reason, we thought it would be interesting to analyse the perspectives and points of view the students in our study expressed in reflective logbooks about digital media. The main themes that we have identified are digital solitude, concern for health and well-being, uncertainty about the redefinition of privacy and the perceived fragility and fluidity of digital identity.

1.1. Digital solitude

The data collected from the logbooks emphasized the search for an “anchor” to be used as an axis of orientation when confronted with the multiplicity and complexity of digital content. The knowledge and information related to digital media appear to be so diversified, fluid and constantly redefined that they appear contradictory and, therefore, require a process of continuous research and updating from the readers. Gatekeeper roles (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), which in the age of books and printed information could easily be delegated to institutions or experts, must now be performed autonomously and defined according to individual judgement, in line with the process of disintermediation (CENSIS, 2015). Students described themselves as constantly urged to take actions that assume responsibility, individual empowerment and personal initiative, and often feel lost in the search for skills that neither their family nor their school have provided for them to exercise and develop.

1.2. Psycho-physical discomfort

The phenomenon of real-time communication, namely the tendency to consider communication through digital media as communication that takes place in a real social space, is framed critically by many students. The imperative to control all communication and relationship channels at the same time in order to catch every update instantly and to be able to react just as directly generates an overload of stimuli and a constant state of alert. Attention is exposed to a very dense flow of information, incomparably faster than it would be possible without the digital dimension. Consequently, students said they often feel under the pressure to be permanently available, and have difficulty finding the tools and strategies for a detachment and a reflective pause. Instantaneous communication does not correspond to a real communicative exchange and, quoting Lovink (2011), many regret the lack of time for reflection, autonomy of judgement and the right

«to moments of true relaxation and inoperability» (Stud 2 Koku). They feel suspended in a time delineated by an overlapping of actions, they claim time for themselves, for the «joy of missing out» (Stud 13 Koku). The greatest concern is the inability to deal with the media, especially social media, and to manage it: «the new media are not the danger but what we put into action with them, what we do and how and how much we use them» (Stud 5 Koku).

1.3. Redefinition of privacy

If we consider the development from Web 2.0 to social media as a change of daily (media) cultures, then we can refer to a meta-process of social and cultural change (Hjarvard, 2013). Participation is not only a structural element of social media, but also the possibility of a free and democratic network (Carpentier, 2011). The category of participation was certainly perceived by our students as a determinant, but they were not able to clarify its exact definition. It was not always seen as a principle of freedom and autonomy in the web, but also as a threat to the private sphere and as a source of control or, from another point of view, as an illusory and selective possibility, marked by belonging to fragmented groups, divided by dense and rigid filters (Pariser, 2011), that suggest underground economic logic and political interests. The students referred to an uncertainty that creates unease because it is linked to the feeling of having lost control over personal information and the conviction of having to rethink the definition of the private sphere and privacy, if not the danger of no longer being able to grasp the distinction between the private and public sphere, a distinction that concerns not only the individual, but also the social roles and norms.

1.4. Digital identity

A very thought-provoking theme that emerged from the students' reflections is that of identity, linked both to the personal management of one's own profile in social media and to the re-

definition of the self in relation to the network of relationships with other users. In this sense, digital identities are perceived as «fundamentally relational, or comparative, rather than individual identities» (Gandy, 2006, p. 370). These “relational profiles” not only provide certain information about individuals and groups, but also behave in a prescriptive way, especially in social media (Gandy, 2006, p. 367). They also have a strong influence on what is presented to a user as advertising or content in general. Students seem frightened by the disconnection of online identity from real identity, which, however, reflects «the dissonances between identity perceived by others and the image one has of oneself» (Stud 23 Koku).

The students’ reflections on digital identity also seem to underline another trait: the complex and challenging possibilities, between excitement and anxiety, to build one’s virtual self. Excited but at the same time overwhelmed, alone in front of the screen but at the same time connected to a community that shares passions and interests, they are looking for personal confirmation and recognition, but are also eager to participate and collaborate, aware of the implications in terms of responsibility (Rivoltella, 2015) and not only of the need for protection and control. In fact, a student wrote:

I feel in my hand the power to express myself freely, I feel that I can communicate without brakes or spatial boundaries. I feel that every space beyond the computer extends and multiplies. But at the same time, I feel that my multiple digital identities are masks, veils (Stud 24 Koku).

2. Policy indications: recommendations and visions

In order to better frame the issues identified by the students, we have taken into consideration the reflections proposed by some documents dealing with media literacy and digital technologies, which seem to lead, in their development, to an interesting focus of new research horizons.

The DigComp: A Framework for Developing and Understanding Digital Competence in Europe (Ferrari, 2013) published by the European Commission aimed to identify the key components of digital competence, to develop descriptors for validation at European level and to suggest a plan for the use and revision of the framework itself. The document is a kind of meta-framework, identifying five competence areas and 21 competences that promote the involvement and participation of students as digital citizens, because talking about citizenship requires consideration of an expansion of the concept of citizenship in and through the digital dimension. Digital citizenship competences are integrated in a dimension that Luciano Floridi (2015) defined as “onlife” in which

ICTs are not mere tools but rather environmental forces that are increasingly affecting: 1. our self-conception (who we are); 2. our mutual interactions (how we socialise); 3. our conception of reality (our metaphysics); and 4. our interactions with reality (our agency) (p. 2).

The learning environment is fluid and integrated between analogical and digital dimensions and based on the development of citizenship competences for autonomous, responsible and aware citizens.

The security issue, which emerged as an important theme in the analysis of our students’ reflections, occupies a considerable space in this framework. It represents one of the five areas of digital competence and refers not only to questions concerning personal data protection and health, but also to online risks and threats and respect and sustainability for the environment. The security of personal data is linked to the competence to understand the terms of service and how to actively secure data and privacy from fraud or threats and to prevent cyberbullying. This competence is articulated in knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding the collection of personal data by service providers to filter commercial messages, the risks of identity and credential theft and the awareness of one’s digital fingerprint.

To protect against psychophysical health risks, the framework proposes the development of awareness of the effects of prolonged use of technologies and having a balanced attitude.

With regard to the implications related to digital identity, which have so much connoted the reflections of our students, this document dedicates a part of the second area of competence, that of communication. This is understood as sharing resources through online tools, as collaboration and interaction in communities and networks and as transversal cultural awareness. One point of this area is also expressly dedicated to digital identity management through the competence of «create, adapt and manage one or multiple digital identities, to be able to protect one's e-reputation, to deal with the data that one produces through several accounts and applications» (Ferrari, 2013, p. 15).

The following European documents *DigComp 2.0: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens* (Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero Gomez & Van den Brande, 2016); *DigComp 2.1: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use* (Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie, 2017); *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators: DigCompEdu* (Redecker & Punie, 2017); and *DigComp into Action: Get inspired, make it happen. A user guide to the European Digital Competence Framework* (Kluzer & Pujol Priego, 2018) also develop the direction indicated by the *DigComp* (2013). They update the narrative through images and infographics to learn «to swim in the Digital Ocean» (Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie, 2017, p. 14) to make recommendations and policies accessible to communities with an active role in the field of education, the labour market and non-formal and informal learning experiences, to enhance the competences for active citizenship and social cohesion. *DigCom 2.1*, in particular, increases the number of proficiency levels to eight (by leaving the 21 digital competences divided into five areas) and provides many examples of use. *The DigCompEdu* (Redecker & Punie, 2017) provides a reference for educator-specific digital competences at all levels of education, from early childhood to adult education. The document emphasizes the use of digital technologies and media to im-

prove and transform educational pathways. It was followed by *DigComp into Action* (Kluzer & Pujol Priego, 2018), a guide to the implementation of *DigComp* with a collection of practices and case studies.

However, it was in the contribution of the documents *Digital Citizenship Education* (Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani & Tomé, 2017) and *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook* (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019) that we identified a first leap forward in the reflection, because these studies, which aim to examine academic literature and policies on digital citizenship education, look beyond the promotion of digital and media literacy and propose an approach based on concepts such as democratic participation and social engagement. The projects highlight new emerging trends in digital citizenship education towards social, civic and intrapersonal competences, aimed at a participatory and inclusive approach to digital citizenship.

Digital safety, privacy and coding are identified as the most common topics within policies and academic studies, but speaking about competences for digital citizenship requires, according to the authors,

the development of attitudes, skills, knowledge and values that go beyond more access to the virtual environments or knowing how to use digital tools effectively. Being a digital citizen means developing competences in the field of privacy and security but also of communication, health and well-being, ethics and empathy (Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani & Tomé, 2017, p. 48).

In this approach, we found the questions, doubts, fears and also the suggestions reported by our students. In fact, the text *Digital Citizenship Education* highlights how many European and international projects often refer to competences related to safety, but that safety is mainly understood as protection rather than promotion or emancipation. The challenge of digital citizenship education is, instead, to develop descriptors consistent with the *Competences for Democratic Culture* framework (Council of Europe, 2016) and, thus, to incorporate both online and offline approach-

es and dimensions for safety and healthy online participation in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings from childhood and throughout life. Promoting digital citizenship education means working on competences that feed into existing literacies and finding a comprehensive approach «towards hard sciences and life (soft) sciences» (Frau-Meigs, O’Neill, Soriani & Tomé, 2017, p. 47). The focus is on the need to talk about digital citizenship education in close relation to citizenship education and to competence development to strengthen the (digital) participatory dynamics and, thus, to support civic engagement and social change. Another document that seems to intercept some of the elements that emerged from the student’s reflections and also provides key elements of digital citizenship is *Rethinking Pedagogy: Exploring the potential of digital technology in achieving quality education* (UNESCO, 2019). This study presents a very interesting approach and argues that depending on how they are designed and used, digital education media and resources may «promote or undermine opportunities for “learning to learn” and “learning to think”» (UNESCO, 2019, p. 6), essential competences for innovation, transformation, ethical discernment and sense of responsibility. The UNESCO report also recognizes contradictory educational trends underlying the use of digital technology in education; on the one hand, a mechanistic idea of learning and an emphasis on the effectiveness and predictability of results, on the other, a more holistic view of the opportunities provided by digital technologies, a sort of «digital humanism» (Doueihi, 2011, p. 32) linked to more diversified and more open learning. All this refers to divergent learning visions, which the document identifies with the pedagogical concepts proposed by Edward Thorndike and John Dewey, one a supporter of an education science and of objective measurements and the other, instead, a supporter of the transformation of school into life (UNESCO, 2019).

With this report, UNESCO (2019) traces the so-called «social turn» (p. 66) in learning with technology, seen as a process that involves cognitive structures but also participation in cultural practices and identifies digital resources as a turning point to-

wards the community and the spirit of the open-source movement (Kafai & Burke, 2013). The report takes into account many of the risks and dangers of overexposure to digital technologies: online safety and security, misuse of information, health risks, mental and attention disorders, concentration difficulties, data management and traceability of actions, which lead to an unsatisfactory life. The challenge is, according to UNESCO (2019), to develop a reflection leading to a «wise, innovative and ethical use of digital technology in education in an effort to contribute to a rethinking of teaching and learning» (p. 4).

3. From digital competence to deep global citizenship

In the documents we have considered, in particular in the last two – *Digital Citizenship Education* and *Rethinking Pedagogy: Exploring the potential of digital technology in achieving quality education* – the voices and needs that emerged from the reflections of our students resonated. Their fragilities and experiences are, so to speak, listened to and met within a wider perspective that suggests a personal and responsible attitude towards digital challenges, that is open to a global dimension of knowledge and communication culture.

On the one hand, the critical and ethical use of digital spaces, which is the aim of media education, allows both the refinement of ways to inform, communicate and learn but, above all, to interact and relate with others, and the interconnection and interaction of people capable of understanding the reality of the world beyond their context. In this way, the digital is configured as factor of development and aggregator of communities (Rivoltella, 2017). On the other hand, a pedagogy of optimal digital interaction and interconnection, which corresponds to public discourses on education for the world of work and for educational efficiency, does not allow us to grasp what is the fundamental theoretical juncture capable of giving meaning to distinct projects and to the multiple prescriptions of digital education: deepening an ideal of active citizenship in which each individual has the competences

to act responsibly and to identify shared solutions in a global context. In the relationship between media education and citizenship education, rethinking educational approaches to media within a global citizenship dimension constitutes, for us, the basis of a new educational proposal, which allows us to interpret the fragilities expressed by the voices of our students as the need to redefine their profile as digital citizens and to enhance, in documents, the aspects of ethical and political responsibility rather than the dimension of literacies (Biesta, 2013; Hug, 2012).

Creating a global citizenship, including digital citizenship as a necessary condition, means having citizens who are committed to the planet because they are aware both of the global scale of the problems and of the possibility of solving them within the framework of the horizontal, cooperative and participatory connections offered by digital communication networks. We are, therefore, outlining an idea of digital media that goes beyond the technological and didactic dimension to deepen into a reflective perspective and into active participation for the recognition and respect for oneself and others; the acquisition of social and moral responsibility; the development of self-confidence and resilience to uncertainty and change; the strengthening of the spirit of solidarity; the construction of values, respecting the different social perspectives; the development of the ability to listen and to resolve conflicts peacefully; and the skills to create a safe environment and active participation in the community (UNESCO, 2002; 2014; 2015).

Just as the idea of digital media is only deepened if it goes beyond the technological area, so the concept of digital citizenship is extended and illuminated with new meanings only if – going beyond the conceptual models of digital citizenship that are limited to the areas of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019) – it also embraces the development of global competence (UNESCO, 2015). *The OECD PISA global competence framework* (2018) also frames global competence as a multidimensional capacity needed by individuals in socio-communicative interactions with others and in participatory ac-

tions. It stresses that interactions and actions are increasingly linked to the use of digital technologies, online networks, social media and interactive digital solutions. It is fundamental for us that global competence is placed on a local and global level of understanding of different perspectives on the world, of effective and respectful interaction with others and, above all, of responsible and collaborative action for the collective well-being (OECD, 2018; OECD/Asia Society, 2018). The idea of global competence is to provide students with the ability to examine global issues independently, critically and consciously and to understand how to communicate and act with others online and offline in contexts characterized by cultural diversity and multiple ethnic, religious and social background. This recalls exactly what Edgar Morin (1999) called

polycentric thought that can aim at a universalism that is not abstract but conscious of the unity/diversity of the human condition; a polycentric thought nourished by the cultures of the world. Educating for this thought is the finality of education of the future, which in the planetary era should work for an earth identity and conscience (p. 32).

If we adopt the perspective of global competence, this means not so much aiming to protect children and young people from the threats of the technological and non-technological world, as to expose them to the reality of the world, making them capable of facing risks and opportunities, of elaborating complex experiences and of dealing with their vulnerability and resilience. It seems to us that it is precisely the global competence that allows us to frame approaches to digital literacy and competences in a different way – no longer at the service of the simple “safe” use of technologies, but as resources for “risky” participation in democracy and sustainability.

In this perspective, the critical dimensions identified by the students are instead constitutive elements of the authentic experience of global citizenship. The perceptions of loneliness, psychophysical discomfort, privacy instability and crisis of identity are exactly the challenges that the global citizen faces in order to live

and collaborate in digital media. From this point of view, the concept of “risk” and “opportunity” paradoxically coincide. The more we undertake to give substance to our active participation in common life, the more we will meet the anthropological challenges posed by the “onlife” experience. Hence, the next step in changing the perspective refers to the definition of global citizenship. Carlos Alberto Torres said that, «the global citizenship is marked by an understanding of global interconnectedness and a commitment to the collective good» (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14). Therefore, we can posit that digital education is the pedagogical ground on which it makes sense to propose not a specialized and technocentric approach, but a transdisciplinary and holistic approach, as Morin suggested, when he invited the adoption of an epistemology that captures the relationships between territories and is open to complexity and interconnections (Morin, 1977). If they are understood from the perspective of global citizenship, digital media do not only give shape to communicative interactions but to the experience of life itself. For this reason, the multiple indications related to digital competence are not sufficient, but it is necessary to refer to a pedagogy of media humanity (Ceretti & Padula, 2016) or of global humanity. Digital media and technologies are tools for organization, communication and access to documents and, therefore, imply a culture of use that concerns the heart of all disciplines.

However, educational attention must involve much more sophisticated competences, related to the ability to live actively together, with creativity and responsibility.

According to the perspective that has been outlined, the profile of the “deep digital citizen” does not require so much an educational intervention at the level of technological skills, but demands the overcoming of the distinction between digital citizenship education and citizenship education in a unitary idea of deep global competence, where civic responsibility and digital competences are different faces of a single humanity. In fact, the so-called digital revolution, for the perspective in education, opens to an anthropological revolution. It is time to overcome pedagog-

ical research focused on technical and didactic competences, linked to the instrumental use of technologies, to reflect rather on the anthropological and epistemological changes that are «changes in the very objects of teaching and learning» (UNESCO, 2019, p. 9). In this way, it will be possible to understand that students' requests are not effectively answered by promoting "digital competences", but rather "life competences", when this is understood not only as "onlife", but as deep global life, or deep global citizenship.

Beyond those who support the need to be concerned about the content conveyed by technologies and those who are alarmed about safe social care and the need to create regulated spaces, it can be argued that expanding the dimension of global competence to digital media allows us to imagine a synthesis that considers the competences of twenty-first century students as interconnected and aimed to «encourage young people to become more reflective about the ethical choices they make as participants and communicators and about the impact they have on others» (Jenkins, 2009, p. 26).

To conclude, the broadening of perspective allowed by what we call "deep global citizenship" gives us a wider view of the goals of digital media education:

- to free creative and critical citizens, capable of interacting with the world, not to adapt flexibly to its demands, but to transform and renew it (Freire, 1970);
- to build educational projects that do not pursue specific and particular competences, but rather give concrete form to models of deep citizenship;
- to respond to the discomfort of educators and students with a perspective that invites them not to defend themselves, but to act, taking responsibility for the risks and opportunities in the digital environment.

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