

## Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



Education – for participation in a digitalised world

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### Introduction

Education is seen as the most important means to integration in society for young people; knowledge is the key to success, skills are needed to enter the labour market and almost every profession needs certain accreditation of training or experience and life long learning is a must for everyone. But the framework for education has changed tremendously in the last decade because of the development of more and more digital(ised) concepts and offers. More people than ever before have access to various “online” offers of education, Methods of teaching, learning and evaluating changed since the use of digital media in the classroom (and beyond), and an increasing mass of content is stored digital and accessible for “everyone” – who has knowledge on how to find it; and also how to judge the value of this content.

Education in the digitalised world needs new skills for both, educators and learners – among others there is handling new digital instruments, knowing how to deal with personal data and more enhanced forms of media literacy.

This paper deals with the challenges of media pedagogy in the digitalised world, new forms of teaching and learning – in formal, non-formal and informal settings – as well as the need of education for political participation and especially for (political) participation in the digitalised world.

### 1. What is education?

What should young people learn and who can teach it?

Education is seen as the main instrument to prevent and tackle poverty, social exclusion and discrimination especially by reaching out to disadvantaged groups, and thus fostering upwards social convergence. Education plays an important role in promoting inclusion and equality, it should build up mutual respect and builds up the foundation for active citizenship. Furthermore education is regarded the main means to successfully enter the labour market in a highly competitive economy. These high expectations on the value of educations are expressed in the Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020). But the question remains what education to these ends is?

The various education systems in Europe face several challenges, like a high rate of early school leavers without finishing secondary education, but also quite a high percentage of pupils score poorly

in reading, science and mathematics as international tests show. This is evidence for a mismatch of expectations and requirements of the education system and its outcomes.

Furthermore, we are currently facing rather a skill based approach to education than a knowledge based concept, focusing, eventually, more on the usability of knowledge.

In the EU guidelines for the employment policies Member States are asked to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the education systems to raise the skill level of the workforce, allowing it to better anticipate and meet the rapidly changing needs of dynamic labour markets in an increasingly digital economy. And consequently the recently published draft joint report ET2020 highlights six new priority areas reflecting the expectations on quality education. :

1. Relevant and high-quality skills and competences, focusing on learning outcomes, for employability, innovation and active citizenship:
2. Inclusive education, equality, non-discrimination and promotion of civic competences:
3. Open and innovative education and training, including by fully embracing the digital era:
4. Strong support for educators
5. Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility
6. Sustainable investment, performance and efficiency of education and training systems

Especially the third area focuses on the importance of ICT mentioning the promotion the use of ICT as a driver for systemic change to increase quality and relevance of education at all levels and fostering the availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels. But also in other areas the importance of ICT is highlighted as in the concrete issues digital literacy as well as the opportunities of the usage of digital technologies is mentioned: In the first area the reduction of low achievement in mathematics, literacy science and digital literacy is a main issue as well as developing and strengthening of transversal skills and competences in particular digital entrepreneur and linguistic competences. Enhancing of critical thinking and cyber and media literacy is an issue in area 2, training of digital competences of educators is crucial in area 4. All in all the importance of digital literacy in contemporary debate on education is beyond dispute.

## 2. Challenges of pedagogy in a digitalised world

The EU Youth Report 2012 highlighted the still ongoing increase of daily computer and internet use among young people (EU Youth Report 2012, pp260). It also points to the fact that young people's confidence in their computer skills grows with their educational level. Furthermore, the report shows that "learning by doing" is seen as the main way of acquiring ICT skills formal education and social contacts (friends and relatives) follow after.

The developments in technology ask for more skills beyond the basic cultural skills of reading, writing and calculating; digital skills and media literacy are main elements of current curricular in formal and non-formal education.

The definitions of digital literacy reach "from simply being technology fluent to the ability to apply information literacy skills (e.g., locating, extracting organizing, managing, presenting and evaluating information) in digital environments to broader, more complex conceptual frameworks that

encompass a wide variety of skills, understandings, norms and practices (Meyers et. al. 2013). Current definitions of digital literacy combine important elements like ability to find and evaluate information in digital resources, but also to create and share information online in user-generated platforms. It emphasises critical thinking to judge and interpret underlying ideologies and also to understand the needs of addressed audiences. Another perspective interprets digital literacy as the general capability for living, learning and working in the digital society. Meyers et. al. ask for a holistic perspective that combines skills, mental models and practices and point out that this concept of digital literacy should also involve a reflexive understanding of oneself in relation to technologies and networked structures (Meyers et. al. 2013).

A digital literate person is not only a critical consumer of information but also a technically skilled creator of information and an ones responsibility reflecting active participant in the digitalised world.

Jenkins (2006) identified a number of new skills beyond the traditional competences of reading, writing and calculating that have to be mastered in order to be a full member of a participatory culture. A participatory culture is described as a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, and in which its participants believe their contributions matter – and this description holds in a high degree for the modern Web 2.0.

The skills that Jenkins recognised include play (experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving); performance (adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery); simulation (interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes); appropriation (meaningfully sample and remix media content); multitasking (scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details); distributed cognition interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities); collective intelligence (pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal); judgment (evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources); transmedia navigation (follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities); networking (search for, synthesize, and disseminate information); negotiation (travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms).

Jenkins also points out the need of political and pedagogical intervention beside the ongoing self-socialisation of youth in popular culture by highlighting three main reasons and hence affirms the role of education to promote equality and mutual respect also as a foundation of active citizenship:

- 1) The Participation Gap — the unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in the world of tomorrow.
- 2) The Transparency Problem — the challenges young people face in learning to see clearly the ways that media shape perceptions of the world.

And 3) the Ethics Challenge — the breakdown of traditional forms of professional training and socialisation that might prepare young people for their increasingly public roles as media makers and community participants. (Jenkins 2006, 3)

### 3. Integrating digital technology in teaching and learning

Digital resources and media are not only topics of education they becomes more and more important as instruments of teaching. Elements of e-learning find access to formal education in schools as well as in tertiary education: flipped classroom, self-study using digital media, blended learning or game-

based learning are used by many teachers as means to activate their pupils and students by using more “modern” techniques.

Various trend researches like the NMC Horizon report focus on the possible and expected future developments from usage of new technologies in teaching and information. In the 2015 reports the new Media Consortium (a consortium driven by IT companies like Apple, Adobe or Oracle together with academic partner institutions) various new developments are predicted to be very influential in the next years for education worldwide. For example MakerSpace-Labs will become important not only in self-organised and non-formal settings but is seen to be integrated in formal education for promoting and fostering creativity and problem-solving skills. BYOD (bring your own device) refers to the trend that people are bringing their own devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones) to the work- and study environments and use these for work. This trend asks for the opportunity to connect to the school's, university's or company's network and get access not only to the internet but to the internal servers, this asks for new IT security solutions. (NMC 2015)

In the informal setting remote learning offers are of high importance since they allow access to information beyond the formal education setting. Here, for example, blended learning (the mixture between instructor's lead and self-study sessions) is seen to become more important than pure online learning since it enables more exchange with the teachers and helps to foster equality better. MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) run by universities or by (commercial) training centres enable people to attend courses and even gain certificates in other countries. MOOCs were also seen as an instrument for promoting equal changes and inclusion by reaching out to disadvantaged people since most of these courses are free to attend (only certificates are fee-based) but it seems that this offer cannot overcome educational differences since people with lower education are less likely to stay in these courses.

MOOCs run by big universities are also seen as a threat to the tertiary education system in smaller countries, where these courses might even replace existing offers from smaller universities.

The development towards a stronger integration of digital technology in teaching and learning is an indicator for the dissemination of digital technology in everyday life around the world. This can also be observed in the non-formal sector as well as in youth work and in youth services. Already for a long time youth centres had to be equipped with computers to access the internet, currently they should rather provide W-Lan access points so the kids can connect their own devices (BYOD) or should think of remote offers (live-streaming of parties, or even online youth centres). And youth information centres need to have online services as well.

#### 4. Does participation need education, information, knowledge or competences – or all?

Beside the integration of digital media into the education system as issues or as instruments for teaching and learning the questions of relation of education and (political) participation occurs. Many scholars postulated certain competences as a prerequisite for political participation; these are the competence of political analysis and judgement, the competence of methods, and the competence of political decision making and acting. For acquiring these competences for example in political education (in or out of school) basic political knowledge is a precondition.

Thus, active participation in the democratic system be it in as voter or otherwise active citizen has knowledge and competences as preconditions. For a rational decision making access to information is essential as well as the ability of judging the relevance, accuracy and objectivity versus ideological

bias of any information. Citizen participation should be – ideally – based on a comprehensible aggregation of all available opinions and their reflective and rational combination to a valid opinion.

Currently a debate on the opportunities for active political (online) participation fostered by digital media – especially the Web 2.0 – concentrates on two aspects: on the one hand the opportunities for the users to create information and get involved in opinion making processes in online social media and on the restricted access to various information on the other hand. In the first topic the debate focuses on the prerequisites (factual knowledge, performance skills, language skills, creativity and other foundations for getting involved in the participatory culture – and therefore digital literacy) and the limits (e.g. clicktivism) of such participation. The second stream of discussion highlights the problems and limits of selection of information out of a seemingly infinite pool. Here are two different approaches of reduction of complexity problematized. The first can be seen in the personalisation of information by the users themselves when using RSS feeds, twitter or special selection of news which reduces the sources of information and eventually can lead to separated publicities with totally different information. The second approach to a restriction is the filter systems of the information providers like google or facebook. In the case of facebook an algorithm based on various criteria like affinity, or time decay decides on the selection of information and status messages in the personal stream and thus invites to react more on messages and information that “seem” to be more interesting to the user than other and thus reinforcing the affinity. Also google will provide different search results depending on previous search history, or the place and time of the search. Both cases of information restriction – individual decisions or automated algorithms – might lead to the loss of relevant “alternative” information that should be included in the decision making process of active participation.

Dörre and Bukow (2014) argue that these forms of information reduction is not a new phenomenon that exists exclusively in digital media; the reinforcement of personal opinion can be found in any personal social network (offline as well as online) and the filter and algorithms are not abolishing any information. But in the end, discussing and problematizing these shortcomings of information selection with digital media should be one element of digital literacy education and of media pedagogy.

But more and more political educators use digital media especially online networks like facebook or twitter but also online gaming or programming of apps as methods for knowledge transfer, fostering responsible behaviour or promoting equality. Even hacking a webpage can be a successful tool for political education

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