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Davide Parmigiani

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Digital Competence and Critical Thinking in the Citizenship Education. National Investigation and Didactic Perspectives

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1. Research topic

The development of ICT has led to an increase in new social media also in civic participation (Schulz et al., 2016, 2017; Fraillon et al., 2019). Although evidences have shown effects on the civic engagement of young people (Anduiza, Jensen & Jorba, 2012; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013), the use of social media and digital resources is still marginal in the 'every day' school context. The results of a national research on citizenship education are described (Perla, Agrati & Vinci, 2020) - the few digital components in the design of civic education teachers - and the proposals for a digital citizenship education curriculum are shared.

2. Theoretical framework

New social media play a crucial role in supporting young people's civic engagement (Kahne, Middaugh & Allen, 2014). Technologies, digital and social media define, in fact, the informal space within which to share a new culture characterized by a horizontal socialization, capable of generating informal learning communities, in which to mediate knowledge, relationships and representations of history (Bonaiuti et al., 2017; Rivoltella & Ardizzone, 2007; Rivoltella, 2015). These informal learning communities are defined by Gee as "spaces of affinity" within which people learn and actively participate, according to their skills and interests (Jenkins, 2006). These are spaces that differ from formal educational contexts as they present provisional, innovative structures capable of responding to short-term needs and temporary interests (Jenkins, 2006). It is the way we inhabit this space of the network which, as Alessandra Carenzio (2012) argues, defines the way in which we are citizens both on and off the screen. According to Meyrowitz (1995), the revolutionary significance of the media lies in the fact that the medium and the representations of reality it conveys transform the social environment and that such changes can affect the behavior of individuals. For a "full and active participation in public life and in the community and in economic life" (New London Group, 1996, p. 9) it is necessary to provide for media education interventions to develop young people the digital citizenship skills necessary to become critical consumers, responsible digital content producers and aware surfers, as stated in the document on digital civic education, skills that allow us to face the challenges of the 21st century. Bertram and Bruce said that "Teens need to learn to integrate knowledge from multiple sources, including music, videos, online databases, and other media. They need to think critically about information that can be found almost instantly around the world. They need to participate. to the types of collaboration that the new communication and information technologies allow, and which require more and more" (Jenkins, 2006: 19). The school, therefore, as a place for the transmission of knowledge and for the expression of citizenship, for personal, social and cultural development and growth, must act as a mediator

in the use and interpretation of the culture that young people produce through digital media (Rivoltella, 2015). The teacher is called to develop a critical awareness of the implications of the use of technologies in the new generations and it is no coincidence that digital competence implies critical thinking and ethical-social skills (Ala-Mutka, 2011; Janssen & Stoyanov, 2012; Calvani, 2013). The promotion of global citizenship passes from actions aimed at promoting key competences related to: critical thinking, active citizenship, holistic approach and complexity, collaborative practices, transformative learning and awareness and responsibility (ECG, 2018). Computer and Information Literacy refers to the individual ability to use technologies in order to investigate, create contents, communicate and participate in the community (Fraillon et al., 2019). Critical thinking and responsibility are the essential objectives to enable students to "identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources, build new knowledge, create media expressions and communicate with others in the context of life situations specific in order to allow constructive social actions and reflect on the process" (Menichetti, 2017, p. 142). Policies and research offer conceptual models - Web Literacy (Mozilla Foundation, 2013), MediaSmarts (Hoechsmann & Dewaard, 2015), DigComp (Ferrari, 2012) - useful for reflecting on the possibility of developing content based on responsibility, security, freedom of expression criteria (Perla, Agrati & Vinci, 2018). As the DigCompEdu document (2017, p. 12) highlights, children and young people are born and grow up in a world characterized by a technological ubiquity that does not necessarily involve the possession of the skills necessary for the correct use of tools. The objective of national and European policies is to develop digital skills in order to make citizens active, critical and responsible users and producers in the use of technologies (Jenkins, 2006; Recommendation 2018 / C 189/01).

3. Methodological design

We present some outcomes of the national research project "At citizenship school. Vertical curriculum design and evaluation of citizenship skills" (Perla, Agrati & Vinci, 2020), carried out by the University of Bari (Italy), in cooperation with the CREMIT research group (University of Milan), UCIIM teachers' professional association and a national network of schools (N=10; target: 72 teachers, 10 Headmasters). The project falls within the framework of professional teaching through the 'analysis of practice' devices and the collaborative research (Vinatier & Altet, 2008; Perla, 2014; 2019; Maubant & Martineau, 2011). This Project aimed at design and realize a vertical curriculum of citizenship education and, alongside, to train teachers for its development also by constructing of scoring rubrics of citizenship competences. The analysis of textual resources and didactic documentation produced by teachers involved in the study has been made through the QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis) procedure, alongside the exploratory use of the NVivo software. A questionnaire is also being administered to teachers, principals, parents and students on the critical use of social media.

4. Expected conclusions/findings

The analysis of the didactic documentation produced by the schools involved in the study shows:

- the lack of themes that are now considered central within the citizenship education policy: 'digital citizenship', soft skills, 'participation', the responsible use of ICT, 'protection' of cultural heritage', the 'correct lifestyles', affective education, the evaluation of civic competences;
- the main difficulties of teachers in designing a vertical citizenship curriculum (tendency towards solitary planning, poor approach to interdisciplinarity ecc.) as useful indicators to direct the training intervention.

Digital citizenship is defined in Article 5 of Law no. 92 of 20 August 2019 as "the ability of an individual to participate in the social, political and economic life of the country using technological tools". The promotion of an active and responsible citizen, of a global citizen, inevitably also passes through digital citizenship for which it is necessary to start digital civic education paths. The task of educators is to prepare students for the future by promoting digital literacy processes. To set up a media literacy path that starts

from kindergarten and that is transversal to all disciplines; who is able to create a space in which to be able to produce meaning, elaborate meanings, collaborate and participate in order to appropriate digital in a correct way, it is necessary to start from the system of skills that students must develop so that they can relate to and face the complexities of today's information society and be able to “make conscious and responsible use of virtual media” as can be seen from the guidelines of civic education. Furthermore, in order to overcome the difficulties of teachers, it is necessary to rethink the design and construction of the digital citizenship curriculum starting from conditions of collegiality. The curricula of civic and digital education, in fact, are characterized by a disciplinary transversality that requires the integration and contribution of different professional skills (Perla, Agrati, & Vinci 2020).

5. Relevance to international educational research

Promoting critical thinking, ethical-social skills and awareness of the implications of their use of technology through digital citizenship education represents one of the main objectives of the current European Policy Cooperation. Research findings may be used to feed the debate on citizenship education policy and teachers' training, particularly on how to integrate digital citizenship education within the interdisciplinary curriculum.

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This book collects some of the works presented at ATEE Florence Spring Conference 2020-2021. The Conference, originally planned for May 2020, was forcefully postponed due to the dramatic insurgence of the pandemic. Despite the difficulties in this period, the Organising Committee decided anyway to keep it, although online and more than one year later, not to disperse the huge work of authors, mainly teachers, who had to face one of the hardest challenges in the last decades, in a historic period where the promotion of social justice and equal opportunities – through digital technologies and beyond – is a key factor for democratic citizenship in our societies. The Organising Committee, the University of Florence, and ATEE wish to warmly thank all the authors for their commitment and understanding, which ensured the success of the Conference. We hope this book could be, not only a witness of these pandemic times, but a hopeful sign for an equal and inclusive education in all countries.

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