

# *Digital Citizenship in Education*

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**Abstract:** *The article presents the concept of digital citizenship, as well as an examination of the need and the steps to integrate it into the governmental policies and curricula of the educational institutions at European level. Since the 21st century continues to introduce a high level of technological improvements throughout the culture we live in, this leads to an awareness of the need to address the integration of these technological developments from a legal point of view and to define how they can be assimilated and used in the current education system. The term Digital Citizenship is a concept that helps teachers, and beyond, understand how students / students / technology users in general should use technology appropriately. The digital citizenship implemented in the educational system is thus more than a didactic tool; is a way to prepare students for a technology-rich society.*

**Keywords:** *digital citizenship, digital competency, educational system, technology*

## **Introduction**

Our world is changing, we must recognize in a vertiginous way and schools need to adapt to the new realities of knowledge, society and education. Technology has fundamentally changed the idea of the community and the ways we interact with each other so that building

individual learning and support networks is more important than ever. The Internet has also lowered many barriers to space and time, allowing us to rethink the way we work and connect. (Janna Quitney Anderson et al., 2010). We are no longer linked only to those in our immediate physical presence, but we are now operating in a more fluid and complex network of people around the world thanks to social networks and mobile technologies. This means today's schools and their curricula need updating to prepare students to succeed in this new type of citizenship, namely digital.

### **What is Digital Citizenship?**

In order to understand the concept of digital citizenship, it is useful to start with the idea of citizenship, meaning "the status of being a citizen of a particular social, political or national community that bears both rights and responsibilities" (Alberta Education, 2012). Thus, citizenship in its traditional sense is linked to a limited space and / or a group of individuals and involves both the benefits of rights and responsibilities.

Given the changing situation of communities, knowledge and education, citizenship is no longer limited by physical location, so the definition of citizenship needs to be expanded to reflect who we are as members of online global communities where we now find ourselves. Digital citizenship asks us to consider how we act as members of a social network that includes both our close neighbours, acquaintances and individuals on the other side of the planet, and requires awareness of how technology mediates our participation in this network . It can be defined as "the rules of adequate and responsible online behaviour" (Mike Ribble, 2014) or "the quality of habits, actions and consumption patterns that affect the ecology of digital content and communities" (Terry Heick, 2013).

Digital citizenship encompasses and extends the more traditional definition of citizenship. If citizenship requires participation

in a given community, we need to consider how participation in the digital world is. In addition to the traditional aspects of citizenship, the digital one also raises some other key issues: these include balance, which develops an understanding of the effects of technology and balances the potential benefits and risks; security and security with regard to online spaces, including issues such as inappropriate content and cyberbullying, as well as ethical issues such as copyright and plagiarism (Jason Ohler, 2012).

### **Technology: Good or bad?**

The Internet offers cheaper, more free access to an enormous amount of information and educational content. Ken Robinson says, "Our children live in the most intense period of stimulation in the history of mankind." (Ken Robinson, 2010). If we accept that most people embrace technology without fully examining the consequences of using it in an inappropriate way, then it is a good time to talk about its implementation and use in a constructive and educational way.

Students are generally competent to use the basic technology but are not necessarily critical users and many of them do not have the skills to be safe and responsible on the Internet. Students start using the Internet at an early age and use it regularly.

If we want students to be lifelong learners, they should see learning as something that can happen at any given time but keeping technology outside the classroom sends the message that school is separate from "real life."

Indeed, in general, the current educational system has been conceived and structured for another age. Education is no longer about centralized training but rather is the process of establishing itself as a knot in a vast network of distributed creativity "(Joichi Ito, 2011). This means that the idea of schooling must probably be rethought that students are endowed with the ability to safely and intelligently explore this abundance of information and to navigate online in a way

that contributes to their learning. Teaching the use of technology in the classroom and the opening of school walls offers a way to reduce the gap between the traditional school system and those that give pupils the necessary skills for the present and the future. However, these kinds of changes cannot happen overnight. Institutions and teachers need to think about the potential challenges of bringing and teaching technology in class, to ensure that pupils attend positive, responsible, safe and secure online spaces. This means that digital citizenship must be planned and adopted both in legislation and policy at the level of institutions or school division.

Teaching and learning opportunities for digital citizenship occur formally, informally and non-formal contexts. However, given the crucial role of formal education in terms of empowering citizens, the challenge for policy-makers is to develop an approach to an adequate educational framework that sets out a comprehensive Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) approach and its structured integration into school curricula for its effective implementation (Jones 2010).

### **Digital citizenship frameworks EU overview**

Digital (digital) skills are a path to employment and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for high-quality jobs where they can fulfil their potential as confident and active citizens. In a rapidly changing global economy, skills will largely determine competitiveness and the ability to drive innovation. They are an attraction factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of creating and growing jobs. These are the key to social cohesion. The situation in Europe requires action.

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) indicates that almost half (45%) of Europeans (European Commission, 2016) still do not have basic digital skills. This is measured in the index as an ability to use an email, use software, or install and use new devices. As a result of these studies and observations, in several European countries

and beyond, schools have begun to introduce "Digital Citizenship Education" to encourage young people to develop their skills, engagement and creativity online, as well as awareness of legal implications of their online activity.

In 2006, following the integration of digital competence as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning, the European Commission created a "DigComp" framework through the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies. Its conceptual model has been updated in response to digitization challenges (Carretero et al., 2017).

DigComp 2.1: "Digital Competence, Framework for Citizens" aims to be descriptive and non-prescriptive and can be used in education, training and employment at different levels, namely: policy formulation and support; training planning; as well as evaluation and certification. Five areas of competence are included: information and literacy; communication and collaboration; digital content creation, security and problem solving.

Later, In 2015, UNESCO created a framework for global citizenship education based on three learning areas with key learning outcomes. These consist of: cognitive results (knowledge and understanding, critical thinking); socio-emotional consequences (feeling of belonging, values, empathy, solidarity, respect) and behavioural results (responsibility, motivation, availability). The Framework also sets out the main attributes and subjects of the learners in the field, as well as the learning objectives by age / level of education (5-9 years, 9-12 years, 12-15 and 15-18 years) (UNESCO, 2015) . The framework was developed to be used by educators, curriculum developers, trainers, policy makers and other educational entities working in non-formal and professional institutions.

### **Examples of implementation in Europe**

The Finnish Ministry of Education initiated the project "As a Global Citizen in Finland" (2010-11). The aim of the project was "to bring

together a vision of the key premises, challenges and opportunities in terms of education for global citizenship in a globalized world" (Jääskeläinen and Repo, 2011), also preparing the Core Curriculum 2014 , which was approved in 2016 and introduced in all classes at the beginning of the autumn term.

In the UK, the Childnet International civil society organization seeks to ensure that all children and young people "are equipped with knowledge, skills and abilities to navigate the online environment safely and responsibly" and help model and influence "policies and programs that prioritize children's rights so that their interests are promoted and protected "(Childnet International 1995) through lobbying decision makers, regulators and the internet industry.

Its educational framework provides a set of resources for primary school pupils (eg, tips, videos, questionnaires and games) and gymnasium students (tips, videos and information about hot topics such as cyberbullying, digital citizenship: analyzing definitions, cadres and actors, sexting, social networks, applications and security) as well as for teachers and professionals (for example, the Childnet Digital Leaders program) and for parents and carers (for example, tips on how to handle children and a helpline ).

In 2015, the French Ministry of Education made a major effort to reshape the education system with the publication of Le Parcours Citoyen, a set of five initiatives to be developed from pre-school and secondary to to encourage young people to become active citizens. In the same year, the Minister of Education published a new one

(Décret 2015-372 2015) at the compulsory schooling period (between 6 and 16 years). Its main objective is to give pupils a "common culture" and the tools needed to thrive succeed academically and integrate into society as participating citizens.

## **Conclusions**

Digital literacy and digital citizenship are important discussions for educational institutions, and should be at the forefront of educational planning, policy development and curriculum development.

Although there is no single definition of digital citizenship, there is a tendency for a consensus on the idea that in an educational context digital citizenship is a dimension that involves the values, abilities, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding citizens have need in the digital age. There is also a consensus that the education of digital citizenship is necessary in formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts, with the involvement of children and young people, families, teachers and professionals as well as other community members to support digital citizenship. At present, the focus is primarily in the formal educational context.

In a globalized, multilingual and multicultural world, the implementation and education of digital citizenship must be supported by research to be inclusive and evidence based. For this reason, most international cadres (e.g. "learning areas" of UNESCO and DIGCOMP of the European Union) are rather descriptive than prescriptive. Firstly, digital citizenship deals with values, and values differ from one place to another. Secondly, digital citizenship is for all, regardless of skills, attitudes or knowledge, and initiatives to support its implementation need to be developed in this context.

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