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## Book reviews

Frau-Meigs, Divina, O'Neill, Brian, Soriani, Allesandro, Tomé, Vitor, *Digital citizenship education: Volume 1 – Overview and new perspectives*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017.

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The influx of digital technologies in our daily life over the last decades have had a significant impact on the way we gather and transmit information, participate socially and politically, and engage with different issues globally. That is to say, digital technologies have had a transformative impact on traditional forms of information, participation and engagement. The development of competences and skills in the new forms of participation, however, shall not be haphazardly and spontaneously, left only on the possibilities that the technology brings to us. Today's youth and the upcoming generations must be aware of their norms, rights and obligations as citizens in a society which has become increasingly digital. As Villano Qiriazzi (2017), head of the Education Policy Division at the Council of Europe, points out, an important objective of the European Union's agenda is the support of youth being active digital citizens in a safe online environment. Obviously, this objective shows the need for the authorities to adopt a comprehensive approach towards digital citizenship education. This, in turn, means to integrate digital citizenship into school curricula. The action the Council of Europe took in regard to the digital life of children in the last 10 years, however, was focused mainly towards their safety and protection in the digital environment instead of their empowerment through education or acquisition of the required competences to become active participants in the digital society.

The book “Digital citizenship education: Overview and new perspectives”, written by Divina Frau-Meigs, Brian O’Neill, Allesandro Sorriani and Vitor Tomé is the first volume in the series of publications on digital citizenship education, issued by the European Commission. The book is a literature review of the literature on this emerging topic which the authors have even proposed to become part of the civic and citizenship curricula in the EU member states. The book is divided into six major chapters.

The first chapter provides an overview of the existing 14 different definitions and frameworks of the concept of digital citizenship. The concept shall not be understood only as the possession of digital skills and knowledge but, more importantly, the skill sets for needed participation, democracy, social engagement and human rights.

The second chapter brings the relationship between the national policies on the topic and the industry where internet providers and social media platforms are considered as the main stakeholder in defining and implementing the policies within digital citizenship education. In particular for the industry, this is happening in the area of data management, privacy and safety, which is an important aspect of digital society, but not the core aspect related to the empowerment of individuals. It is important to note that using the technology itself represents the “hard skills”, but it does not represent and is not sufficient to being a digital citizen in the digital society. A set of socio-emotional and socio-relational competences (“soft skills”) are required for participating in the digital society and for being defined as a digital citizen. In addition, the digital space and the real world coexist and the exchange between them shapes within a cycle of mutual influence.

The third chapter explores digital citizenship as a “sense-making practice” and how the digital culture determines practices aiming at long-term experiential strategies which, in turn, contribute to participatory and inclusive approaches of digital citizenship education.

The fourth chapter focuses on social literacy and how it relates to the digital environment, and consequently how it is prioritised in digital citizenship education. The existing frameworks give priority to the social-relational skills and attitudes which narrows the focus towards values like inclusion, diversity and empathy, which are considered as the base of fostering positive online participation.

The fifth chapter is about the major challenges in the implementation of digital citizenship education which have to be taken into account when developing effective strategies on the topic. One of the core issues in the implementation is the co-existence of the real world and digital space

where citizens participate, as described in Chapter 2, and the way they not only shape but also complement each other. Participation online can evolve into participation in the real world.

The sixth and final chapter draws upon the specific recommendations for developing digital citizenship education strategies based on the review in the previous sections of the book. The authors propose two key directions: implementation strategy and awareness strategy.

One of the issues related to digital citizenship that the authors point out is the large variety of the existing definitions of the concept in the 14 selected frameworks they scrutinize. This requires alignment of the strategies with these frameworks for effective implementation. Although there are numerous definitions of digital citizenship, there is an emerging consensus that in the educational context, it is a transversal dimension which involves values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding – all of them are required by citizens in the digital era. It also relates to the development of inclusive strategies not only for youth, but for all ages and, more importantly, for all cultural contexts while balancing different literacies and all strategies needed to be coherent and long term. The context, as the authors point out, have different values and values are dealt with in a different way in different contexts. However, going beyond the content of the book, when it comes to the cultural contexts, we need to relate them to the diminishing so-called “nationally bounded membership” or “legal membership” in a nation-state where the nation-state defines the civil, social, political rights and responsibilities, i.e. the traditional forms of citizenship (Choi, 2016). The questions we need to ask ourselves in this regard is how nationally bounded membership is still valid in an interconnected and global world where national borders start to fade and cultural context is not isolated. A world there is an increasing exchange of information, ideas and reactions to events in other countries in the world and globally.

The reader shall bear in mind that digital citizenship is a new concept and any strategies of teaching and learning, as well as implementing changes in civic and citizenship education, have to be done carefully. This will be a long-term process which requires further in-depth definitions, specifications and discussions of any implementations of digital citizenship education in the curriculum. This is probably why the book does not prescribe any specific sets of goals or topics. Further developments and theorizing in this area are needed, especially for the precise definition of digital citizenship in relation to the way how digitalisation and mediation in a technological sense can have an impact upon citizenship. In this regard, several studies (e.g. see Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady and

Verba, 2012) have found that the use of digital technologies and social media in particular have a profound effect on youth's civic participation and, in addition, that social media can be more effective in enhancing participation due to its interactivity, as opposed to the traditional media channels where communication is unidirectional. The power social media has, however, can often be untamed and elemental. The book provides a good example from a South Korean philosopher who points out that one of the biggest challenges for digital citizens is the participation: the internet did not make things easier for citizens, but harder and more complicated when it comes to gathering together in order to bring about collective change in a way that can affect their communities. In this regard, the authors stress the need for raising policymakers' awareness of the risk that a lack of digital citizenship education poses to youth in terms of exclusion especially when if the youth lacks the necessary literacy to empower them as citizens. This risk may also extend to creative and critical actors and this is why the authors point out that digital citizenship education should start at an early age. This shall be done through a communication plan which uses the framework in a coherent way with simple messages aimed at decision makers.

On the other hand, digital citizenship education needs to be a coherent part of all other literacies instead of a separate or special form of educational content or discipline. This would also increase the need for training professionals in using competence frameworks and developing their own capacities to (1) evaluate; (2) express their experience; and (3) transfer their results.

The book will be of interest to policymakers, educators and researchers in the area of civic and citizenship education. The new realities which technologies bring to our society come with new opportunities, but also with certain challenges which we did not face with traditional forms of communication, civic participation and engagement. It is important to keep in mind that digital citizenship is not a state that everyone can reach after completing a training course, it is a lifelong process. Thus, the implementation of digital citizenship in education requires a regular assessment and monitoring.

#### Literature

Choi, M. (2016) A Concept Analysis of Digital Citizenship for Democratic Citizenship Education in the Internet Age. *Theory & Research in Social Education* 44(4), pp. 565-607.

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Rainie, L., Smith, A., Schlozman, K., Brady, H., and Verba, S. (2012) *Social media and political engagement*. Washington, DC, USA: Pew Research Center's Internet, & American Life Project.

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