

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



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Overview and
new perspectives

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new perspectives

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Foreword

In 2016, the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) of the Council of Europe launched a new intergovernmental project on Digital Citizenship Education. The aim of this project is to contribute to reshaping the role that education plays in enabling all children to acquire the competences they need as digital citizens to participate actively and responsibly in democratic society, whether offline or online.

Most young people in Europe today were born and have grown up in the digital era and it is the duty of education to ensure that they are fully aware of the norms of appropriate and responsible behaviour with regard to the use of technology and participation in digital life.

Despite worldwide efforts to address issues concerning the role of education for the development of digital citizenship there is a clear need for education authorities to adopt a concerted and comprehensive approach to digital citizenship education and integrate it into school curricula to ensure that it is effectively implemented.

The Council of Europe's action with regard to the digital life of children over the last decade has been aimed mainly at their safety and protection in the digital environment rather than their empowerment through education or the acquisition of competences for actively participating in digital society.

Several legally binding instruments define the standards guiding the Council of Europe member states in their action to protect children in the digital age, and the European Court of Human Rights has developed case law on information and communication technologies and human rights. These instruments include:

- ▶ Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)5 on measures to protect children against harmful content and behaviour and to promote their active participation in the new information and communications environment, which encourages member states, in co-operation with the private sector, associations of parents, teachers and educators, the media and civil society, to promote media (information) literacy for children, young people, parents and educators, in order to prepare them for possible encounters with harmful content and behaviour;
- ▶ Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2006)12 on empowering children in the new information and communications environment which calls on member states to develop a coherent information literacy and training strategy which is conducive to empowering children and their educators to make the best possible use of information and communication services and technologies.

The above-mentioned recommendations have been used as references and inspiration for the development of specific tools for teachers and students, such as the Council of Europe Internet literacy handbook for teachers, parents and students which explains how to get the most out of the internet and how to protect privacy on websites and social networks.

Building on the achievements of the current programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the results of the project on Competences for Democratic Culture, as well as co-operation activities with other sectors (UNICEF's Internet Governance and Children's Rights programme), the Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice decided to launch a pan-European project within the new programme of activities 2016-2017 that would encompass at least the following elements:

- ▶ a multi-stakeholder consultation/debate on policy issues regarding the place and better use of online resources and contemporary information technologies (social networking sites and Web 2.0 or Educational Web 2.0 sites as well as personal devices) in school settings (curricula and schools organisations) and mapping the administrative and legal responsibilities for school leaders, teachers, students and parents;
- ▶ a review of both formal and informal literature (blogs, wikis and websites). This review would examine the concept of digital citizenship, current digital education policies and contemporary digital education practices and challenges in schools;
- ▶ the development of policy guidelines to further support national authorities in developing digital citizenship education policies to address learning issues as well as the needs of students and to provide guidance in policy development to help protect students working in open, collaborative, online environments;
- ▶ the promotion and sharing of best practices from member states on effective interactive programmes for the acquisition of digital citizenship competence for students, through the curriculum, and for teachers, through initial and in-service education;
- ▶ a set of descriptors for digital citizenship education competence and guidance for the integration of such descriptors in current citizenship education curricula;
- ▶ development of partnerships with other sectors of the Council of Europe with regard to cross-cutting contemporary educational and legal issues that school authorities face today, such as cyberbullying, including cyber-misogyny, cyberbullying of teachers, privacy, sexting, digital addiction, student-teacher relationships through social media (Facebook), digital safe schools, freedom of expression online, and the human rights of students in digital settings.

The study of existing literature and new perspectives contained here is one of the first activities to be conducted under the project, and I would like to express my special thanks to the authors, Divina Frau-Meigs, Brian O'Neill, Alessandro Soriani and Vitor Tomé, all members of the Council of Europe expert group on digital citizenship education. The findings and recommendations of this overview will guide the expert group in its future work and the development of new activities.

The Council of Europe is well positioned for developing, at pan-European level, new policy orientations and approaches with regard to the challenges schools and society will increasingly face with regard to digital education. The Council of Europe already possesses an important set of standards and tools related to legal issues, rights and responsibilities and children, data protection, media literacy and, most importantly, the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. The *acquis* and expertise accumulated during the last decade on citizenship education and the current work on the implementation of the charter will serve as a solid basis for the development of a new dimension of citizenship education and reaffirm the role of the Council of Europe as the leading organisation in this field.

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Executive summary

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the academic and policy literature on digital citizenship education (DCE), highlighting contributions in terms of definitions, actors and stakeholders, competence frameworks, practices, emerging trends and challenges primarily in the context of the member states of the Council of Europe, while noting other international contributions that have advanced the subject.

The corpus of literature reviewed consists of texts published between 2000 and 2017, and includes:

- ▶ peer-reviewed scholarly literature;
- ▶ policy guidelines and frameworks for digital citizenship, including those developed by international, national and intergovernmental agencies;
- ▶ other relevant literature produced by civil society organisations.

The inclusion of a wide selection of sources is intended to ensure sufficient coverage of what is an emergent topic that has yet to gain a strong foothold in either educational or academic literature but has received wider policy attention.

The review is organised into six main sections.

Section 1 addresses the core concept of digital citizenship. Fourteen different definitions and frameworks of competences are discussed and compared in order to get a better understanding of this complex topic. The concept of digital citizenship is said to involve not only digital and media literacy competences, but also other skillsets that appear in related discussions of participation, democracy, social engagement and human rights.

Section 2 describes the relationships between national policies on DCE and the role of industry. Social media industries and internet providers are key stakeholders involved in the definition and implementation of DCE policies, particularly in the context of data management, e-privacy and digital safety.

Section 3 examines digital citizenship as a “sense-making practice” and examines how digital culture has shaped practices which aim at long-term experiential strategies and which contribute to participatory and inclusive approaches to DCE.

Section 4 looks at emerging trends and considers how social literacy is prioritised within different approaches towards DCE. In a majority of the frameworks analysed, particular emphasis is given to social-relational skills and attitudes, so that values such as inclusion, diversity and empathy are seen as fundamental elements in the development of positive online participation. This section also includes a summary of emerging trends identified by a multi-stakeholder consultation that was carried out in tandem with this review.

Section 5 outlines the principal challenges to DCE implementation identified in the literature, which relevant stakeholders need to take into account in order to develop a comprehensive and effective strategy for DCE:

- ▶ developing and piloting descriptors for DCE aligned with the Council of Europe's Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) framework;
- ▶ incorporating online and offline approaches as an integrated whole rather than as separate spheres;
- ▶ initiating DCE at an early age in order to achieve better, safer and "savvier" online participation, not just in formal education but also in informal and non-formal settings;
- ▶ accessing the large number of practices, projects and experiences dedicated to DCE across Council of Europe member states (a non-exhaustive review of sample projects is included in the review);
- ▶ harnessing the diversity of modes of participation brought about by digital technologies, particularly those most conducive to facilitating individual participation and social change;
- ▶ finding a comprehensive approach that balances the "hard literacies" related to science and technology education with "soft skills" and social literacy represents another challenge for education agencies.

In conclusion, Section 6 recommends a series of steps to develop DCE. Against the background of persistent risks related to the digital presence of the citizens, two key directions are proposed.

1. Implementation strategies

- ▶ develop descriptors for better defining digital citizenship competences (DCC);
- ▶ develop a visual model for DCC that illustrates the main forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which digital citizens need to achieve;
- ▶ identify linkages between DCC and the Council of Europe's CDC;
- ▶ develop digital and non-digital resources for teachers and educators, for example through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), apps, games, publications, etc.

2. Awareness strategies

- ▶ create and launch an awareness campaign to sensitise decision makers and policy makers and to promote the relevance of DCE when addressing current challenges;
- ▶ organise a conference exploring the recommendations of the "Digital citizenship education multi-stakeholder consultation report" and the results of the good practices survey.

Appendices 1 and 2 bring together 16 different DCC frameworks in order to provide an overview of the different values, attitudes, skills and knowledge proposed by various national and multinational approaches.

Appendix 3 presents a tool for the analysis of sense-making DCE practices that takes into account variables such as: vision, type of project, stakeholders, targets, funding systems, evaluation models, type of resources, settings, durations and sets of competences developed.

Introduction

The transformative and other forms of impact which the internet and digital technologies might have on societies and on citizenship have been the subject of longstanding scholarly speculation and debate. Much of this debate has focused on the supposed dislocation of the social from the physical environment brought about by electronic media. Meyrowitz's characterisation of a generational transformation of electronically mediated social interaction stands as a statement of the lessening significance of physical location – and human connectedness – for all social actors (Meyrowitz 1986). The philosopher Luciano Floridi predicted in the mid-1990s that in information societies, the threshold between online and offline would disappear, and proposed nothing short of “re-ontologizing” reality based on a seamless migration of all social interaction to an exchange between connected informational organisms (Floridi 2007). The French philosopher Bernard Stiegler has characterised such technological and industrial developments as the rise of a new “technical milieu” in which the human environment is transformed, impacting all economic, social and political processes (Venn et al. 2007).

The extent to which digital technologies pose ethical issues for human behaviour and for citizenship is a key focus within this scholarly debate. A dominant theme within the philosophy of technology has been the critique of the technological paradigm that radically separates labour and leisure, and undermines the social in favour of forms of industrial society based on effortless and thoughtless consumption (Ellul 1973; Borgmann 1987). The impact of technology in such debates challenges societies to address fundamental questions about the role and impact of technology and the extent to which social life is organised and priorities are set according to the demands of technological systems. Harnessing technology for societal good and for addressing major challenges in combating poverty, hunger and disease and supporting sustainable economic development is one form of response to this technological challenge. Furthermore, there is the so-called “moral agenda” of a responsible and accountable media culture in demonstrating responsibility for others in a world of great conflict, tragedy, intolerance and indifference (Silverstone 2004). This requires, according to Silverstone, a critical and literate citizenry, capable of engaging “with the reality of that difference, responsibly and humanely” (Silverstone 2004: 440).

This is the context in which the current review of DCE was undertaken. Citizens today live in communities that comprise distinct, multiple kinds of environments. The world which citizens inhabit has become a complex entanglement of physical reality, technologies, digital media and social networks. Therefore, citizens are faced with a whole new series of challenges and opportunities, and live, act and make choices as digital citizens. As defined in this review, digital citizenship refers to:

- ▶ the ability to engage competently and positively with digital technologies (creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning);

- ▶ participating actively and responsibly (values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding) in communities (local, national, global) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural);
- ▶ being involved in a double process of lifelong learning (in formal, informal and non-formal settings); and
- ▶ seamlessly defending human rights and dignity.

Drawing both on the large body of academic literature devoted to citizenship in the digital age as well as the extensive numbers of programmes and policies that have developed to promote good citizenship in a digital context, the aim of this review is to assess the emerging consensus on the definition of digital citizenship, as well as the appropriate aims and scope of a framework for DCE. Using the CDC¹ (Council of Europe 2016) as a starting point, the analysis focuses on the specific competences which citizens require as a result of their use of digital technologies to participate effectively in a culture of democracy. While the development of a set of descriptors of digital citizenship – what a person is able to do, having mastered the competences specified in the model – is the next stage of the project, the current phase is concerned with examining the contribution of existing literature from the diverse subjects of media and information literacy, various forms of technical literacy and digital competence, and approaches to supporting good citizenship at all levels of education.

The review begins with a discussion of the core concept of digital citizenship and the various forms of citizenship education that have been developed to address the challenges for citizens in a digital age. The various skills and competences that contribute to engaging in and through digital technologies are outlined, and a working definition is advanced. Digital citizenship is defined as a “sense-making practice” to which diverse stakeholders – including government, civil society and industry – contribute by creating and supporting opportunities for effective DCE. Good practices – in the sense of strategies which aim at long-term experiential impact and which contribute towards defining participatory and inclusive approaches to DCE – are examined and discussed.

A number of emerging trends are highlighted in the review. One key element concerns the priority given to social literacy aspects, including empathy towards others, as the basis of positive online participation. The review also highlights some of the main challenges for policy makers in implementing DCE. This includes: the complexity of the field, reflected in the lack of consensus – as well as competing perspectives – on the key constituent components of digital citizenship; the differing needs of different age groups; and the challenges of implementation in different sectors of education, both formal and informal.

Finally, the review makes a number of recommendations on the next steps needed to advance DCE, which focus on strategies to advance its implementation and to build wider awareness of its potential positive impact.

1. Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC).

Chapter 1

Digital citizenship: analysing definitions, actors and frameworks

Citizenship in the digital era and the concept of digital citizenship itself are increasingly evident in policy discourse and the subject of much debate, with accompanying academic literature (Common Sense Education 2015; Council of Europe 2016; Australian Government n.d.; Netsafe 2016; Ribble 2011). However, despite the widespread references to digital citizenship, there is no consensus on what it refers to precisely.

Within the literature, a range of synonyms or concepts closely related to digital citizenship are in evidence. These include:

- ▶ “global citizenship” (Parker and Fraillon 2016; UNESCO 2015);
- ▶ “global competence” (OECD 2016);
- ▶ “digital competence” (Ferrari 2013; Carretero et al. 2017);
- ▶ “digital consciousness” (IROC2 2010);
- ▶ “digital literacy” (MediaSmarts 2015; Meyers, Erickson and Small 2013);
- ▶ “digital media literacy education” (Mihailidis 2016);
- ▶ “media and information literacy” (Frau-Meigs and Hibbard 2016; UNESCO 2013).

Just as there are differences in the terminology used to designate digital citizenship, definitions of digital citizenship – while complementary in many respects – also vary. Historically, citizenship has been associated with “the rights and responsibilities of living in a community” (Impero 2016). However, in a digital age, citizenship straddles both offline and online worlds, referred to respectively as “real life (RL)” and “immersive reality (IR)” (*idem*). It is claimed that regardless of the extent of convergence between physical and virtual worlds, citizens must be digitally competent to be active citizens.