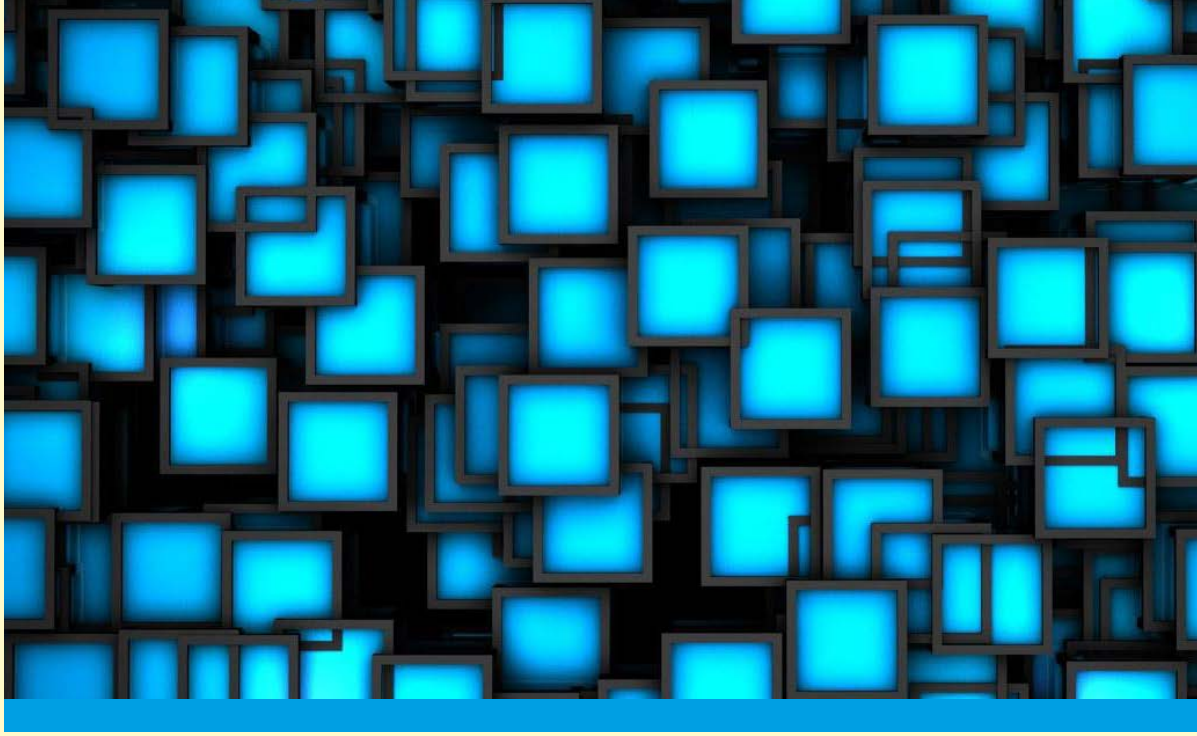

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DigComp as a Theoretical Framework for Media Education. Issues and Implications

Andrea Garavaglia[a], Livia Petti[b], Serena Triacca[c]

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Keywords: Media Education, DigComp, Digital Competence, Media Literacy.

1. DigComp as a theoretical framework for media education?

This essay critically discusses the ways in which DigComp can be used as a theoretical framework to support media education programs in schools. Since 2006, digital competence has been one of the eight key competencies that were defined by the European Union for lifelong learning. As reported in the 2018 recommendations, these competencies are considered to be fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society.

DigComp (Digital Competence Framework for Citizens) is one the most important framework used in project to help students achieve digital competence (Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie, 2017). It was released by the Joint Research Center and is mainly meant for use by government agencies, educational institutions and enterprises.

The evolution and diffusion of new media have led to the emergence of a series of risks as well as opportunities (Rivoltella, 2017), which substantially confirm the need to activate critical analytical skills and a profound reflection on the use of devices in students (Hobbs, 2017; Tisseron, 2016). Such aspects concerning the principles of media education have already been elaborated in a previous research (Masterman, 1985). The spread of digital media in the recent years makes it seem like DigComp and media education can converge towards a singular aim of training responsible and aware citizens. However, an accurate analysis of the DigComp 2.1 framework indicates that the program does not allow the recognition of all the dimensions of media education (Kačinová, 2019; Swertz, 2019). DigComp focuses specifically on the acquiring of knowledge, recollection, comprehension, application, evaluation, and creation, without explaining the fundamental activities of critical analysis and reflection directly and extensively. The latter two dimensions form an integral part of the fundamental objectives of media education, which could enable students to make a truly conscious and responsible use of the new media.

This discrepancy is probably due to the fact that, critical and reflective dimensions are included in three of the other seven key competencies (functional, alphabetical, citizenship, height, cultural, awareness, and expression) for European lifelong learning framework (2018), and require educational systems to propose the use of system-structured program-paths across several key competencies.

On the other hand, analysing DigCompEdu, which is the European framework for the digital competence of educators, could help identify the inherent competences that assist educators in facilitating the achievement of the learners' digital competence dimensions. This is a competence that was not sufficiently developed in DigComp, and is hence reinserted here, in place of safety; it is a dimension that we could consider as an outcome of responsible use.

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1.1. Methodology

The methodology adopted is the analysis of projects that apply the DigComp framework through the review of articles and reports.

The analysis, carried out through a structured grid, focuses on identifying:

- The application of critical analysis to artifacts and media communication;
- The promotion of responsible acting on the network;
- The recognition of awareness dimension;
- The development of reflection.

2. Issues and suggested solutions

More recently, in 2020, the first version of the LifeComp Framework was published. LifeComp is the European framework for Personal, Social and Learning-to-Learn key competence, and is one of the eight European lifelong learning frameworks. A first brief analysis of LifeComp enables us to understand the transversality of media education in relation to the eight European lifelong learning frameworks of competences:

- In the first area (Personal) of the LifeComp Framework, the dimensions of wellbeing and self-regulation are relevant for media education. These competencies integrate and complete the dimensions of DigComp.
- In the second area (Social), communication and collaboration are presented with a strong emphasis on awareness, understanding and responsibility, which are key elements of media education that are not included in DigComp.
- In the third area (Learning-to-Learn), critical thinking and reflecting form the key dimensions of analysis and creative production of digital artefacts.

With a view to use DigComp in media education, the goal of this paper is to suggest solutions to avoid the reductionism of the development of media education skills to the dimensions of DigComp. On the down side, however, extensive adoption of DigComp in educational programs could increase the risk of the disappearance of the reflexive critical dimension. These dimensions are fundamental elements that form the foundations of media education (UNESCO, 1982) and are included in LifeComp Framework.

The proposed solution emerges from the analysis of some media education projects that have been implemented in schools. DigComp has been tested as a theoretical framework in some of these projects. The outcome highlighted that information literacy seems to be well-covered by the DigComp framework, while the dimensions of critical analysis, awareness and responsibility, as they are defined, do not allow for extensive and complete application.

This work suggests that an attempt be made to integrate DigComp and LifeComp, in order to establish a more comprehensive framework for media education projects. This essay critically discusses the ways in which DigComp can be used as a theoretical framework to support media education programs in schools. Since 2006, digital competence has been one of the eight key competencies that were defined by the European Union for lifelong learning. As reported in the 2018 recommendations, these competencies are considered to be fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society.

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