Globalization, education, information and communication technologies: what relationships and reciprocal influences?

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Abstract

Globalization – described as a structural phenomenon of increasing interdependence among various parts of the world, for which the effects of an action feel at a distance – has produced a variety of economic, cultural, and social changes that have shaped the world over the past 50 years. Without doubt this process was favoured by development and pervasiveness of digital technologies, that make the communications faster and the information more easily sharable. Globalization has had a relevant impact also in the educational field: the convergence of models of educational organizations, the internationalisation of key competencies definition and the diffusion of large-scale assessment of student’s performance (PISA-OECD), are only a few of more relevant aspects of this process. This paper aims to explore the main features of globalization in education with a particular focus on role played by the new information and communication technologies (ICT). For this purpose will be used different approaches and heterogenic sources (national and international statistics and laws) and will be made a large review of sociological literature on these topics. In a globalized world characterized by a convergence culture, school systems should work in order to integrate ICT in ordinary learning processes, that means: to give new competencies and skills, to experiment new didactic models based on social media and web 2.0 tools, to contribute to the construction of a new digital literacy directed at the critical uses of digital media, in order to understand how the technologies work, and how they may affect our global life.

Keywords: Globalized education,, ICT, digital literacy.

1. Has globalization changed education systems?

From the outset a few decades ago, there have been divergent interpretations of globalization both in the public debate and in specialist studies. Even in recent times, alongside authors who see globalization as an unavoidable feature of modernity and development (Levitt 1983; Ohmae 1990), there have been others who express concern for its potentially destructive effects on democratic life (Held 1995; Martin and Schuman 1995), on workers’ rights (Tilly 1995), on natural resources (Shiva 2000) and on the authority exercised by nation-states (Cox 1996; Kobrin 1997). Yet others maintain that a majority of the reactions to the phenomenon of globalization are unjustified, and due entirely to its unexpectedly extensive effects (Doremus 1998; Hirst and Thompson 1996). In the plethora of opinions on the issue, however, the ‘reality’ of globalization is rarely called into question: the growing interdependence between the parts of the globe, which is such that the effects of every action are also felt at a distance (Held et al. 1999), is something that can be seen in all aspects of social life. Over the last few decades, the
gradual breakdown of regional and national boundaries has effectively transformed the economy, culture, politics and the habits of daily life.

Nor have education systems been immune from this influence, and the relationship between globalization and teaching has been addressed by numerous studies. Though there has been an enormous amount of ambitious work, many of these investigations do not stand up to close scrutiny because, as Cobalti (2006) has noted, they simply juxtapose the two topics, without identifying the influences or connections that join them, or because they limit themselves to addressing restricted settings such as higher education, citizenship education, and so forth.

What relationship can be found between globalization and the changes that have recently swept through education systems? How can we examine the consequences of a phenomenon that has been so heterogeneous, and whose effects have differed so widely according to the conditions that prevailed at the beginning of the process in the areas involved? These are difficult questions to answer, largely because of the caution called for in considering globalization as a determinant of specific social changes. When multidimensional processes are involved, causal direction is hard to determine, and certain authors (e.g., Hay and Marsh 2000) hold that globalization is an effect of other causes, rather than a cause in itself. In the following pages, when we speak of the relationship between globalization and education, we will thus refer to a series of mutual influences that generate circular mechanisms: on the one hand, increasing globalization has stimulated institutional decision-makers to pursue education policies aiming for a greater internationalization of curricula and more uniformity in educational goals. On the other hand, the spread of new skills (e.g., a knowledge of foreign languages) and of new practices (student mobility, for example) have provided fertile ground for globalization to take root and grow.

The paper lays out the issues as follows. Section 2 offers a definition of ‘globalized education’ and provides an overview of its main characteristics. Section 3 focuses on a specific aspect: the role of ICTs in the development of globalized education. Section 4 specifies certain aspects of the role played by mass media and digital media in the globalization process, as viewed by a number of sociologists. Section 5 analyzes the changes in education and socialization processes brought about by the media, shedding light on the changing identities of teachers and learners in the global age. Section 6 attempts to draw some conclusions about the new learning and social settings.

2. The features of globalized education

To interpolate the definition of globalization proposed by Gallino (2004), the set of processes of convergence in institutional goals and characteristics of school systems that aim at ‘making them whole’ could be labeled as ‘global education’. Some of these processes have arisen spontaneously, driven by the evolution of social systems, technological change and the uptake of an internationalized culture. Others have been originated by specific public policies and actions proposed by systematic heterogeneous actors. International organizations and institutions that deal with promotion and economic development have provided a major impetus to the birth of global education at various levels. By enacting recommendations and, above all, by funding projects, they have acquired the political and economic capacity to generate global changes in educational discourse and practices and to generate convergence in policy processes and ‘desirable’ policy goals.

In particular, the World Bank has influenced the education policies of the less developed countries, while the OECD’s recommendations seem mainly to address more developed countries.

In recent years, the Union European has also redoubled its efforts to reform its own education system in order to create overall convergence at the European level, as a way of enhancing international/global competitiveness. Since March 2000, the EU has formulated its policies in line with the ambitious objectives of the so-called Lisbon Strategy. This strategy recognized that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU’s most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition. EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened co-operation in 2009 with strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. A series of benchmarks have been set for 2020: i.) at least 95% of children between the age of four and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education; ii.) the share of 15-year olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%; iii.) the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%; iv.) the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary
educational attainment should be at least 40%; v.) an average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25-64) should participate in lifelong learning.

The Bologna Process for the creation of the European Higher Education Area has inspired change in university systems, introducing a two-cycle (undergraduate-postgraduate) degree structure and wider implementation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System).

The impact of globalization on education systems has been so relevant that there is a need for a shared definition of global education. The participating delegations of the Europe-wide Global Education Congress, Maastricht, (November 15-17 2002), representing parliamentarians, governments, local and regional authorities and civil society organizations from the member states of the Council of Europe agreed that: “Global education is education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all”.

In short, global education is characterized by the presence of elements of openness, integration and cosmopolitan influences, mostly unknown to mainstream education until a few decades ago. They concentrate on two main areas: one which is directly relevant for the purposes of their education systems and the tools whereby these goals are achieved. As regards the main purpose of education — the cognitive purpose — the changes resulting from the growing interconnection between the different parts of the world involve defining new learning goals and adopting instruments for assessing skills that are not confined by national boundaries. For several years, the IAE (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) has conducted large-scale comparative studies of educational achievement, repeating assessments in specific subjects at regular intervals: a regular cycle of assessment that includes the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted in 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2001, 2006, 2011). The last round of PIRLS assessed more than half a million students enrolled in the fourth and eighth grades in 44 countries. The best-known of these programmes is the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The first cycle was carried out in 2000, and since then PISA has involved over 70 countries. Each new PISA report is eagerly awaited: the results achieved by students are considered to be important indicators of a national education system’s efficacy and efficiency, and comparisons with other countries provides a stimulus to improve school performance.

PISA, unlike the IEA evaluation programs, does not administer curriculum-based tests, but establishes the extent to which students have acquired skills in reading, mathematics, science and problem-solving that enable them to develop their full potential and fulfill themselves in the so-called knowledge society. This reflects the changing goals of education systems, which no longer concentrate on the mere transfer of content, but attempt to provide young generations with a mastery of all the tools needed to participate fully in a changing world, where learning must be lifelong. How exactly life skills are to be defined, however, is problematic. Vrignaud (2003) points out that it is not easy to distinguish between performance and skill, and that in any case we cannot separate an ability from how it was conceptualized and made operational. The risk is that of arriving at a reification of skill and identifying it with what has been measured by the test, without determining whether this skill is in fact a predictor of the individual’s ability to act profitably in different settings. Attempting to identify generalized and universally valid life skills, moreover, could lead us to focus on a restricted and merely structural definition.

As mentioned earlier, the education systems’ process of convergence towards a global model has also affected how schools fulfill their institutional purposes, bringing major changes in the forms of organization and management. Decentralization, assessment and privatization are the key words describing these changes. The trend towards decentralization, which originated in North America and in Europe, spreading rapidly through Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, takes place, in forms that vary in intensity, through the transfer of authority and financial independence from a central government to local governments, or directly to the schools. This approach, though generally regarded as useful in democratizing decision-making processes and improving the systems’ efficacy and efficiency by spreading responsibility, in fact produces more fragmentation than uniformity.

Greater decentralization in education is accompanied by increasing reliance on assessment, as funding is assigned to schools precisely on the basis of the results that they actually achieve, rewarding or punishing their performance. Even in countries that do not have a stringent system of accountability, assessment has nevertheless become an issue
of increasing interest: pursuing a better quality of education — which, in a time of tight public budgets, is by no means at odds with the need to curb expenditures — entails strict control over the results achieved and the use of available resources. Alongside the reports drafted by national assessment groups, those by multilateral agencies are becoming increasingly influential. Once again, one of the most prominent of these agencies is the OECD, which in addition to assessing students’ skills (PISA), publishes annual comparisons of input, process and output indicators for the education systems of over thirty countries. Since 1992, a collection of these indicators has been published regularly in the series, *Education at a Glance*.

And finally, privatization. Among the trends typical of globalization, privatization is seen as that which has had the greatest impact in the field of education (Kogut and Macpherson 2004). Though it is occurring to a varying extent across all continents — from Europe to North and Central America and as far as Asia — its influence is currently felt mainly in the grades of higher education.

In addition to the factors we have mentioned, globalized education is characterized by the presence (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the setting) of a number of other features: the institutionalization of multiculturalism in formulating teaching programs (Rosenfelt 1994), the encouragement of foreign study (e.g., the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme promoted by the European Union), and agreements between states for the international recognition of academic qualifications.

Brief as it is, this review provides evidence in support of the hypothesis that the pressure of globalization has brought about a convergence in education systems, both as regards education policies and in curriculum design (Pan 2010). However, the evidence to the contrary is equally compelling: the convergence towards decentralization mentioned above, for instance, can be traced back to forms of localism and produces more diversification than homogeneity between systems (Cobalti 2006; Hussein, 2010).

These contradictions set sharp bounds on the rather common criticism that holds that the globalization of education jeopardizes the survival and specificity of national and regional cultures. In particular, accusations have been leveled against the predominance of English over other, more minor, languages. On the other hand, the existence of a lingua franca is an important vehicle for conveying cultural elements that would otherwise be difficult to communicate.

The greatest fears concerning the consequences that the expansion of globalization would produce in education systems derive for the most part from the close link that is thought to exist between globalization and the hegemony of neo-laissez faire economic policies (Duménil and Lévy 2005) and the worldwide rise of the capitalist-oligopolistic model (Gallino 2003). Approaches of this kind have given rise to an extensive literature criticizing the “commercialization of education” (Arnow and Torres 2003; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The danger that the principles of International Political Economy (IPE) which govern the activities of enterprises will be transferred bodily to education, however, is quite remote. True, we can see a growing power on the part of the multilateral organizations, as well as a change in the governance of education systems. Nevertheless, the de-territorialization of education policies, by contrast with what has occurred for economic policies, is by no means in the offing. Studies by Gopinathan (1996) and Law (2004) have demonstrated that contemporary educational institutions are still highly nation-based, serving national projects of human capital formation, the creation of national elites, and other societal projects in economic and political areas.

3. ICT, globalization and education

Globalization is based on a network of interconnections, interactions and interdependencies between remote actors who make it possible and within which causative actions, information, knowledge and influences are propagated almost instantaneously. The general consensus is that without the impetus provided by the development of new information and communication technologies, globalization — whose first signs began to appear a couple of centuries ago — would have stopped short at a very basic level.

If, taking Dale’s view (2005), we maintain that the relationship between education and globalization can be brought into sharper focus by scrutinizing certain of its components rather than the phenomenon as a whole, it is
hard to find an element which is more paradigmatic than the role played by ICTs. A few words suffice to describe how ICTs have transformed education, expanding the spaces, methods and times for its spread: i.) teaching materials have been enriched with new capabilities (animation, interactivity, multimedia content); ii.) the quantity of textbooks and study content has increased significantly, and accessibility to them has improved; iii.) almost instantaneous sharing of information and content, as well as the possibility of more extensive interactions at a distance, has stimulated the development of cooperative learning strategies; iv.) personalized study plans have become more feasible, especially for students with special needs.

Though other benefits could be added to this list, it cannot be denied that the use of ICTs has also brought certain elements that are hardly conducive to quality teaching. The so-called “Internet learning style”, with its interactive, search-oriented and self-teaching character, can often be somewhat superficial and incapable of developing critical selection skills.

These considerations regarding the various functions of ICTs highlight the significant support that they have provided to the globalization of education.

And not only: the growth prospects associated with the use of ICTs could lead to a radical transformation of the institutions of mass education. It is plausible that, in a highly globalized scenario, schools as a place set aside for teaching, where students and teachers meet daily for the activities connected with transmitting knowledge, will no longer be the fulcrum of educational processes. The rise of advanced teaching methods such as e-lessons, the use of Web-based educational material, remote mentoring and the creation of distance study groups could lead to the demise of the class-unit. Educational provision would become polycentric, as it would be made up of the teaching programs delivered by agencies and institutions with locations around the world, or by educational networks (consisting of global virtual universities, virtual schools and multinational educational consortiums) competing with each other.

The birth of an education system of this kind will probably not come anytime soon. Nevertheless, this scenario points to the urgent need to replace traditional curricula, based on courses rigorously defined by the programs and rooted in the acquisition of knowledge, with open curricula centering on the student’s cognitive needs and aiming at the acquisition of skills. Integrating ICT applications in the curricula facilitates this passage (OECD 2001): each student should have the opportunity to develop and apply his or her ICT capability using computer tools as a support in studying all school subjects. Using the new information and communication technologies obviously calls for guidance and supervision by well-prepared teachers: the purpose is to build the ability to think and create, and to go beyond an exclusively intuitive (and too often passive) approach to ICTs that is typical of their recreational use. Digital literacy thus becomes, at one and the same time, both a learning tool and a learning goal.

4. The role of the media in globalization processes

At this point of our analysis, which has aimed at identifying and understanding the interconnections between globalization, education (both as regards teaching and, more generally, educational processes) and information and communication technologies, it is time to take a step backwards and consider the role played by communication media in “constructing” and representing the phenomenon of globalization and, subsequently, in changing educational and learning processes.

Regarding the part that the media have played in globalization processes, a number of sociologists and mass mediologists have emphasized the importance of the media and technology in the broader development of the ongoing processes. In this section, we will discuss only a few of the more significant theories, given the enormous amount of literature on the subject.

Essentially, the role of the media in the development of globalization involved at least two stages: the first was characterized by the advent of television and the electronic media, while the second saw the birth of the telematic networks and the Internet, whose rise ushered in the age of the digital media.

From the communication standpoint, the emergence of globalization is rooted in the intuitions of Marshall McLuhan who, in his metaphor of the global village, described how, with the evolution of communication media,
and especially with the arrival of the satellite which enabled communication to take place in real time over great
distances, the world became so small as to take on the typical earmarks of a village: a global community (McLuhan
1964). The new forms of communication, and especially the electronic media, had shrunk the globe into a much
smaller physical space, where information passes instantaneously from one part of the world to another.

A further interpretation of the role of the media in globalization is that offered by Thompson, another student of
the relationship between media and modernity, who begins his analysis by discussing the emergence of globalization
in the sphere of communication (Thompson 1995). According to Thompson, it was only in the nineteenth century
that communication networks were systematically organized on a global scale. It was in this period, then, that we
can begin to speak of the globalization of communication. In this connection, the author analyzes three aspects,
which he sees as particularly expressive of the period’s advances: 1) the development of underwater cable systems
by the European imperial powers; 2) the establishment of international news agencies and their division of the world
into exclusive spheres of operation and 3) the formation of international organizations concerned with the allocation
of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that the origins of the globalization of communication can be traced back to
the mid-nineteenth century, Thompson notes that this process, at least in its most complete form, is primarily a
phenomenon of the twentieth. The scholar analyzes: a) the emergence of transnational communication
conglomerates as key players in the global system; b) the social impact of new technologies, especially those
associated with satellite communication; c) the asymmetric flow of information and communication products within
the global system; and d) the variations and inequalities in terms of access to the global networks of communication.

Another concept that can effectively sum up the interconnection between globalization and the media system is
that of the network society, coined by Manuel Castells. The Catalan sociologist speaks of a new economy on the
global scale, which he calls informational, global and networked, based on the primacy of information and
knowledge (Castells 1996).

In Castells’ model, this economy is informational because the productivity and competitiveness of the units or
agents in it (whether they be firms, regions or nations) fundamentally depend upon their capacity to generate,
process and apply efficiently knowledge-based information. It is global because the core activities of production,
consumption and circulation are organized on a global scale, and it is networked because productivity is generated
through and competition is played out in a global network of interaction between business networks.

Ulrich Beck, who has dedicated much of his theoretical thinking to globalization, holds that the reasons for what
he calls the irreversibility of globalization include at least two factors that are intrinsically linked to the role of the
media: the permanent revolution of the information and communication technologies, and the image-flow of the
global cultural industry (Beck 1999). Likewise, Arjun Appadurai, as part of his theory centering on ethnoscapes as
descriptors of global culture, also introduces the ideas of technoscapes, or movements of technologies across
borders, and mediascapes, or the distribution of the capabilities to produce and disseminate electronic images
(Appadurai 1998).

5. Changing educational scenarios in the age of global media

In analyzing the contribution that ICTs have made to transforming educational processes in the global setting, we
must address two different levels. The first level regards the changes undergone by education and socialization
processes, while the second concerns the change in what we mean by the term learning, with reference to the two
key players in the educational processes that take place in and outside the school setting.

As for the first point, there is an important distinction between education and socialization, given that in speaking
of these dynamics in the global age, it is necessary to refer to both concepts. According to Cesareo (1972, 31),
education is “the set of only the formalized and institutionalized aspects of socialization”; in addition, education
always entails a relationship between those who teach and those who learn, and a certain degree of awareness on
their part, whereas socialization includes “everything that actively or passively contributes to an individual’s
insertion in social groups and, in particular, from the sociological standpoint, each element of the complex relationship between the social structure and the formation of personality (*ibidem*).

This premise is necessary and useful when it comes to highlighting the role played by the mass media in the development of the young generations’ socialization routes. Alongside the formal dimension of education, traditionally delegated to family and school, another “socialization channel” (Morcellini 1997; Besozzi 2006) has opened up: the channel inaugurated by the mass media. The latter oblige us to consider a broader and more informal dimension of the socialization process. The increasing pervasiveness of media offerings, despite the differing critical stances on the subject, is an invitation to acknowledge the medias’ significant power in constructing and processing social reality, and in ensuring that the media are considered to be major sources of influence that interact with the subject and with the surrounding environment to the point where they play a determining role in the construction of identity.

In this sense, the emergence of the electronic media and then of the digital media, which contribute to shedding light on the features of an ever more markedly global scenario, has brought about a radical change in how we see education, forcing us to relocate it in the new economic and social scene and to redefine educational roles, content and styles.

The rise of new information and communication technologies has paved the way to a newly central role for both teachers and learners, a role based on interactivity and, more recently, on a communication model we can define as *socialcasting* (Bennato 2011), arising from the opportunities for sharing content provided by the new participatory media.

Globalization and the digital revolution have been having a major impact on teacher’s and learner’s identities, because the global landscape implies a change in subjective and inter-subjective sociality and the new relationships between individuals and institutions.

The “global identity” must construct new balances to orient itself and to find new points of reference, filtering between real and virtual communication systems (Giaccardi and Magatti 2009). The global identity is a pluri-identity, and is – at the same time – geographically stable and nomadic.

Information and communication technology are so important in today’s global society that teachers are forced to use ICT in their ordinary work at school. New technologies are contributing to create new learning environments and new ways of teaching.

As shown by Davide Parmigiani (2011), the features of an innovative learning environment include:

- involving all subjects and all classroom teachers;
- modifying the structural aspects of school (transmission versus construction of knowledge);
- experimenting new ways of representing knowledge and new language (books or digital content);
- experimenting new ways of organizing learning time and space of (school/home, presence/distance);
- avoiding abandonment and scholastic difficulties;
- providing a learning environment that is more “attractive” to students;
- promoting students’ creativity, both in the use of the instruments and in the construction of knowledge.

These features are more important in a global society because children are involved every day in a “stream of communication” based on the pervasive presence of radio, television, Internet and the new devices that are now available. This landscape compels us to rethink how traditional content is offered, and the traditional ways of offering it. For example, the new learning environments could make extensive use of new technologies: LIMs (the Italian acronym for Interactive Multimedia Blackboards), PCs, interactive tablets, podcasting devices and so on.

On the other hand, the rise of Web 2.0 tools and the spread of UGC user generated content introduce a revolutionary way of conceiving “teaching and learning processes”, while social networks such as Facebook or Twitter facilitate communication and relationships between young people, allowing the creation of communities and multiple networks.

The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O’Reilly in referring to the transition to a fully participatory Web, where people are both readers and writers, while UGC (user generated content) or UCC (user created content) “is defined as: i) content made publicly available over the Internet, ii) which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and iii)
which is created outside of professional routines and practices. Based on this definition a taxonomy of UCC types and hosting platforms is presented" (OECD 2007).

In addition, teachers and learners in a global society are structurally very different, as suggested by several authors.

According to Marc Prensky, for example, the most useful designation for the young generation is *Digital Natives* (Prensky 2001). It means that young people are “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet, because they were born in the digital world. By contrast, adults can be defined as *Digital Immigrants*: they learn to adapt to their environment and, at the same time, they always retain, to some degree, their specific "accent". The “digital immigrant accent” can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it, printing out your email, or needing to print out a document written on the computer in order to edit it. More recently, Prensky reflected further on this dichotomy and decided to substitute it with a new set of distinctions based not only on the age variable, but also on the concept of *digital wisdom*.

The young generation has been given many different labels: we thus have *Digital natives* (Prensky 2001; 2009), *Net generation* (Tapscott 2008), *New Millennium Learners* (OECD, 2009), and so on.

6. Educating for the media in the age of globalization

On the global scene whose multiple interactions between education, learning and technologies we have attempted to portray, we must move towards an approach that can raise awareness of the need for critical thinking in order to build what has been called *digital citizenship*, an extension and a broadening of the traditional concept of citizenship, oriented towards the creation of conscious, critical forms of integration in a society which is ever more complex.

There can be no doubt that in today’s historical and social setting it is particularly urgent to create the conditions whereby the network, and, more generally, the ICTs, can truly be places of inclusion and growth (Giaccardi 2011). In this connection, we believe that it is not enough to know how to create content or distribute it in the various available platforms: it is necessary to create content that stems from a fully aware type of processing, that is part of a cultural route or project, that has ethical value in the broadest sense of the term. With this acquisition of skill and awareness, the new communication technologies could become, in a project of at least partial integration in formal and informal educational structures (and thus in the places devoted specifically to learning as well as in informal environments) centers of cultural and media quality and perhaps even an anthropological space, to encourage fresh dialog between young people and adults.

In this sense, media education (or media literacy) could be a particularly useful prospect, given that its transdisciplinary approach takes the relationships between young people, the media and educational institutions into consideration, acknowledging fully and without preconceptions that the media have a role as an integral part of the education and learning process.

In any case, the global society has also brought about a major change in the concept of culture, which becomes *convergent culture*: this shifts consumers into the forefront, making them active producers of their social and cultural reality (Jenkins 2006). The profound changes triggered by these new forms of cultural production have led to new social spaces, created by the interaction between grassroots media and the people who use them.

Media literacy education also involves the important matter of critical thinking: being aware of the risks and opportunities presented by technologies, being able to read and analyze messages and creative acting, being able to produce content, to express oneself in these new languages, to use these tools innovatively. Today, the switch is from an idea of Media Literacy as a choice to a new idea of Media Literacy as a core part of a wider Citizenship Education. This is why the European Recommendation of 20 August 2009 can say that «Media Literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today's information society. [...] Media literacy is today regarded as one of the key prerequisites for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and diminish risks of exclusion from community
life. Today there are, in fact, many forms of exclusion and one of the most important is digital exclusion. Sonia Livingstone underlines that, as we witness a further major shift in information and communication technology (ICT), a new form of literacy is emerging, termed computer literacy or Internet literacy (Livingstone 2004). This new form of literacy, if it is indeed “new,” and if it is appropriately labelled “literacy”, lies at the heart of a series of lively debates intersecting the academy, the policy community, and the public.

In conclusion, one last thought regarding digital skills: this concept refers to “being able to evaluate a variety of technological solutions (more than just knowing how to use a specific technology well) and having the requisite cognitive and cultural equipment, in particular in the form of the ability to select and handle information, its sources and reliability” (Calvani 2010, 46-47). The next step is to gauge the link between skills and institutional policies, evaluating the extent to which they are disseminated and implemented (Ranieri 2010).

Achieving full digital citizenship will doubtless involve prioritizing the sphere of education and learning, with particular attention to the policies that will have to be put in place if the goals for integration are to be successfully reached.

On 18 December 2006, the European Commission issued the “Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning” (2006/962/EC). This document is part of the process known as the Lisbon Strategy, which began following the Lisbon European Council of 23-24 March 2000 and was re-launched in 2005. The Council concluded that there was a need to define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning as a key measure in Europe’s response to globalization and the shift to knowledge-based economies.

The Recommendation thus sets out eight key competence, one of which is digital competence. According to the definition provided in the Recommendation, «digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet».

In the current global scenario, it will obviously not be possible to develop these competences, or to arrive at a critical and fully aware model of citizenship, unless there is real cooperation and integration between education systems, media systems, and the institutions and players that are traditionally delegated to fulfill educational functions.

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