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Table of contents

Preface	13
THEME 1	15
Teaching critical media/digital literacy in multicultural societies	
Content and Dynamics of Gender-Specific Behaviours in the Digital Educational Environment <i>Jeļena Badjanova, Dzintra Iliško, Svetlana Ignatjeva, Margarita Nesterova, Mariana Petrova</i>	17
Digital Storytelling, Video making and Media Education: an Experience of University Teaching <i>Filippo Bruni</i>	21
Utilising a Shared Critical Media Literacy Intervention to Challenge Stereotypical Representations of Minorities in the Classroom <i>Maria Campbell, Peter Stevenson</i>	25
From Predictive Algorithms to Eudaimonia. A Critical Review on Legal, Ethical and Pedagogical Issues in Educational Data Science <i>Claudia Cavicchioli, Laura Menichetti</i>	29
Digital History, Teaching and Social Inclusion in the United States Experience <i>Monica Dati</i>	33
Digital Artifacts as Cultural Machines: for an Intersectional Critical Analysis of the Relationship between Power and Technology <i>Martina De Castro, Umberto Zona, Fabio Bocci</i>	37
DigComp as a Theoretical Framework for Media Education. Issues and Implications <i>Andrea Garavaglia, Livia Petti, Serena Triacca</i>	41
Not Just Fun and Games: The Status-quo of Commercial Games in Teaching <i>Ida Kathrine Hammeleff Jørgensen, Michael S. Debus</i>	45
Learners' Spiritual Well-Being During the Pandemic in the Digital Learning Environment <i>Dzintra Iliško, Jeļena Badjanova, Svetlana Ignatjeva, Diāna Dūna</i>	49
Learning and Teaching Critical Skills: An Introduction to the Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies <i>Ilaria Moschini, Sandra Petroni</i>	53

Developing Computational Thinking Among Preservice Teachers <i>Marta Peracaula-Bosch, Juan González-Martínez</i>	57
Digital Competence and Critical Thinking in the Citizenship Education. National Investigation and Didactic Perspectives <i>Loredana Perla, Laura Sara Agrati, Viviana Vinci, Alessia Scarinci</i>	61
Art and Citizenship: Intercultural and Civic Soft Skills in the School Projects of the Triennial Plan of Arts <i>Alessia Rosa, Gabriella Taddeo</i>	65
About University Teachers' Transmedia Profile <i>Anna Sánchez-Caballé, Juan González-Martínez</i>	69
Educating Digital Competence in Early Childhood. A Possible Model of Action <i>Maria Grazia Simone</i>	73
Digital Contexts Mediated Communication Between Teachers and Parents: a Transversal Research in a Multicultural School <i>Alessandro Soriani, Elena Pacetti</i>	77
Virtual Exchange in Teacher Education: New Challenges to Address Social Injustice and Foster Gender Equality <i>Roberta Trapè</i>	81
THEME 2	85
Decommodifying teacher (digital) education	
The Bridge Across, Not Over the Digital 'Stream': a Critical Digital Media Course for Pre-service Teachers <i>Pinar Ayyildiz</i>	87
Developing Professional Digital Competence in Collaborative Partnerships Between Teachers and Teacher Educators <i>Stine Brynildsen, Halvdan Haugsbakken, Susanne Kjekshus Koch</i>	91
Teachers' Experiences of Developing Professional Digital Competence by Participating at TeachMeets <i>Stine Brynildsen, Ilka Nagel, Irina Engeness</i>	95
Quality Culture and Knowledge Management: Learning Analytics to Improve Education and Training Services <i>Giovanna Del Gobbo, Glenda Galeotti</i>	99

Analytic Philosophy for a decommodified teacher training to coding <i>Margherita Di Stasio, Beatrice Donati, Matteo Bianchini</i>	103
Increased Legalisation and Reconfiguration of Education Into an Instrumental Commodity State? New Challenges for Nordic Teachers <i>Eyvind Elstad</i>	107
Dialectical Method and Theatre for the Training of Teachers in Citizenship Education <i>Francesco Fabbro, Colin Isham</i>	111
Digital Learning Culture at School: How to Promote it (also) Without Using Technology <i>Laura Carlotta Foschi, Graziano Cecchinato</i>	115
Challenges of Parents During Online Learning of Children in the Pandemic Period <i>Rita Loloci</i>	119
Challenges of Students' Art Education in Digital Environment at the Faculties of Teacher Education in Croatia <i>Svetlana Novaković, Jelena Blašković, Zlata Tomljenović</i>	123
First Year University Students Digital Competence Self-Perception <i>Anna Sánchez-Caballé, Mercè Gisbert-Cervera, Francesc Marc Esteve-Mon</i>	127
Student Teachers' Pedagogical Reasoning for Effective Technology Integration <i>Ottavia Trevisan, Marina De Rossi</i>	131
SYMPOSIUM – Digital Technology, Education Policy and the Commodification of Schools <i>Gianna Cappello, Juliana Elisa Raffaghelli, Elena Gabbi (discussant Maria Ranieri)</i>	135
THEME 3 Digital technology and equity for inclusive teaching	141
The Local Context and the Curriculum. An Identity for the Small and Rural Schools <i>Alessandra Anichini, Giuseppina Cannella, Rudi Bartolini</i>	143
Non-Believers in School: Beyond the Social Stigma with Media Education and Critical Thinking <i>Gianfranco Bandini</i>	147

The Bridge21 Framework: Impact on Teachers and Implications for Equitable, Inclusive Classrooms <i>Aibhín Bray, Jake Byrne, Brendan Tangney, Elizabeth Oldham</i>	151
Case Study: Analysing Twitter Sentiment in the Context of Anti-Bullying Campaign #Neklusē (Don't be silent!) in Latvia <i>Linda Curika, Zanda Rubene</i>	155
Innovative Approaches for the Inclusion of Each and Every One <i>Giuseppe Filippo Dettori, Barbara Lettieri</i>	159
Analytic Philosophy for a Decommodified Teacher Training to Coding <i>Margherita Di Stasio, Beatrice Donati, Beatrice Donati</i>	163
Self-Assessment of Digital Competence at the End of University Studies: Outgoing Profile of Prospective Teachers <i>Floriana Falcinelli, Mirko Susta</i>	167
Technology-Enhanced Learning as a Driver of Inclusive Approaches: A Cross-Case Analysis of Teacher Training Programmes <i>Laura Fedeli</i>	171
Toward a Broader Concept of Risky Play: Methods and Tools to Encourage Risk-Taking in ECEC and Primary School Context <i>Daniela Frison, Laura Menichetti</i>	175
Applying the Bifocal Modeling Framework in the Italian School System: "Making-Science" with Special Needs Students <i>Tamar Fuhrmann, Lorenzo Guasti, Jessica Niewint, Livia Macedo</i>	179
Reading Comprehension and Technologies for Students with Deafness <i>Cristina Gaggioli, Moira Sannipoli</i>	183
Inclusive Designing Through Educational Robotics. A Training Course for Pre-Service Support Teachers <i>Francesca Gratani, Lorella Giannandrea, Alessandra Renieri</i>	187
Presentations of Persons with Disabilities in Norwegian Textbooks for Primary School. A Contribution to an Inclusive School? <i>Marte Herrebrøden, Magne Skibsted Jensen, Rune Andreassen</i>	191
Digital Technology and Equity for Inclusive Teaching <i>Douha Jemai</i>	195
Before and After the Lockdown: Analysis of the Perceptions of a Group of Students Involved in an Educational Robotics Project <i>Beatrice Miotti, Daniela Bagattini</i>	199

Moving Forwards: Using Search Tools on The Classroom <i>Emiliana Murgia, Monica Landoni, Theo Huibers, Maria Soledad Pera</i>	203
Teachers' Perceptions of their Technology Skills their use of Technology in the Classroom, and the Factors that Influence Use <i>Moya O'Brien, Aisling Costello, Eileen Winter, Grainne Hickey</i>	207
Can Digital Education Provide an Effective Bridge Between Formal and Non-Formal Education? Experiences from Teachers and Youth Workers <i>Connie O'Regan, Bernadine Brady, Cornelia Connolly, Cliona Murray, Paul Flynn, Pat Dolan, Gerry Mac Ruairc</i>	211
Pleiade: A Playful and Participatory Approach to Teacher Professional Development on Social Inclusion <i>Donatella Persico, Marcello Passarelli, Francesca Dagnino, Flavio Manganello, Francesca Pozzi, Andrea Ceregini</i>	215
Strategies for Integrating Students with Disabilities in Presence and Distance Learning <i>Natasha Poroçani, Manjola Lumani Zaçellari</i>	219
On the relationship between ethics and simulations in teacher education in Israel <i>Amalia Ran</i>	223
Build to learn <i>Margherita Maria Sacco, Elena Liliana Vitti, Alberto Parola</i>	227
Educational Technologies, Social and Emotional Learning and School <i>Alessia Signorelli</i>	231
Making Sense of Collaborative Learning Practices in the ICTPED MOOC Ammar B. Singh	235
Pediatric Chronic Illness and School Experience: Technologies for Promoting Hospital-School Link <i>Lucrezia Tomberli, Andrea Smorti, Laura Vagnoli, Elena Amore, Francesca Maffei, Enrica Ciucci</i>	239
Teacher's Thinking About Sensory Impairments and Technologies: An Exploratory Study Within a Specialisation Course <i>Viviana Vinci</i>	243

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

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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 of the most important frameworks used in projects 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 (Kačínová, 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, health, cultural, awareness, and expression) for the 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.

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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