




Critical Education and Digital Media: A Binomial for the Exercising of Human Rights

Lucia Picarella*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5275-1111>

Abstract

The consideration of education as a social right, a human right, and a factor of social development offer possibilities for effective responses in terms of democratization, equality, and equity to the controversial socio-cultural and socio-economic effects and consequences of the digitization and platformisation of current societies. The scope of this article is the evaluation of Latin American critical edu-communication as a transformative and institutive instrument of practices that, through the integration of digital literacy with dialogic and conscientization strategies, open spaces of democratization and protection of human rights in a context characterized by strong inequalities and the digital divide. In this sense, the analysis through a qualitative methodology of a pilot case study makes it possible to offer necessary suggestions to promote digital media education strategies and the democratization of education.

Keywords: Critical Edu-communication, Education, Human Rights, Latin America, Media Literacy

Introduction

The debate on the recognition of education as a tool to strengthen and achieve freedoms and human rights is one of

* Lucia Picarella is a Senior Researcher and Professor at the Law Faculty of the Universidad Católica de Colombia. C-email: lpicarella@ucatolica.edu.co

Published Online: Nov 20, 2024.

ISSN (Print): 2520-7024; ISSN (Online): 2520-7032.

<https://reviewhumanrights.com>



the greatest challenges of the 21st century. It intersects multi-dimensionally with the macro-themes of the sociology of education¹, such as equity, inclusion, and the relationship with the sociocultural context of reference. As Durkheim argued, education is the only tool that allows for the creation of an effective relationship between the subject and the social system². Mangone also highlights how “the changing contexts and their higher complexity have raised the need to initiate a reflection on modernising innovation actions that have the capacity to provide social responses to the real needs of citizens and that, most importantly, are able to combine resources and quality standards [...] the problem of distributive justice links to the concept of equity.”³ In the world’s richest regions, an unprecedented event such as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic revealed the significant difficulties of guaranteeing equitable educational solutions to avoid long-term growth of cognitive and learning gaps. This led to studying possible collective agency measures in emergency situations to reduce inequalities through education care and human solidarity⁴. In other regions of the world, such as Latin American, this event not only greatly widened the traditional structural and systemic gaps, but also demonstrated that education continues to be a real privilege in this area.

Education conceived as a factor of social and cultural progress requires new perspectives that can strengthen its complete transformation from a privilege to a right, not only a social one but, first and foremost, a human one. The democratic and progressivist vision of education as a transformative social process for equality and social justice⁵, as an engine for participation, conscientization and emancipation⁶, of resistance and epistemological and cognitive democratisation⁷ would be fully realised. The vision of education as a process of human educability⁸ based on the equal and equitable empowerment of knowledge and skills is

connected to the importance emphasised by Cubeddu and Mangone of the implementation of a social justice education approach constitutive of a new cultural model of education oriented towards social justice and the valorisation of the social value of everyone⁹.

If the two great horizons of fundamental rights inescapably bind freedom and justice, with the latter being closely associated with equality¹⁰. The idea of their enforceability becomes of significant relevance when referring to education as a tool to achieve equity. This implies a further expression of the humanisation of law and the modalities of social pluralism.

Esping-Andersen *et al.* claim that currently none of the welfare models has been able to combine and guarantee equity in its forms of equal distribution and equal opportunities of access to resources¹¹, independently of income and for equal needs. Consequently, the consideration of education as a fundamental human right reinforces its connotation as an instrument of social equity and equal opportunities. It also includes the recognition of every social subject against any form of discrimination or exclusion as well as the revaluation of cultural diversity in opposition to homogenisation.

According to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), equity does not mean equal educational outcomes, but that differences in cognitive and learning outcomes do not depend on socio-economic status. In this perspective, states that do not invest in building an 'integral' education in the long term will be forced to suffer very high social and financial costs due to the failure of the education system¹². Equity and social justice through education become a resource, allowing for the achievement of other goals such as development and peace. Thus, fully manifesting education as an expression of a public value capable of establishing social links based on equitable redistributions, recognition of differentiated needs and social

inclusion. Redistributive equity, along with and the possibilities of accessing infrastructural resources and knowledge/education represent the core of the problem of the education/society relationship¹³. This is made even more complex by the dynamics of interdependence typical of globalised societies. The complexity of contemporary societies makes it imperative to emphasise equity and social justice guaranteed and transformed into praxis through education. Rawls stated how social justice is based on the principle of satisfying the freedom and needs of all people through the distribution of the main goods of society to all¹⁴. It is therefore impossible not to consider education as one of the most important public and social goods. If capitalist logics have eroded Keynesian visions and the principles of the welfare state¹⁵, it is through education, particularly through the visions of critical education, that it is possible to counterbalance the dynamics in action in our societies and strengthen the values and rights established by widening the spaces of democratisation and, consequently, achieve greater levels of social justice.

This article evaluates the possibilities that have been created in Latin America due to the strengthening and implementation of a new model of critical education to digital media. Critical counter-narratives that allow for a convergence between offline and online reality have been produced. Thus, transforming into praxis the vision of education as a tool for the extension and protection of human rights, freedoms, conscience and critical participation in the social and political arena directed, in severely unequal societies, to achieving equity.

Geographic focus and Methodology

The Latin American context is characterised by the significant presence of structural problems linked to systemic variables such as high social inequalities, high rates of extreme poverty

and low levels of schooling, internal violence and human rights violations. Especially during and after the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the digital and educational divide in Latin America emerged as the new face of inequality, reinforcing pre-existing unfairness. The loss of opportunities and rights associated with digital exclusion are related to the conditions of access and use of the Internet in a double sense, i.e geographic, socio-economic, gender, ethnic and other inequalities are determinants of different levels of access but, in turn, these inequalities can be deepened by unequal digital participation¹⁶. According to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean data, in 2023 around 30% of the population of Latin America does not have access to the internet¹⁷. By the latest data from the Observatory of Digital Development¹⁸ fixed broadband penetration in the region is below 20% of the population, compared to 40% in Europe. In terms of the quality of connections, the region is also below the world average in both fixed and mobile broadband. In addition, the digital divide by household income level also persists. In 2022, internet penetration in higher-income households was almost double that of lower-income households in some countries. Furthermore, 77% of urban households in Latin America and the Caribbean are connected, while in rural areas this percentage is only 38%. Clearly, Latin American governments face the challenge of bridging the digital divide, an issue that will be key not only for economic development but also for education. One of the main consequences of digital exclusion is unequal access to education, as the digital divide limits access to the resources necessary for training individuals and their subsequent integration into the labour market. This perpetuates the situation of exclusion and social division, as the digital divide prevents access to information, education and communication, thus creating ever deeper differences between communities. In this perspective, the choice of Latin

America as an interesting case study because this context is in constant tension between democratising practices and experiences, demands for social justice, guarantees of freedoms and fundamental rights, including the opportunity for education as a right for all. This article employed a qualitative approach based on the pilot case study to demonstrate that Latin American critical education can be an important opportunity to transform into praxis the vision of education as a tool for the extension and protection of human rights for the achievement of real equity, complementing digital literacy with dialogic and conscientious strategies. The qualitative approach and the use of case-study methods is appropriate for testing or developing theories because it allows for conceptual validity, facilitates the exploration of causal mechanisms in individual cases with fine detail. Bennett and Elman note that the importance of qualitative methods lies in the fact that “case study methods, especially the combination of process tracing and typological theorizing, have considerable advantages... these methods’ advantages [are] in studying complex, relatively unstructured, and infrequent phenomena that lie at the heart of the subfield”¹⁹.

In the context of this article this methodology is justified because makes it possible to emphasise the importance of developing more wide-ranging approaches centred on critical, dialogic and argumentative reflection, to foster not only the acquisition of skills and abilities, but above all a greater awareness of the functioning and effects of digital media, platforms and social networks at both socio-cultural and political-economic levels. And furthermore, the timeframe considered in this article, i.e. the actuality characterised by platformised societies and digitalisation, highlights that the case study of Latin American critical mass media education is evidently directed towards the development of institutive and transformative educational-communicative practices to open

spaces of democratisation capable of closing gaps and divides and pushing towards a more equitable and just future.

Education, rights and digital media

The characteristics of contemporary societies warrant a process of socialisation and dynamic adaptation of the social subject to current transformations²⁰. The different approaches of the sociology of education have focused on the problems of change that characterise the relationship between education and society. The interactionist-communicationist approach is based on the consideration of society as communication and intersubjectivity. For interactionists, therefore, social reality is a process of construction and symbolic re-signification by the subject. According to the propositions of the interactionists, the relationship between social reality and education is not based on the equilibrium of Dürkheimian functionalism or the conflictuality dominated by Marxist and Weberian power relations, but rather on the recognition of the subject's capacity for collective signification construction. A capability that is transformative of reality and is directly linked to the visions of Nussbaum and Sen in their consideration of the capability approach²¹ as a prerequisite for the construction of solidaristic societies oriented towards social justice and equity, in view of the starting point of this approach, namely the human dignity and welfare of people.

A focus on the issue of social injustice implies an analysis of the set of socio-cultural, political-economic, and educational trends aimed at broadening and strengthening the rights and freedoms of the marginalised segments. These dynamics must be observed and ensured through effective and equitable governance tools to protect welfare and increase the opportunities to access and acquire skills and competences. The aim is to give all people life chances²² by progressively reducing the inequalities between social classes because, referring again to the Rawlsian vision, the complexity of the

relationship between education and society is inherent in the evaluation of the concept of equality of opportunity. This concept cannot be seen as an indemnification mechanism for economic inequalities since this perpetuates systematic inequalities in opportunities for access as well as in aspirations and success outcomes.

The Preamble of the UNESCO Constitution establishes that states have the duty to guarantee and promote culture and education for freedom, peace, and justice since this is indispensable for human dignity²³. From this declaration, education and culture are stated in the constitutional texts of most countries of the world as a social right and are recognised as an indispensable element for the exercise of freedom and human dignity, i.e. as the supreme aims of a constitutional welfare state. Education is enhanced to the status of a human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁴, through the statement in Article 26 “Everyone has the right to education”. This article also emphasises the gratuitousness and compulsoriness of education for the full development of the human personality and the consolidation of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The statement in Article 26 is reinforced by its interpretation in conjunction with Article 2 - the freedoms and rights enunciated in the Declaration are due to all people, without distinction, and with Article 22 - everyone, as a member of society, has the right to the enjoyment of the social, cultural, and economic rights necessary for the full development of his or her personality and dignity.

The recognition of the social right to education as a human right has given a prominent role to education as a concrete and specific tool for the conquest and realization of inestimable values such as freedom, social justice and equity, peace and democracy, tolerance and inclusion. According to Morin, the social construction of a democratic culture must be based on

educational processes that promote dialogue, pluralism and the understanding of differences. These values must be included in the school curriculum²⁵. The social challenge is both educational and cultural. It is therefore essential to build alternative models and educational processes for the fomenting of rational and conscious citizens. They should be implemented at a cultural level by building counter-critical narratives that influence the development of dialogical and communicative processes aimed at the transformation and re-recognition of social reality in terms of a democratization of the concepts of equity, rights and freedom, along with sustainability.

The actions of the various social actors involved in the Extension of Human Rights to Education project, who are working on the amendment/supplementation of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the sense of a progressive enlargement and democratisation of the human right to education, are moving in this direction²⁶. Objectives 4 and 16 of the 2030 Agenda, aimed at the correlation between education-communication and education-information, set the goal of permanent educational opportunities for all. This is to enable new generations not only to be agents of change but also to build a different future. The characteristics of contemporary societies drive these reflections on the role played by ecosystems and digital technologies but not without concerns and controversies.

Kurzweil highlighted the path of society towards the so-called technological singularity, with it being the overcoming by technology of the human capacities of understanding and control²⁷. Joy emphasized the urgency of a critical conscious and ethical reflection on the development and use of technologies²⁸. Since the second half of the last century, there has been a debate on the relationship between education and technology, but the question of the effects and benefits²⁹ is still

open. The 1982 Grünwald Declaration, recognized as the cornerstone of media education, states that “political and educational systems must assume the obligation to promote a critical understanding of communication phenomena among citizens”³⁰. Starting from this Declaration, the importance of media education is spreading as a premise for the formation of democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, a vision that is not always reflected in effective educational policies. To strengthen this vision, the European Union has stressed the need for citizens to acquire media skills with the aim of making European society more active, critical and participatory. Since 2007, the European Commission has promoted different programs such as “Media”, “Media Mundus” and “Creative Europe”³¹. This highlights the importance of including media education in educational plans at all school levels, to ensure that all children and adolescents born in the digital age achieve media literacy through formal education.

The objective of media literacy promoted at a European level is to foster the acquisition of skills that allow everyone in today’s society to become conscious users of media and technology. They should also be aware of the right of access to information, intercultural dialogue as well as the importance of the ethical use of information technologies to communicate and interact democratically. This vision is reinforced and complemented in terms of social justice by projects linked to the European “HORIZON” programme, such as the “SMOOTH” project (2021-2024) that, empirically exploring the notion of educational commons, has promoted and accelerated the inclusive potential of education in addressing and reversing situations of marginalization and isolation of vulnerable social segments³².

One of the first studies related to media literacy is the Street analysis based on the identification of an autonomous model, understood in the traditional way as the acquisition of

skills-capability-competences detached from contextual specificities. It is an ideological (or sociocultural) model that in opposition to the previous one focuses on the components, practices, and socio-cultural commitment of the contexts of reference³³. This view is further highlighted by Buckingham who frames the effective implementation of media education and media literacy in and through the sociocultural practices of different social realities³⁴. A third model of media literacy is defined by Bèlisle as intellectual empowerment when referring to the acquisition of skills and abilities capable of producing a transformation, more precisely emancipation, in knowledge and the way of thinking.

The concept of competence assumes, as stated by Calvani, Fini and Ranieri, a transversal and three-dimensional connotation characterized by the interweaving of technical/metacognitive, knowledge/capacity, ethical/social dimensions³⁵. This is followed by Potter's reflection on media education as a defence mechanism against the risk of simple incorporation/absence of news processing caused by the abundant flows of information that spread rapidly in the digital ecosystems. Against this risk, which affects our way of thinking, the author highlights the importance of considering media education as an opportunity to distinguish the boundary between the real and the virtual world³⁶. Simona Tirocchi highlights how the cancellation of this border, and consequently the elimination of the limit between media/digital representation and personal identity requires a more effective socialization of digital media through the strengthening of media education approaches to foster a greater understanding of media content and codes³⁷. This is even more relevant in the light of the operating logic of the network society³⁸ and the platform society³⁹, in which personal and social relationships are shaped by algorithms.

At present, “the community is not a community of meanings, but a virtual community (...) therefore the elimination of communication in the information environment is seen as a condition for the exhaustion of pedagogical subjectivity”⁴⁰. This could lead to a form of anesthetized education and communication, against which we must oppose a vision of education and communication as a sensitive and participatory experience, dialectic and dialogical, structured in educational paths of impact on the community. Gianna Cappello and Marianna Siino support the importance of considering education as a common good. They decline the notion of educational commons in the field of media education reflecting on the potential of educational processes to foster sustainable social changes over time under the guidance of the concepts of equality, creativity and practices of collective participation⁴¹.

Alongside the theoretical reflections and defining debates, the education-digital media-society relationship raises interesting controversies about the real effectiveness of media literacy as well as about the digital divide. With reference to the first question, Bulger and Davison consider it naive to identify media literacy as the only strategy against the circulation of fake news and post-truths that circulate in digital ecosystems. It is a strategy that to be effective in the long term in societies must be complemented with other strategies that favour the development of critical thinking⁴², along with contextual and systemic media education approaches⁴³. If young people with a high level of digital literacy can identify false web pages or fake news, they cannot develop a logical and rational reflection on the contents of the same information⁴⁴. This must lead to a reflection on the superficial and unconscious internalization of literacy techniques.

According to Gálík, digital ecosystems, platforms and cyberspace influence educational processes in terms of

organisational-planning and learning-understanding of information. They encourage a shift away from a discursive capacity in favour of the immediacy of associative thinking simply based on images⁴⁵. Critical and conscious digital media education is therefore indispensable, with it not only being based on the ability or use of technologies. This requires targeted educational and socio-political interventions to ensure, simultaneously, the acquisition of knowledge and skills for an effective use, along with a critical and conscious reflexivity due to the impact at a social level. This is related to the second open question, which relates to digital inequalities and their effects in terms of the right to education and social justice. The practices of using new technologies and digital platforms offer greater possibilities for inclusion and integration through new opportunities for sociability and participatory citizenship⁴⁶. They also allow for the development of new skills, of learning methods and interactions summarised in the concept of transmedia literacy⁴⁷. However, the controversial effects of increased exclusion and marginalisation caused by the digital divide should not be forgotten.

Starting in the 1990s, inequalities in the possibilities of material access to digital technologies began to be considered in academic and political circles as a relevant form of social inequality. The consequences of this form of inequality are intensifying despite a reduction in the gaps in the opportunities for material access to the Internet⁴⁸. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2021 considered digital inequality to be one of the greatest global threats of actuality⁴⁹ due to the problem of the gap having transcended the basic question of accessibility. It has gone to a second-level⁵⁰ based on the observation of the differential use of digital media due to the different socio-cultural resources of the subjects.

According to Comunello, the concept of the digital divide should not be used in a materially and technologically dichotomous sense, but should focus on the cultural, political, and economic correlations of the phenomenon to avoid its incorrect use⁵¹. In societies characterised by a significant digitalisation and platformisation of the communication and educational processes, digital differences and inequalities produce exclusion and social marginalisation. They deprive people of the right to develop their capacities, reducing their chances of inclusion and participation in the economic and public sphere.

We have returned to the starting point. Inequalities in opportunities of access to resources and of intellectual and educational growth not only generate a limitation in terms of guaranteeing rights and freedoms that are fundamental to human dignity, but they also have a significant impact on society. They exacerbate and amplify closely interrelated problems such as racial and gender discrimination and elevated social stratification⁵². The responsiveness to the challenge imposed by the era of platformisation is therefore played on several closely related fronts. They include a just and inclusive distribution of resources and opportunities of access, investments in infrastructure and in digital literacy/training as well as robust educational policies centred on the promotion of human dignity and social justice. It is an alternative and critical model of education in digital technologies based on the recognition of education as a source of socio-economic progress and social stability through investment in the development of human and social capital, and as a tool for the democratisation, achievement/strengthening and exercising of greater rights and freedoms.

The case of “Educomunicación” in Latin America

According to Buckingham, orienting the complexity of technological and digital ecosystems towards visions of social justice and sustainability needs a broader approach of media education to promote an awareness and responsibility. The real goal of education must be to stimulate the imagination of the possibilities of transforming the future through the exploration of alternative paths⁵³. Since the second half of the last century, on both sides of the ocean, a dynamic development of community education-participation practices aimed at greater inclusion, representation and empowerment of people has been observed.

Considering the necessities and transformations imposed by the digitalisation of societies, the role of edu-communication as a democratising ‘leverage’⁵⁴ has become fundamental, especially in urban contexts characterised by situations of significant vulnerability. Edu-communication is a field of study based on the Latin American theoretical currents of emancipatory education, popular communication and cultural studies. The main features of the “*educación*” (edu-communication) regard the recognition of intersubjectivity as a critical element for understanding interactions between people and media. They also focus on cultural communicative practices and political dimensions, as well as on the person rather than the technological device.

In complex contexts such as the Latin American scenario, characterised by extreme systemic and structural inequalities, the differences in the opportunities of access and distribution of resources are so significant that they translate into real social segregation⁵⁵ based on a differential selection linked to social class⁵⁶. Therefore, the concepts of inclusion, protection of human rights and social justice as factors of development and social stability frame the discourse on the centrality of human dignity as well as the construction through education of societies and subjects that are conscious and free of

oppression. Social claims in Latin America have historically been based on Freirean critical education practices. Considering digitised scenarios, transformative educational praxis is leading a reflection on the importance of critical perspectives as alternatives to simple forms of media literacy that are instrumental and functional to the capitalist mercantilisation of the educational and communicative processes. The characteristics of the Latin American context also make the problem of the digital divide much more evident. The debate is incubated in a context of elevated social injustice, material precarity and structural gaps in access to resources, infrastructure, and education.

The Latin American reflection is centred on a renewed vision of *educación* (edu-communication), which places more emphasis on the critical aspect. This model does not only refer to digital media literacy, but above all to the knowledge to learn to interact with them by developing critical ‘filters’ to reduce the emotional vulnerability on which algorithms, polarising bubbles and obviously neo-liberal socio-economic and educational logics operate. In Latin America, reflections on *educación* developed between the 1970s and 1980s, in the wake of the interest of international organisations such as UNESCO, on communication policies as an element of development for third world countries. At the 1979 Paris summit held at UNESCO headquarters, it was agreed that “education in media education includes (...) all forms of study, learning and teaching at all levels (...) and in all circumstances, the history, creation, use and evaluation of the media as a practical art and technique, as well as the place of the media in society, their social impact, the consequences of media communication, participation, the change it brings about in the way we perceive, the role of creative work and access to the media”⁵⁷.

Latin American *educomunicación* is opposed to the traditional vision of media literacy (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) centred on the instrumental use, application, and management of applied technology in a given field or sector for the acquisition of skills in accessing and producing information to achieve specific results⁵⁸. The Latin American vision shifts towards forms of education/pedagogy of communication. It goes towards the dialogical approaches of Freire's critical education and Liberation Theology, without forgetting the proximity with the critical reflection of the Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies⁵⁹. According to Aparici, *educomunicación* "includes, without being reduced to this alone, knowledge of the multiple languages and means by which personal, group and social communication is realised. It also includes the formation of a critical sense, intelligent facing communication processes and messages to discover one's own cultural values and truth"⁶⁰. For Kaplún, *educomunicación* "will play the role of supplier of support materials but conceived no longer as mere transmitters-informants but as generators of dialogue, intended to activate analysis, comparison and participation of the students and not to replace them"⁶¹.

These two definitions highlight the framing of the vision of Latin American *educomunicación* in the Freirean tradition of dialogue and criticism, recognizing communication as an essential part of learning, socialization and the construction of knowledge. The goal of the Latin American vision of *educomunicación* is therefore the creation and collective co-construction through the symbolic exchange and flow of meanings. It is in strong opposition to instrumental visions of literacy to digital technologies, that according to Aparici, Correa García and Gutierréz are symptoms of the neoliberal educational model directed to the standardization of a single thought⁶² by the simplistic transfer of skills.

The assumptions of the Latin American perspective of education refer to the participatory nature, the creative and transformative possibilities, as well as the knowledge of the mediating means and codes to establish the education process. Based on these assumptions, according to Latin American education, digital ecosystems should not be understood only in its technical aspects, but above all it should be understood as a community of practices⁶³. It is a social learning methodology based on group actions that aim at creating knowledge and transformation through dialogue and research.

The most recent reflections on critical educación take up Freire's theories on the liberation of the oppressed through a critical dialogic action⁶⁴. Its development transcends the field of communication and is framed in the cultural and political field, with the objective of building a communicational citizenship. Educación thus becomes a critical socio-political project, based on the assumption of the involvement of the concepts of counter-hegemony and power/subalternity in the structure of conceptual interpretations.

Based on these concepts, it is necessary to re-problematize the interactions in digital ecosystems. Critical education in digital media must be understood as a field of social intervention⁶⁵, as a practice directed to build and strengthen participatory communicative ecosystems. In these ecosystems, critical awareness must not only allow for a simple re-transformation from consumer to citizen, but also train aware citizens. The action of producing a (digital) content is not synonymous of active and democratic participation. The core of the issue of critical Latin American educación therefore focuses on the understanding of hegemonic forms of production and dissemination of messages, information and content. It also focuses on the interconnections between power, communication, market, digital ecosystems and

platforms, on the confusion between social relations and connectivity, and the effects in terms of marginalisation and exclusion that they produce on an individual and collective level.

The Latin American critical educomunicación strengthens the vision of education as a tool at the service of knowledge and inclusion, democratisation and justice and social innovation, but above all as an area of transformative practice to obtain an extension of the guarantees of fundamental rights and freedoms. An interesting example is the project DigiMENTE, the first free educational program in digital media education for middle and secondary schools, developed for Spanish-speaking Latin America in alliance with Google News Initiative, and with the NGOs Movilizadorio, Teach For All, Enseña por Argentina, Enseña por Colombia and Enseña por México. This project is openly inspired by the visions of critical educomunicación. Its aim is to train citizens capable of discerning sources of information, creating and disseminating quality content, while understanding the risks of complex digital ecosystems. They should also participate in society in a responsible, critical and conscious way.

The four modules that make up the programme are designed in a way that is perfectly in line with the theories of critical education and of critical edu-communication. They symbolically have the shape of a circle (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. DigiMENTE programme framework



Source: <https://digimente.org/>

In reference to the visions of critical educomunicación, the first module is entitled *Evaluar Información críticaMENTE* (Evaluate Information Critically), the second *Producir Contenidos creativaMENTE* (Produce Content Creatively), the third *Participar activaMENTE* (Active Participation), and the last *Pensar y reflexionar éticaMENTE* (Think and Reflect Ethically).

The prerequisite of each module is a question-guide, since the external items that make up the circle develop in a dialogical and participatory way. For the first module, the question is “what does the information say and why does it say it?”. It guides a critical reflection on the blue coloured items (investigate the origin, detectives and clues, compare the source, hack the propaganda). Whereas, for the second module, the question is “how do I create and disseminate content?”, with the dialogical reflection developing around the pink items (the fine print (that no one reads), remix contents, build the story, your voice your story). The items of the third module are coloured yellow (we are more, #PowerfullHashtags, the audience of my story, your opportunity in the media) and are based on the question “what does it mean to be part of a community”. Finally, the critical reflection of the fourth module is based on the question “which

norms and values guide my life in the digital media?” and the items of green colour (my media responsibility, I accept term and condition, in other people’s shoes, our footprint in the media).

The program is characterized by a mixed approach, with it combining technical-functional skills along with critical and dialogical skills. It has been implemented since the second semester of 2020 in schools associated with Enseña for Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. It has had a significant impact on the ability of students participating in the program to critically evaluate digital information, identify the purpose and veracity of the message. It has also led to a greater willingness to dialogue and reflect on responsibilities as well as the rights and freedoms in the production and dissemination of digital content.

The future objectives of the programme include transforming itself from a pilot project into a critical educational strategy for digital media throughout the region, strengthening the curriculum and seeking new alliances aimed at the promotion of democratic culture. It also includes the synergistic construction of solutions to improve the quality, inclusion and equity in education⁶⁶.

Educomunicación could represent an important playing field in a context such as Latin America that is under constant tension between democratizing practices, demands for social justice, guarantees of freedoms and fundamental rights. The historical experience of the region in the processes of popular and community critical education applied in communication and technology could represent an interesting attempt to respond to the needs of digitalized and platformized societies. It could also try to counterbalance the risks and consequences of digital ecosystems.

A critical and dialogical reflection of educomunicación promotes the co-construction of spaces of democratization

characterized by the constant union between *formación de formadores* (education of trainers, teachers and professionals) qualified through the learning continuum acquisition of skills and abilities/training/research/digital methodological innovation, and *multiplicadores de formación* (training multipliers) in their own social realities through the union of education/communication/building of culture and social relations. It is obviously a vision directed towards the development of educational, communicative, behavioural constitutive and institutional practices of a fairer and just future.

Conclusions

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is defined by UNESCO as a combined set of skills, knowledge and attitudes aimed at learning and applying critical thinking to the creation and dissemination of information and digital content⁶⁷. The goal of digital media education is to promote forms of critical literacy that can be transformed into an instrument of conquest. It also includes a strengthening of the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, democratic culture, active and conscious participation in the social and public sphere. This is a challenge which must be guided by educational processes. In a situation of social “imbecilization”⁶⁸ due to the logic of platformization which favours the mechanization of activities, of relational experiences and the fragmentation of information, a critical reconceptualization of digital media education strategies is necessary to address the challenges of the 21st century.

Interesting proposals come from numerous media education and media literacy projects funded by the EU. On the Latin American front, they come from the visions and strategies of critical educomunicación. In both cases, the most recent reflections highlight the importance of developing broader and more focused approaches to critical, dialogical, and argumentative reflection. This is to foster not only the

acquisition of skills and abilities, but above all, a greater awareness of the functioning and effects of digital media, platforms and social networks, both socio-cultural and political-economic.

Critical and conscientious approaches and methods of media education, media literacy, edu-communication could represent valuable tools to combat the controversial dynamics and effects of digital ecosystems, directing their governance towards the transformation and democratisation of societies through the training of conscious citizens. This will be possible only if, in all countries of the world, there is a clear political and public commitment to the enhancement of education as a fundamental human right, as an instrument of inclusion and the exercise of greater freedoms and social rights, and as a long-term investment that will determine the economic, political and social development of the country.

The transformation into praxis of the vision of education as a fundamental human right is evidently based on the concept of social justice. For it to be really implemented, there is the need for a fair redistribution of resources linked to the prerequisite of ensuring equity in the opportunities of access to education, for all people, regardless of their starting economic and social condition, and at all levels.

The democratization of education also implies a re-signification of the whole educational field in a humanist sense and not only professionalizing. The resilient and transformative potential of every person is expressed if there is a social consciousness about their role in society. This awareness is the result of a reconceptualization in a critical sense of the educational and communicative processes so that different alternatives can be built. Other worlds are possible if we find different ways of thinking about them, but to this end the consolidation of education as a fundamental human right is the *conditio sine qua non*.

Notes

¹Saha L. Lawrence, "Sociology of Education," in *21st Century Education A Reference Handbook*, ed. Thomas L. Good, vol. 2 (California: Sage Publications Inc, 2008), 299–307.

²Émile Durkheim, *Éducation et sociologie* (Paris: PUF, 1922).

³Emiliana Mangone, "I Processi Educativi per l'inclusione Nell'era Della Network Society," (p.42). in *Formazione e Ricerca per Una Didattica Inclusiva*, ed. Sibilio M. and Aiello P. (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2015), 41–61

⁴Maddalena Colombo et al., *Education & Emergency in Italy: How the Education System Reacted to the First-Wave of Covid-19* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2022).

⁵See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, ed. 1997).

⁶See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

⁷See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Una Epistemología del Sur. La reinención del conocimiento y la emancipación social* (Buenos Aires: Clacso/Siglo XXI Editores, 2009).

⁸Giuditta Alessandrini, *La pedagogia di Martha Nussbaum. Approccio alle capacità e sfide educative* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014).

⁹Francesca Cubeddu and Emiliana Mangone, "The Social Justice Education Approach: Towards a New Cultural Model of Education?," *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 16, no. 1 (2024): 113–29. Doi: 10.14658/PUPJ-IJSE-2024-1-6

¹⁰See Gustavo Zagrebelsky, *Il diritto mite. Legge, diritti, giustizia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992).

¹¹Gøsta Esping-Andersen et al., (eds.), *Why We Need a New Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹²OECD, "Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility" (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/equity-in-education_9789264073234-en.html.

¹³Emiliana Mangone, "Beyond the Micro–Macro Opposition: The Multidimensionality of Educational Processes" in *Educational Contexts and Borders through a Cultural Lens Looking Inside, Viewing Outside* ed. Marsico G., Dazzani V., Ristum M. and de Souza Bastos A. C. (Cham: Springer, 2015), 53–63.

¹⁴John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap press of Harvard University, 1971).

¹⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World* (New York and London: OR Books, 2020).

¹⁶ Ellen Helsper, *The Digital Disconnect: Causes and Consequences of Digital Inequalities* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021).

¹⁷ CEPAL llama a cerrar la brecha digital de género. Available at [https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/cepal-llama-cerrar-la-brecha-digital-genero-fomentar-la-participacion-mas-mujeres#:~:text=La%20CEPAL%20insta%20a%20los,el%20desarrollo%20y%20conocimiento%20tecnol%C3%B3gico.\(8/03/2023\)](https://www.cepal.org/es/comunicados/cepal-llama-cerrar-la-brecha-digital-genero-fomentar-la-participacion-mas-mujeres#:~:text=La%20CEPAL%20insta%20a%20los,el%20desarrollo%20y%20conocimiento%20tecnol%C3%B3gico.(8/03/2023)).

¹⁸ Observatorio de Desarrollo Digital, Brechas de conectividad como factor de exclusión. Available at [https://desarrollodigital.cepal.org/es/datos-y-hechos/brechas-de-conectividad-como-factor-de-exclusion\(02/02/2024\)](https://desarrollodigital.cepal.org/es/datos-y-hechos/brechas-de-conectividad-como-factor-de-exclusion(02/02/2024)).

¹⁹ Andrew Bennet and Colin Elman, "Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield" *Comparative Political Studies* 40 no. 2 (2007): 170-195. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006296346>

²⁰ Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1964).

²¹ Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.). *Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²² Ralf Dahrendorf, *The Modern Social Conflict: An Essay on the Politics of Liberty* (New York: Grove Pr., 1988).

²³ Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Adopted in London on 16 November 1945. Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>.

²⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A). Available at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

²⁵ Edgar Morin, "Intolerancia y Diversidad Cultural", *Revista de la Universidad de México*, 15, no. 1 (2010): 12-19.

²⁶ Project Extension of Human Rights to Education (Düsseldorf: PoliTeknik, 2021).

²⁷ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (USA: Penguin Publishing Group, 2006).

²⁸ Bill Joy, "Why the Future doesn't Need Us", *Wired Magazine*, 2000. Available at <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html>.

²⁹ Among other see Max Giardina (eds.), *Interactive Multimedia Learning Environments: Human Factors and Technical Considerations on Design Issues* (New York: Springer Verlag, 1992).

³⁰ Available at <https://milobs.pt/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/The-Gr%C3%BCnwald-Declaration-on-Media-Education.pdf>

³¹ European Commission, *A European Approach to Media Literacy in the Digital Environment* (Brussels: EU, 2007); European Commission, *EU: Digital Literacy Review, 2008*, Available at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm.

³² Gianna Cappello et al., (eds.), *Educational Commons. Democratic Values, Social Justice and Inclusion in Education* (Chaim: Springer, 2024).

³³ Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

³⁴ According to Buckingham, media education is the process of teaching and learning in the media, while media literacy is the result of this process in terms of knowledge and skills learned during this process. See David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2003); David Buckingham, "Digital Media Literacies: Rethinking Media Education in the Age of Internet", *Research in Comparative and International Education* 2 no. 1 (2007): 43-45.

³⁵ Antonio Calvani, Antonio Fini, Maria Ranieri (eds.), *Valutare la competenza digitale* (Trento: Erickson, 2011).

³⁶ James W. Potter, *Media Literacy* (Los Angeles: Sage Knowledge, 2013).

³⁷ Simona Tirocchi, *Sociologie della Media Education: Giovani e media al tempo dei nativi digitali* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2015).

³⁸ The network society is characterized by the consequences of technological innovation and a change in capitalist structures, and especially for cultural transformations that are based on individual freedoms and social autonomy through which to express identity claims. See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

³⁹ The platform society is characterized as the place/ places in which to exchange communicative practices, forms of togetherness and participation in public life and also technologies that allow both individuals (individuals or collectives) as for the institutions to relate and achieve their goals. See José van Dijck, Martijn De Waal, Thomas

Poell, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴⁰ Cristina Corea and Ignacio Lewkowicz, *Pedagogía del aburrido: escuelas destituidas, familias perplejas* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2011, 41).

⁴¹ The authors clarify the difference between common goods understood as “commons”, that is the set of material and intangible resources, and common goods understood as common, related to the processes of resource governance. See Gianna Cappello and Marianna Siino, *Educational Commons: Pratiche educative di comunità, disuguaglianze e partecipazione* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2022).

⁴² Monica Bulger and Patrick Davison, “The Promises, Challenges, and Futures of Media Literacy”, *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 10 no. 1 (2018): 1-21.

⁴³ Gianna Cappello, “Fake news e Media Education. Note per una prospettiva di analisi e di intervento sistemica e contestuale” in *I saperi della comunicazione nell'era della post-verità* eds. Rizzuto F. and Vaccaro S. (Palermo: Palermo University Press, 2021), 49-65.

⁴⁴ See among other Marianne Bissonnette, Pierre Chastenay, Chantal Francoeur, “Exploring Adolescents’ Critical Thinking Aptitudes When Reading About Science in the News”, *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 13 no. 1 (2021): 1-13.

⁴⁵ Slavomir Gálik, “Influence of Cyberspace on Changes in Contemporary Education”, *Communication Today*, 8 no 1 (2017): 30-38.

⁴⁶ See among other Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 2009); and Danah Boyd, “The Significance of Social Software”, in *Blog Talks Reloaded: Social Software Research & Cases* eds. Burg T.N. and Schmidt J. (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2007), 15-30.

⁴⁷ Simona Tirocchi and Roberto Serpieri, “Piattaforme, adolescenti e forme di soggettivazione. Una lettura foucaultiana del progetto Transmedia Literacy”, *Mediascapes Journal* no. 16 (2020): 208-222; Carlos Scolari et al., “Transmedia literacy in the new media ecology: Teens’ transmedia skills and informal learning strategies”, *El profesional de la información*, 27 no. 4 (2018): 801-812.

⁴⁸ Jan A.G.M. van Dijk, J. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society* (London: Sage Knowledge, 2005). On the digital divide see also: Sara Bentivegna, *Disuguaglianze digitali: Le*

nuove forme di esclusione nella società dell'informazione (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2009).

⁴⁹ World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2021* (16th Edition, 2021). Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/global-risks-report-2021/>.

⁵⁰ Eszter Hargittai, "Second Level Digital Divide: Differences in People's Online Skills", *First Monday*, 7 no. 4 (2002).

⁵¹ Francesca Comunello, *Oltre il digital divide: tecnologie abilitanti e new media literacy*, in *Dal digital divide ai media sociali. Le nuove sfide della comunicazione pubblica* eds. Masini Maurizio, Lovari Alessandro, Sabrina Benenati (Roma: Bonanno, 2011), 111-125.

⁵² Raymond Boudon, *L'inegalite des chances* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973).

⁵³ David Buckingham, *The Media Education Manifesto* (Cambridge: PolityPress, 2019).

⁵⁴ Andrea Volterran and Maria Cristina Antonucci, "A Tale of Two Cities in Local Democratic Innovation: The Experiences of the Participatory Budget in Milan and the Local Community Development in Reggio Calabria from the Perspective of Edu-Communication", *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies* 18, no. 1 (2022): 1-14.

⁵⁵ On the concept of social segregation see Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les heritiers, Les etudiants et la culture* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964); and Robert Mare, "Change and Stability in Educational Stratifications", *American Sociological Review* 46 (1981): 72-87.

⁵⁶ Alain Girard, Henri Bastide, "La stratification sociale et la democratisation de l'enseignement", *Population* 1 (1963): 9-48.

⁵⁷ Zaghoul Morsy (eds), *La educación en materia de comunicación* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984, 8).

⁵⁸ Patricia Aufderheide, *Media Literacy: A Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy* (Washington: Aspen Institute, Communications and Society Program, 1993); Pete Fraser and Jonathan Wardle (eds), *Current Perspectives in Media Education: Beyond the Manifesto* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2013).

⁵⁹ Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, "Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core Concepts, Debates, Organizations, and Policy", *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26 no. 3 (2005): 369-86.

⁶⁰ Roberto Aparici (eds.), *Educomunicación: más allá del 2.0* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2010, 9).

⁶¹ Mario Kaplún, *Una pedagogía de la comunicación* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1998, 244).

⁶² Roberto Aparici (eds.), *Comunicación educativa en la sociedad de la información* (Madrid: UNED, 2003); Ramón Ignacio Correa García, *La sociedad mesmerizada: Medios, nuevas tecnologías y conciencia crítica en educación* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2001); Alfonso Gutiérrez, *Alfabetización digital: Algo más que ratones y teclas* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2003).

⁶³ Etienne Wenger, *Comunidades de práctica: Aprendizaje, significado e identidad* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2001).

⁶⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2005).

⁶⁵ Ismar Soares, "Educomunicação e Educação Midiática: vertentes históricas de aproximação entre comunicação e educação", *Comunicação e Educação* 19 no. 19 (2014): 15-26.

⁶⁶ DigiMENTE, Informe ejecutivo. Educación mediática para América Latina, sept. 2021, Available at <https://digimente.org/>

⁶⁷ UNESCO, Media and information literacy, 2018. Available at <https://bit.ly/2TKTTzP>

⁶⁸ Guilherme Goulart Righetto, Enrique Muriel-Torrado, Elizete Vieira Vitorino, "'Imbecilization' in the Disinformation Society: What can Information Literacy do about it?", *Investigación Bibliotecológica* 35 no 87 (2021): 33-55.