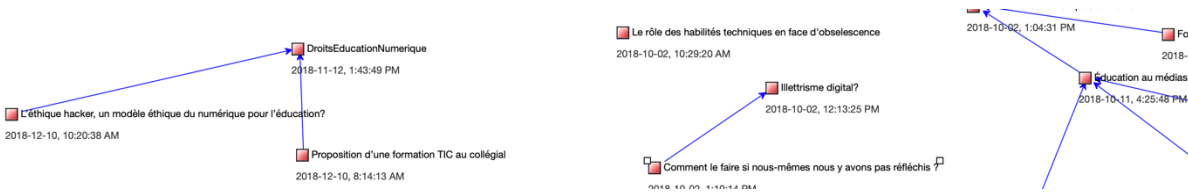


The networked community of the workshop seminar TEN-7000 (Fall 2018),
Faculty of Education, Laval University



Declaration of Principles Regarding the Right to Digital Education

TEN 7000's Workshop Seminar and
Networked Community (Fall 2018)
Faculty of Education
Laval University

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To whom it may concern,

Objective: Declaration of Principles Regarding the Right to Digital Education

From the freedom of expression to fake news, passing through the democratisation of knowledge and culture and ultimately leading to the use of personal data for political and advertising gains, the digital transformation currently taking place, in which children and adults are all involved, has given rise to many issues.

Thus, at a time when the reality of citizenship is becoming more and more marked, influenced and even conditioned by digital technology; how, as a society, do we plan on overseeing this transformation in order to guarantee the respect and protection of fundamental human rights, particularly those of children?

In response to situations mediated¹ by digital tools and data used by adolescents; we, as master's students studying in the class *Apprentissage en réseau*, wanted to contribute to this discussion by means of a knowledge building process. The current text represents the principal artifact produced by this process.

Founded on the idea that, the sharing of our own work and reflections allowed us to define common and uniting perspectives, it has become apparent to us that a declaration of principles in favor of the right to an education of the digital is crucial.

Ergo, this document concerns all people who have been affected by the changes and challenges linked to the digital world, particularly those who are involved in the education sector. Essentially, we wish for this declaration of principles to provide food for thought and guide the actions of those who wish to take concrete steps in order to foster the development of citizen skills in digital literacy.

Sincerely,

The co-signatories of the Declaration for the Right to Digital Education

Audet, Louis
Boulay, Marie-France
Camara, Doudou

Doyon, Jessica
Johnson, Quinn
Mazerolle, Anne-Sophie
Suarez Ramon, Luisa Fernanda

Under the supervision of:
Thérèse Laferrière

¹ See Annex 1



The Current Digital Landscape

- Our society is currently undergoing a digital transformation from which will emerge effects that are social, societal, economic, political, cultural, educational, etc.;
- Digital technology is contributing to a redefinition of the concept of temporality by transforming and offering new possibilities for social interaction (i.e. our ability to contact each other anytime from any place, without regard to time zones or geographic distance);
- The digital is currently imposing a new definition of the concept of territory, which can be contemplated or expressed on bases that are geopolitical, linguistic, societal, cultural, social, political, etc.;
- The opportunities brought about by access to digital technologies are creating inequalities between developing and developed countries as well as within those societies themselves (i.e. access to digital tools, to digital content and to high speed internet, etc.);
- The omnipresence of algorithms is having an impact on people's identities and behaviors without them necessarily being aware of it;
- The inherent speed of technological change requires the development of continuous digital skills, supported by adequate resources.

The Advantages of Digital Technology

- Digital technologies multiply the opportunities to participate actively in society and consequently to exercise one's freedom of opinion and expression in conformity with article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²;
- Digital technologies can foster better access to education and encourage social justice. Consequently, it allows individuals, communities and populations to mobilise their full potential in order to improve their quality of life;
- The networking phenomenon makes it possible to access people in other parts of the world at all times in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication, allowing the mutualisation of digital content.
- Digital technology leads to a democratization of knowledge made possible thanks in particular to the sharing, dissemination and assemblage of research findings.

² Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. (<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>)



- Digital innovations can contribute to the mobilisation of resources in order to develop solutions which may increase productivity, which may nurture job-creation and employability and which may facilitate exchange and communication between citizens, social groups and nations;
- Digital technology can support the valorization of cultural diversity and linguistic exchange (e.g. the production and diffusion of cultural content in a variety of languages).

Digital Technology: Current Challenges

Issues Concerning Universal Human Rights

Considering that:

- Human rights experts at the United Nations Organization assert that “technology in education provides important benefits, but it can also impair the right to education if inequitably implemented”, that governments need “to take special care that marginalization and disparities [caused by digital technology] are not allowed to grow” and finally that governments must “ensure that the digital divide in education, both between States and within them, is progressively reduced.”³ ;
- In order to be able to exercise their collective potential in a society in the midst of a digital transformations, citizens should have the ability to create, obtain, use and share information and digital competence in a context where respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is promoted.

Issues Relating to Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Considering that:

- The laws and regulations that oversee digital activities differ from one jurisdiction to another contributing to an increase of complexity regarding their interpretation and applicability;
- Governments must ensure that their laws and policies are modernized and respected so as to protect the right to an education;
- As of yet, public policy does not seem to have followed the rhythm of digital technology’s rapid development.

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20129&LangID=E>



Issues Relating to Digital Characteristics

Considering that:

- Digital technology consists of computers capable of processing data that can be stored in several places simultaneously with different levels of accessibility (consultation, modification, broadcasting, etc.), that can be quickly duplicated and easily distributed, and which can be created and communicated automatically;
- Being omnipresent in all spheres of society, computers:
 - can carry out tasks without any human intervention;
 - have tremendous operating speeds;
 - store information in such a way as to ensure its longevity and accurate retrieval;
 - can perform different types of work at the same time without any interference.
- The digital forms a dimension of our identity. Its systemic nature exposes, shapes, conditions and even alters individual and collective identity consciously and unconsciously.

Issues Regarding the Access to and the Use of Digital Technology

Considering that:

- The tools of communication and information converge towards the digital;
- Children and teenagers, being users of technology that permits them to consume and produce digital content, represent a vulnerable clientele whose rights must be respected and whose protection must be ensured (i.e. issues concerning the protection of private information, advertisements that target younger children, etc.);
- Everyone, and especially the youngest and the most vulnerable, must be able to acquire the necessary competencies and knowledge to wisely make use of digital content and technologies while being engaged in the development of their critical thinking;
- Participation in a community using digital technology, whether entirely virtual or not, requires the creation of a personal profile in order to have a visible existence;
- Not all people have the same level of access to digital material; as such, those with a higher-level education or socio-economic status benefit more from digital resources.



Ethical and Moral Issue

Considering that:

- The *Big Data* phenomenon fosters exponential production of data and that the way in which this data is collected, managed, produced, used and transmitted raises questions related to law and ethics as well as issues related to the respect of private life and the security and integrity of people;
- The use of digital systems and services, as well as the data they produce, is founded on the trust that individuals, groups and organizations place in them;
- The use of inference models and algorithms (matrix intelligences) are growing rapidly and that these models develop the ability to combine social data with decision-making engines;
- The obscurity of the reasoning behind algorithms raises increased concerns, particularly at the ethical level, about the possibility of maintaining clear control and accountability structures;
- The production, possession or transmission of digital material generates permanent traces, visible or not, which may lead to personal, financial, legal, psychological, social ethical, unpleasant and/ or unpredictable consequences;
- For people both young and old, digital dependence is a real issue that can contribute to compulsive behaviour.

Propositions and Recommendations

Thus, based on the preceding considerations:

- We declare that digital education is a right;
- We currently understand this right to digital education as including :
 - literacy education in certain digital technologies;
 - an awareness of the network phenomenon;
 - an awareness of digital technology's possibilities and challenges;
 - an awareness of the various means of access to available information;
 - an awareness of the various ways of creating content;
 - the development of critical thinking.



To achieve this, we suggest the following:

- That States increase their efforts towards universal access to digital infrastructures;
- That UNESCO examine the importance of specifying the principles underlying the right to digital education;
- That various social actors recognize the right to digital education as well as their shared responsibility to protect this right;
- That the initiatives undertaken by communities regarding the right to digital education be supported by the nation-state members of UNESCO;
- That the right to digital education be included in a frame of reference for training programs;
- That students, informed of their right to digital education, formulate questions and engage in transformative dialogue.

Finally, we also believe that Scardamalia's (2002)⁴ 12 knowledge building principles could guide the defining of this right to digital education. In the same manner, these 12 principles could support communities' approval and implementation of this right, in the form that it henceforth take.

Research and drafting:

Audet, Louis
Boulay, Marie-France
Camara, Doudou
Doyon, Jessica
Johnson, Quinn
Mazerolle, Anne-Sophie
Suarez Ramon, Luisa Fernanda

Under the supervision of:
Thérèse Laferrière

⁴ See Annex 3



ANNEX 1

Mobile phone use and juvenile pornography

Saillant, N. (26 mars 2019). Un 4e élève des Pères Maristes plaide coupable. *Le Journal de Québec*. Repéré à <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2019/03/26/peres-maristes-un-quatrieme-eleve-plaide-coupable>

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ANNEX 2

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Scardamalia, M. (2002). Collective Cognitive Responsibility for the Advancement of Knowledge. In: B. Smith (ed.), *Liberal Education in a Knowledge Society*. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 67–98. <http://ikit.org/fulltext/2002CollectiveCog.pdf>

Original French version from the TACT team available at the following URL

https://telelearning-pds.org/doc_eer/kf_pedago/principes.html



ANNEX 3

Twelve Knowledge Building Principles (Scardamalia, 2002)

Knowledge Building principles were suggested by Marlene Scardamalia, acting as a system to facilitate development of knowledge building communities. This link contains the original version of the 12 principles with their socio-cognitive dynamics and technological dynamics in support (https://lcp.cite.hku.hk/resources/KBSN/Q1/KB_Principle.html).

1. Real Ideas, Authentic Problems
2. Improvable Ideas
3. Idea Diversity
4. Epistemic Agency
5. Community Knowledge, Collective Responsibility
6. Democratizing Knowledge
7. Symmetric Knowledge Advance
8. Pervasive Knowledge Building
9. Constructive Uses of Authoritative Sources
10. Knowledge Building Discourse
11. Embedded, Concurrent and Transformative Assessment
12. Rise Above

Scardamalia, M. (2002). Collective Cognitive Responsibility for the Advancement of Knowledge. In: B. Smith (ed.), *Liberal Education in a Knowledge Society* (pp. 67-98). Chicago: Open Court. Available online: <http://ikit.org/fulltext/2002CollectiveCog.pdf>

For additional information

Please contact

q.7.johnson@gmail.com

