LSE Media and Communications

Digital Citizenship; Citizenship with A Twist?

Discussing Citizenship at the Digital Education Turn

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on one of the most cited definitions that popularised digital citizenship in educational research and advocacy. The departure point for this work has been the prevalence of the concept of digital citizenship as an effort to account for the implications of digitalisation in contemporary societies. The paper provides a critical account of Mike Ribble and Gerald Bailey's definition of digital citizenship which has been endorsed by several influential child advocacy organisations including Common Sense Education, Media Literacy Now, CYBERWISE, the Obama Foundation, the UN Alliance of Civilisation (UNAOC), UNESCO, and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). The paper discusses Ribble and Bailey's definition of digital citizenship in view of the scholarly theorisation of the concept of citizenship and the way the authors envision civic culture in the digital realm. In this analysis, the socio-cultural implications of the extensive adoption of Ribble and Bailey's definition in educational settings are being considered. It is being argued that through utopian solutionist narratives this approach weighs in on the debate on citizenship in the digital era against the backdrop of a climate of concern regarding the children-new media relationship and the role of education promoting an educational agenda.

The paper attempts to illustrate the ideologies facilitated by the mainstreaming of Ribble and Bailey's model of digital citizenship and the advancement of commercial agendas of the educational technology industry. It is being argued that the depoliticised understanding of citizenship underpinning the concept of digital citizenship is peddled in education by means of the appropriation of progressive pedagogical concepts which normalise edtech practices of surveillance and profiling and undermine the 'risky' creative forces of the pedagogical relationship and young people's critical encounters with digital technology.

"The investigation of the meaning of words is the beginning of education".
Antisthenes

"words plainly force and overrule the understanding,
and throw all into confusion,
and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies".
Francis Bacon (Novum Organum, Aphorism XLIII)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade research has shown increasing interest on the way the introduction of digital technology and the Internet shapes the society and moulds the prospects of humanity. In this milieu, there has been special focus on the relationship of children who are independent users of new media technologies (Livingstone et al., 2011) with the Internet.

The relationship of children with digital and internet-related technologies and its implications has been significantly explored in academic research (Banaji, 2017; Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016; Selwyn *et al.*, 2018). However, this relationship constantly generates new questions and dilemmas given the rapid pace of change of digital and internet technologies. Amongst lay groups, parents and educators share common interests as regards the impact of new technologies on children's life and development. They also have distinct concerns regarding ways they can negotiate children's relationship with the Internet and digital technologies within their remit of influence. In consequence, these anxieties channel the attention of expert professionals and lay stakeholders to the direction of 'protection' (Livingstone, 2014) bolstering research on 'internet safety' and justifying the emergence of independent children, media, and public policy advocacy groups that aim to address these concerns. These developments are taking place against the backdrop of the lack of in-depth "digital understanding" (Miller *et al.*, 2018) of the general public. At the same time, the absence of empirical evidence and historical precedent favour the opaqueness of the processes that advance digitalisation[2] and the state of unaccountability for government and corporate actors.

Within this context, 'digital citizenship' has served as a flexible conceptual platform that has conveniently accommodated the children-new media relationship helping to address predicaments that arise for parents, educators and policy-makers due to the deployment of algorithms on the vast spectrum of human activity. This paper argues that, under the banner of the digital, the large scope of the concept of citizenship, encompassing the interdependent relationship between individual practices and the ethos and purpose of human communities, has been reduced to a code of conduct that amounts to acceptable practices and appropriate behaviours prescribing responsible citizenship in the digital world.

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[2] Digitalisation is understood here as "[the] sociotechnical process of applying digitizing techniques to broader social and institutional contexts that render digital technologies infrastructural" (Tilson et al., 2010: 2).

The departure point of this paper is the prevalence of apolitical conceptualisations of digital citizenship adopted by education experts and the implications for education and citizenship in the 'digital era'. I conduct a critical analysis of the discourses employed by Ribble and Bailey (2007) for their theorisation of digital citizenship which has produced the most widely cited definition of the concept in education.

The power matrix involving an influential definition (digital citizenship), a niche topic in high demand (education in the digital era), a vulnerable audience (children), a pivotal social institution (education), lack of public awareness (digital understanding) and the cultural turmoil (digitalisation) necessitated the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its inquiry into the connections between language, power and ideology (Fairclough, 2010). CDA supported the unpacking of ideologies underpinning Ribble and Bailey's approach and guided the understanding of its implications for education and society. Questions asked include the positioning of the authors against the tradition of citizenship studies and citizenship education scholarship, their assumptions about childhood, society and digital technology.

In my analysis, I take into consideration the questionable affinity of the industry of educational technology (ed-tech) with independent media education advocacy groups campaigning for digital citizenship against the background of unclear policy frameworks regarding the proliferation of surveillance practices by government and corporate actors (Hintz and Brown, 2017). I argue that a social conundrum emerges as a result of this affinity given edtech industry's promises to offer smart and effective solutions to long-standing problems in the field of education, while normalising processes of student data collection and profiling (Couldry and Jun, n.d.). The profit-oriented character of the private sector and edtech, in particular, raises questions regarding the purpose, commitments, disposition, and long-term sociocultural effects of digital citizenship discourses adopted and perpetuated by children and media advocacy groups.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Digital citizenship: the social science approach

E-citizenship, online citizenship, cybercitizenship are some of the terms used to delineate the model

of citizenship that contains its new, digitally mediated, manifestation and the changes in the model of social living. The concept remains contested in the literature and social science scholars point to the democratising potential of online participation, but also the democratically subversive consequences of ideological normative discourses that aim at managing online civic engagement. Although the term "digital citizenship" is not extensively or confidently used by social or political scientists, this body of research has looked rigorously into the ways online participation and increased connectedness may challenge, inspire, replicate and reproduce established political structures and cultures.

The vast majority of social and political science scholars theorise citizenship in the digital age through the lens of the evolutionary character of the classical notion of citizenship. Banaji and Buckingham's (2013) theoretically and methodologically groundbreaking work is an empirical testament to the hype surrounding the ungrounded utopianism of narratives regarding the democratising potential of the internet. Although Banaji and Buckingham do not use the term digital citizenship, they provide a thorough analysis of the ways citizenship is being re-organised by the internet and demonstrate the complex interplay of the sociopolitical variables that shape offline and online civic practices and the ways the two are related. Similarly, Loader (2007) identifies the connections between online and offline civic practices emphasising the vital role of "socio-demographic variations in mastering the new media for political advantage". Focusing on youth and participatory culture, Henry Jenkins' (2016) research demonstrates how new media can offer vital new alternatives for engagement, fostering youth activism shaping a new form of politics.

Papacharissi (2010: 103) theorises online participation adopting the term digital citizenship which she defines as the 'civic responsibility enabled by digital technologies'. In her analysis, she acknowledges the crucial role of context, describing citizenship as deeply embedded in the factors that shape the historical context of a given time including sociopolitical relationships, economical state of affairs as well as developments in the technology sector:

> It is with an understanding of the historical progression of citizenship, as well as with insight into the conditions of modernity and capitalism, that the role of the citizen in a converged digital environment is sketched out (Papacharissi, 2010: 81).

Papacharissi (2010: 104) also delineates the way digital citizenship can affect traditional forms of citizenship highlighting the significance of access in '[creating] new and reinforced, or [reproducing] existent, inequalities structured around gender, class, and race, but also education, income level, and age'. She outlines the digital citizen sketching out her potential and limitations online, as well as the connections of the digitally enabled citizenship with traditional conceptualisations of citizenship taking into account the notions of digital access and literacy through a brief analysis of the new media political economy.

In a more recent work, Isin and Ruppert (2015) theorise the concept of digital citizenship with a clearer focus, arguing on the interrelationship of the physical world with cyberspace. Their analysis emphasises its dynamic character and examine how the digital citizen emerges through a performative process of rights claims in cyberspace. In their discussion on digital acts in the online world, they call attention to the role of political forces in shaping digital citizenship and they highlight the interdependence of anonymity and traceability with manifestations of the political in digital spaces including obedience, submission and subversion.

The evolutionary character of the civic culture and its relation to the digital infrastructure is also identified by Couldry *et al.* (2014). Drawing on Dahlgren's approach to civic culture as a circuit, the authors bring to light the interconnection of the online and offline worlds exploring the processes of narrative exchange in light of their conditioning to societal forces and digital infrastructure. Based on empirical findings, they identify 'digital citizenship' as an emergent form of narrative exchange supported by digital infrastructure. In doing so, they argue that '[d]igital media and digital infrastructures provide the means to recognise people in new ways as active narrators of their individual lives and the issues they share with others (ibid, 2014: 1).

Exploring a variety of institutional settings, they attempt to envisage what a culture (or cultures) of citizenship would be like, revisiting pessimistic accounts on the relationship between digitalisation and democratisation.

Mossberger et al. (2008) popularised digital citizenship as a political concept. In their definition, they link traditional debates on the topic of citizenship such as the ones of inclusion and participation with the 'digital' examining digital citizenship as a fundamentally social issue which extends

beyond the activity in the physical world to cyberspace. They envisage digital citizenship as deep-rooted and dependent on real-life social identities as the latter determine opportunities for access and media literacy:

> We define "digital citizens" as those who use the Internet regularly and effectively—that is, on a daily basis (Mossberger *et al.*, 2008: 1).

This definition also highlights that the development of practical digital skills constitutes a prerequisite for political participation.

In the same line of argument, Coleman (2006) embraces a political approach to digital citizenship. He criticises traditional citizenship education initiatives and digital citizenship definitions that perpetuate young people's exposure to controlled environments wherein specific discourses dominate. Instead, he argues that 'digital citizenship entails a more multi-layered, open-ended notion of political interaction' (Jenkins, 2016: 259).

MAINSTREAMING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN EDUCATION

Ribble and Bailey's approach to digital citizenship

Ribble and Bailey produced one of the earliest and most citied definitions of digital citizenship that discusses the educational implications of the concept. Their definition has been adopted or endorsed not only by individual schools (Kane *et al.*, 2016) but also by influential advocacy organisations in the field of education including: Common Sense Education, Media Literacy Now, the Obama Foundation, the UN Alliance of Civilisation (UNAOC), UNESCO, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the Digital Citizenship Summit and, recently, the UK-based IMPERO Software.

Ribble and Bailey's 130-page book (2007) is based on a scarce number of references (less than 50) that primarily refer to ICT literature and online sources such as Webopedia -an online tech dictionary for students, educators and IT professionals- or the Merriam Webster online dictionary. The authors show little interest in the rich scholarship and classical or contemporary theories on education and citizenship. They fail to situate their work with reference to influential theory-driven or evidence-based accounts that look into: the relationship between education and society (Dewey,

1954; Apple, 2004; Ball, 2006), the social, political and cultural factors that underpin subjectification processes in education (Bourdieu, 1989; Biesta, 2013), the power relationships that shape pedagogy and its outcomes (Foucault, 1977; Bernstein, 2000; Freire, 1993) or the implications and drivers of the introduction of technology in education (Laurillard, 2007; Selwyn, 2006; Selwyn, 2007). The authors also ignore major research on the topic of citizenship education including prominent international empirical studies (Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2002), and well-argued theoretical approaches that account for critical civic and political issues such as multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2001; Banks, 1997; Gutmann, 1996), globalisation (Bourn, 2009; Andreotti, 2014), democracy, human rights and social justice (Crick, 1999; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004; Osler and Starkey, 2005).

Deprived of the support of concrete empirical evidence Ribble and Bailey's approach latches on moral panics associated with the short history of the internet (i.e. pornography, cyber bullying, privacy, radicalisation, fake news) (Livingstone, 1996; Buckingham and Strandgaard Jensen, 2012).

The emergence of technocratic skills-based definitions of digital citizenship similar to the one provided by Ribble and Bailey is also backed by their 'user-friendly' character. Lacking substantiation in research evidence and theoretical insights such definitions prevail in the realm of education in that they offer what is perceived as palpable and comprehensible instructions that promise to enable stakeholders to deal with their concerns around digitalisation, while evangelising a digital utopia. Their sponsorship by credible and reputable media advocacy organisations and tech corporations further contributes to their legitimisation. In this context Ribble and Bailey's Digital Citizenship unfolds as a moralistic rhetoric that appeals and corresponds to default assumptions and dominant narratives regarding young people's online behaviour and their presumed susceptibility to deviance. This normative, moralising and utopian definition favours commercial agendas on digital literacy and internet premised on as 'wishful thinking' rather than research evidence (Noula, 2018).

My analysis of the discourses employed to define digital citizenship and my interpretation of the ideologies underpinning Ribble and Bailey's theorisation of self-mediation draw on Chouliaraki's thesis on self-mediated citizenship. Chouliaraki (2010) theorises the discursive formation of the public self, emphasising its ideological character due to the ethico-political underpinnings of the social and cultural contexts constitutive of the process of self-mediation. For the purpose of the

analysis I examine the authors' linguistic choices and the socio-cultural context within which these are made.

Depoliticising citizenship

Ribble and Bailey (2007: 10) describe digital citizenship as comprising 9 elements:

1. Digital Etiquette,
2. Digital Access,
3. Digital Law
4. Digital Literacy,
5. Digital Communication,
6. Digital Commerce,
7. Digital Rights and Responsibilities,
8. Digital Health and Wellness
9. Digital Security

This instrumental definition of digital citizenship is expressive of the authors' intention to tap on educators' and parents' puzzlements with regard to the children-new media relationship and the ensuing concerns on constructive educational approaches.

Ribble and Bailey's book on digital citizenship was written in order to expertly discuss the topic of 'appropriate technology use' in and through education addressing a wide range of education stakeholders including 'educators and technology leaders-superintendents, principals, technology coordinators, library media specialists, classroom teachers, and teacher educators' (2007: 2). Their approach appears to start afresh oblivious to existing traditions of education and citizenship and thus being very little concerned with addressing persistent long-standing predicaments in either field.

It is striking that the departure point of Ribble and Bailey's digital citizenship treatise is the thin, rudimentary definition of the citizen as 'a native or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a larger state or collective and who shares in the rights and responsibilities afforded all members of that collective' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 7). Their analysis fails to consider the aspects of citizenship that accrue to democratic inclusive living, namely the one of citizenship as practice in the sense of

active participation in human communities and the one of citizenship as feeling that refers to the feeling of belonging that individuals develop as a result of empathetic inclusive meaningful interaction in their communities (Osler and Starkey, 2005).

Ribble and Bailey (2007: 10) from the outset reveal the normative premise of their definition:

> Digital citizenship can be described as the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use.

Introducing readers to the 'Basics of Digital Citizenship' Ribble and Bailey make their prescriptive approach clearer:

> Unfortunately, the digital world has come up with few rules about what is and what is not appropriate behaviour for digital citizens (2007: 9).
> […]
> It's not an understatement to say that the digital world has changed how we behave and function as citizens of the "real" world (2007: 12).

What remains unclear, however, is what their reference to the 'digital world' entails, who has defined this world and how its definition has been established. Did the process include public deliberation and academic debate or it was shaped by influential advocacy? What the authors explain, instead is that the digital world is a distinct entity from the one of the 'real world' although neither is defined. In fact, despite the contemporary lack of sufficient consent on the legal frameworks that concern digital and internet-related technologies, the authors base much of their argumentation on and descriptions of appropriate digital citizenship on an ungrounded definition of the notion of legality concerning their perceived digital world i.e.: 'issues as diverse as copyright infringement and where and when you can talk on a cell phone are now under *legal*[3] jurisdiction in the digital world' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 131).

This decontextualized approach to digital citizenship is lucidly manifested in Ribble and Bailey's subscription to the online-offline disconnect as opposed to a developing academic consensus on the

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[3] emphasis added

seamlessness of online and offline living (Floridi, 2018). A vivid example of this approach is their analysis of Digital Commerce understood as 'the buying and selling of goods online' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 16), one of the nine elements of digital citizenship:

> Digital Commerce Issues:
> - Online buying through commercial sites, auction sites, and other Internet locations
> - Online selling through auction sites and other Internet locations
> - Media subscriptions and purchases made through media software such as iTunes
> - Buying and selling "virtual merchandise" tor online games (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 17).

The authors' understanding of the concept of digital commerce does not only demonstrate their subscription to the online-offline divide. In focusing solely on young people's consumer-appropriate choices, the text fails to acknowledge the importance of other crucial aspects of online trading. These may involve consumers' awareness on their profiling as personalities including their official civic credentials and their psycho-emotional identity while justifying capitalist practices that are proliferated through internet technologies.

As Fisk argues, the online-offline disconnect ensures that 'the attentions of concerned adults and youth alike are turned away from the social conditions that make young people vulnerable and likely to engage in risky behaviours' (2016: 2). Thus, Ribble and Bailey's proposed digital imaginary subverts the potential of social change through education as 'the concepts of youth Internet safety mask and protect existing institutions and power relations from criticism while further opening the lives of youth to forms of surveillance and control' (Fisk, 2016: 2). Furthermore, Fisk's argument highlights how Ribble and Bailey's theorisation of digital citizenship can serve as an argument for the justification of surveillance, monitoring and datafying technologies in the classroom while obscuring what Emejulu and McGregor (2016) define as ideological conflicts and material struggles escorting the development of technology.

Appropriateness and responsibility

Distinctive of the depoliticising outlook of the definition in question is the emphasis on and extensive use of the notion of 'appropriateness'. The latter is based on a predetermined

understanding of proper technology[4] use and, thus, prompts young people to meet relevant social expectations. 'Appropriateness' is the most prevalent reference in the book[5]. It is understood that Ribble and Bailey emphasise appropriateness aiming to delineate what is considered acceptable or unacceptable technology use and online behaviour, while prescribing relevant educational approaches.

Fairclough analyses the concept of 'appropriateness' with regard to the teaching of English in UK education arguing that theories of appropriateness underpin 'competence-based' approaches to language education (2010). His main point is that in the case of language education such approaches to language use 'wish to impose their own social order upon society in the realm of language'. Likewise, it can be argued that upholding and championing a very similar understanding on appropriateness regarding the relationship between humans and technology, Ribble and Bailey encourage the assumption of a 'neutral' technology, devoid of purpose or human biases, thus, subverting critical engagement with the production processes of technology and their intended or unintended consequences.

Another weak account is provided for the element of Digital Access described as 'full electronic participation in society'. Although the definition is premised on the crucial sociological concept of inclusion, the fact that it is understood merely in relation to technical skills acquisition and equitable access to infrastructure renders it unnuanced and lacking consideration for its socio-cultural implications. The authors omit critical aspects of the concept that politicise citizenship and which are related to citizens' ability to produce personally and civically meaningful outcomes that positively impact both their online and offline environments (Helsper, 2017).

A stark manifestation of their appropriateness-driven understanding of digital citizenship is the emphasis placed on the issue of Digital Etiquette, which they describe as: 'the standards of conduct expected by other digital technology users' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 10). In order to explain the concept, the authors use the example of one's answering a ringing phone while having a face-to-face conversation:

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[4] the authors use the generic term technology, apparently conflating it with Internet and Communications Technologies (ICT)

[5] there are 212 mentions of the word appropriate and its derivatives

> In the past, it was polite to excuse oneself from a conversation before doing something else, bur today those rules have been bent almost to the breaking point (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 24).

Etiquette as politeness is an important driver for democratic citizenship, however not sufficient in itself. Focusing on the democratising potential of the internet, Papacharissi (2004: 260) argues that 'adherence to etiquette […] frequently restricts conversation, by making it reserved, tepid, less spontaneous'. While acknowledging the importance of politeness as a condition for democratic dialogue, she emphasises that democracy may be dependent upon what can be considered as lack of civility or 'the democratic merit of robust and heated discussion'. Similarly, Rheingold (2008: 102) acknowledges 'the importance of contentious, even rebellious, processes that are as fundamental to democracy as they are vexing to authority figures.'

Etiquette, a term that resonates with an elitist and compliant register, along with the notion of expectation supporting its definition imply citizens' compliance with pre-existing codes of user conduct, while critical and constructive engagement with media technologies remains undiscussed.

In the discussion of the element of Digital Rights and Responsibilities it is again the notion of expectation that determines civic entitlements and responsible behaviour. The issues referred to in relation to *Digital Rights and Responsibilities* include:

- Following acceptable use policies and using technology responsibly both inside and outside school
- Using online material ethically, including citing sources and requesting permissions
- Using technology to cheat on tests and assignments
- Reporting cyber bullies, threats, and other inappropriate use (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 30).

The syntax and wording used, conceal the subject/actor who determines what is acceptable, what is appropriate or ethical. Consequently, young people are encouraged to comply with a model of civic responsibility, determined and dictated by invisible actors who set and regulate the terms of inclusion in the digital community.

The notion of appropriateness resonates what the authors define as 'ethical behaviour'. Co-opting the notion of ethics, the authors, further obscure the ideological character of their definition, thus,

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casting the value system they endorse as widely accepted and democratically established and normalising their advocated principles as constitutive of a technological code of conduct.

The emphasis on moralising rather than ethical accounts is explicit throughout Ribble and Bailey's analysis with a systematic concern about right and wrong. The 'digital compass for the 21st century' (2007: 90) is a reference to the popular metaphor of 'moral compass' further denoting of the moralising agenda of digital citizenship as defined here. According to the authors, the 'digital compass' should guide digital citizenship model and revolves around the right-wrong axis, purportedly enabling teachers to assess students' performance in their lessons on digital citizenship.

Ribble and Bailey's understanding of moral responsibility masks the moral duty of both human agents in charge of the development of digital technology and of Artificial Intelligence (AI) itself. Their context deprived fallacious accounts on the 'ethics' of digital citizenship obscure the real ethical challenges involved in the design, production and use of technology and contribute to the depoliticised character of the advocated version of digital citizenship. Unpacking the 'black box' of AI O'Neil (2017) describes the ways unregulated algorithmic technologies are being modelled, manipulated perpetuating bias and discrimination. Floridi and Sanders (2004) argue against the neutrality of AI discussing the radical transformation of the ethical field. Revisiting the concept of the 'moral agent' they reject its 'human-based nature'. They argue that Artificial Agents are sources of moral action in that they are 'sufficiently informed, "smart", autonomous and able to perform morally relevant actions independently of the humans who created them' (ibid, 2004: 351). Thus, they should be held equally accountable to human agents.

Furthermore, Ribble and Bailey's linguistic choices efficiently transpose the responsibility regarding the ethical character of technologies from tech designers and companies to the individual user. In this way, the corporate and individual actors, actually responsible for the purpose and possible uses and effects of the digital technologies, remain off the grid of accountability. This approach also downplays the critical responsibility of citizens to uphold the ethical principles of equity and fairness by scrutinising tech corporate actors and their role as arbitrators of the morality of the contemporary society. Besides, the systematic occurrence of the notion of responsibility as a concept that primarily concerns the behaviours and actions of citizens/users is clearly manifested in their analysis of the element of digital citizenship they define as 'Digital Rights and Responsibilities'

analysed above.

Ribble and Bailey's emphasis on the notion of Digital Law, defined as 'the legal rights and restrictions governing technology use' (2007: 26) further contribute to citizens'/users' *responsibilization*. Issues pertaining to the element of Digital Law include sharing practices, piracy, hacking or identity theft. It is evident that their interpretation of the Digital Law is concerned with individual practices, while individual users are portrayed as potentially deviant. At the same time, issues that would contribute to an individual state of awareness and vigilance are left out of the definition including illegal practices of media corporations such as indiscriminate and unlawful surveillance or data breaches are left out of the definition.

This understanding of legal/illegal behaviours contributes to the construction of an ideal imaginary of digital citizenship that is dependent upon the activity and attitudes of 'personally responsible citizens' (Westheimer, 2008) that act sensibly in the digital communities, are of good character ('ethical') and obey the laws. The materialisation of this ideal is left to the discretion and capacity of 'digital citizens' who are expected to comply with of the prescribed (digital) citizenship model.

A user-centred approach becomes obvious in the authors' understanding of the element of 'Digital Health and Wellness' concerning: '[t]he elements of physical and psychological well-being related to digital technology use' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 31). The element of 'Digital Health and Wellness' regards ergonomics and addiction to the Internet. Here too, responsibility regarding the appropriateness of technology shifts to the user as issues regarding the repercussions of sentient technologies developed for the purpose of health improvement and well-being are not being treated. By implication, the discussion of topics related to the engaged, critical and beneficial use of Artificial Intelligence products is dismissed along with the responsibility of developers of digital technology and their accountability regarding the management of personal data.

Ribble and Bailey's understanding of the element of Digital Communication further highlights the compliant civic model advocated. Digital Communication is defined as 'the electronic exchange of information' (2007: 19). Impero Software's "Digital Citizenship White Paper" co-authored by Ribble and based on the 9 Elements elaborates on the issue arguing: 'communication is concerned with defining, organizing and sharing content in ways that are effective and relevant' (Impero Software

and Digital Citizenship Institute, 2016). I would argue that the expression of this anodyne but also docile version of communication is best manifested in the word 'relevant' used by the authors of the White Paper. The aspired quality of *relevance* regarding digital communication is inevitably linked and understood in terms of existing standards about what is topical, pertinent and also proper, thus, placing digital communication in the broader accounts of appropriateness.

The emergent civic model of compliance corresponds to the ways the proposed definition of digital citizenship appears to accommodate the corporate interests and sustain the requisites of the existing heavily unregulated digital-ecosystem. The ideal digital citizen is depicted as obedient and conforming to a prescribed utopian model of citizenship for an unspecified novel civic universe ('digital world') that is ignited, reliant to and configured by digital technology. The epistemological premise of technological determinism implied situates citizens as subjected and accountable to an existing legal framework that has been primarily shaped by tech corporations.

Ribble and Bailey encourage accepting and uncritical attitudes of the digital and political status quo as shaped by corporate tech giants (Naughton, 2017). Compliance is cemented by the thin definitions of Digital Literacy and critical thinking that are promoted as instrumental rather than ethical concepts. Digital Literacy is defined as 'the capability to use technology and knowing when and how to use it' (Ribble and Bailey, 2007: 10) and is associated with technical knowledge, i.e. 'knowing how to use browsers, search engines, download engines, and e-mail' (ibid, 2007: 22). Another important component of Digital Literacy as understood by Ribble and Bailey is the ability to assess the accuracy of online content that reflects their understanding of critical thinking, a concept never explicitly used by the authors.

The sole reference to the concept of critical thinking is included in their examination of the element of Digital Law where it is rather being associated to the notion of appropriateness is articulated as follows: 'Good digital citizens understand the social reasons for adhering to such rules. They think critically about what is acceptable and how their actions affect others in society' (ibid, 2007: 131).

Overall, the implicit emphasis on the instrumental character of critical thinking that consists to the assessment of factuality and the ability to meet social expectations and achieve the standards of the dutiful citizen undermines the understanding of critical thinking as an ethical concept that enables

individuals to assess right and wrong (Paul & Elder, 2002). Although young people's ability to distinguish between right and wrong is implied in the excerpt above, it is, however, subverted by its conditioning to a compelling externally imposed moral universe and the broader accounts of appropriateness.

Naturalising technology, idealising the digital

As argued above, Ribble and Bailey's normative definition of digital citizenship is underpinned by an imaginary of a utopian, digitally driven universe as enabled by the achievement of a desired set of technical skills and individual attitudes regarding the use of technology. Similarly, a large number of assertions on the role of digitalisation which implicitly and explicitly is identified as a force for good synthesise the discourse that shapes the vision of and ideal citizenship in the digital era. This is best illustrated in the White Paper on digital citizenship.

> Casting Digital Citizenship in positive terms. We need to portray Digital Citizenship for what it is: the most positive development in education since the Internet became a fixture in our lives (Impero Software and Digital Citizenship Institute, 2016: 2-3)

This is also supported by the emphasis placed on the technical aspects and the related skills that appear to define the quality of digital living. The ideal digital imaginary can be materialised through the tangible nature of the technical skills required and the possibility of perfecting them:

> Digital citizenship reflects our quest to help students, as well as ourselves, develop the skills and perspectives necessary to live a digital lifestyle that is safe, ethical and responsible, as well as inspired, innovative and involved (2007: 2)

The discursive construction of the possibility of the realisation of the implied ideal digital citizenship is further supported by the naturalisation of digitalisation included in the White Paper:

> The reality is that a number of the technologies we use today will seem tame in comparison to what is right around the corner, including connected clothing, real thinking caps that raise test scores, contact lenses that provide Internet connectivity, the Internet of Things, and much more. How will communities respond to these technologies? How will we provide students the opportunities to think the changes that await them? (2007: 12-13).

The unthoughtful endorsement of technological development cited above backs the idealisation of technology. Emerging technological products are seen solely as opportunities, while the risks involved and the imperative for critical reflection on their implications are silenced. The idealisation of digitalisation, in spite its yet unknown sociocultural impact, undermines the multidimensional purpose of education to a qualification process and the mere socialisation of young people to a predetermined digital world. In contrast, this approach limits education to the fulfilment of the very specific function of engineering of students as digitally efficient individuals. The authors of the White Paper make their resolution clear asking: 'What kinds of home-school-community connections should we develop to best prepare students to be ideal digital citizens?' (Impero Software and Digital Citizenship Institute, 2016: 13).

Contrary to Ribble and Bailey's portrayal of the intentions and effects of technology as neutral and unbiased, Habermas (1971) argues that technology and science are ideologically driven registering them in the positivist tradition. One example of his approach regards the fundamental methodological presupposition of technology linked to the desired human control over the forces of nature. This seemingly valid and legitimate philosophical premise, according to Habermas, facilitates the masking of government policies that actually serve capitalist interests while rendering needless public consent and democratic deliberation. Thus, this premise works to the direction of the depoliticisation of the purpose of technology and ascribing to it with a deeply ideological function. The inclusion of the idea of Digital Commerce as an essential element of digital citizenship and the emphasis on dimensions that regard copyright and lawful content use along with the uncritical endorsement of citizens' consumer identities contribute to the normalisation of existing and emerging capitalist relationships. This user-centred approach undermines the criticality of the discussion on the 'materialities' that support the broader capitalist environment and the tech industry in particular including 'the natural resources that make the digital possible' (Emejulu and McGregor, 2016: 3). This approach also disrupts the momentum of public deliberation regarding the responsibility and accountability of tech corporations. More explicitly, the inclusion and problematisation of such topics in education, or their respective silencing, determine the ethical character of contemporary citizenship and of the associated notion of responsibility in the ethics debate on digital technology.

Co-opting progressive pedagogy

The champions of the Nine Elements approach to digital citizenship attempt to enter the educational realm without disrupting established value systems and assumptions about education. For example, the authors of the White Paper appeal to their readership paying tribute to the Deweyian tradition by means of the selective use of isolated quotes that fit their advocated citizenship model. In the White Paper on Digital Citizenship, Ribble and his co-authors defend their proposed digital citizenship model citing Dewey's thesis on the functioning of schooling:

> the highly respected educational theorist John Dewey stated that schools need to become mini societies, mirroring the real life social activities of the students they teach (Impero and Digital Citizenship Institute, 2016: 14).

Failing to acknowledge Dewey's rationale regarding the importance of real-life engagement in school for the flourishing of democratic citizenship, the authors use his thesis arbitrarily attributing the prosperity of the new digital society to the adoption of the credo of digital citizenship. The Deweyian pedagogical legacy is in stark contrast to the White Paper's advocated paternalistic pedagogical approach founded on a top-down prescriptive model for digital citizenship which precludes the conditioning of youth portrayed as 'inherently untrustworthy and suspicious and in need of constant policing' (Fisk, 2016: 79).

Similarly, Ribble and Bailey's definition of digital citizenship co-opts the notion of empowerment. The concept of empowerment has been widely adopted and misrepresented in the interests of profit-driven commercial agendas (Doxtdator, 2018). Empowerment, as described by Ribble and Bailey, stands at odds with the definitions included in critical scholarship. Empowerment is an inherently political concept which has been conceptualised within the field of Critical Theory. In education studies, empowerment has been primarily and extensively theorised by the movement of Critical Pedagogy (Giroux, 1988). In Critical Theory, including feminist studies, critical pedagogy and critical race theory, the concept of empowerment is associated with the notion of emancipation, as it refers to the process of gaining critical awareness which enables people to take control of their own lives and to free themselves from the power structures which dominate and constrain them. The travesty account of empowerment in Ribble and Bailey's definition of digital citizenship consists to the use of the concept as synonymous with the notion of enablement resonating entrepreneurial agendas.

Although the interchangeable use of the two words is not uncommon, from a psychological and pedagogical perspective the difference between the two concepts is crucial. While empowerment entails capacity building, independence and ultimately the self-reliance necessary for resilience, enablement regards the process of providing support and resources for the attainment of a specific desired outcome.

The underlying emphasis on the certainty that should frame the digitally enabled educational processes is reflected in Ribble and Bailey's asserted concerns over safety online. These concerns are explicit in the authors' description of the element of Digital Security. The latter is defined as 'the precautions that all technology users must take to guarantee their personal safety and the security of their network' (2007: 34) and regards issues like hardware, network, school and community protection from viruses, hackers or terrorist threats. However, this phobia-prompted approach can have long-lasting adverse consequences not only for youth but by implication for the human civilisation that is increasingly governed by fears that legitimate the growth of monitoring and control technologies. Fisk has argued on this issue noting that the conceptualisation of Internet safety panics generates 'mechanisms for leveraging information technologies to surveill and modulate the social lives of youth' (Fisk, 2016: 2). This argument strongly resonates Deleuze's (1992) thesis who maintains that such phenomena mark the transition from a disciplinary society to a society of control.

The implications of the emphasis on safety and security for education can be discerned in Bauman's (2006) discussion of the concept of *Sicherheit* that encapsulates the ideas of security, certainty and safety (Zedner, 2016: 401). In his analysis, the concept of security often overlaps with the one of safety and is further linked to the one of certainty advocated by Ribble and Bailey. Bauman (2006: 17) delimits the latter as follows:

> Knowing the difference between reasonable and silly, trustworthy and treacherous, useful and useless, proper and improper, profitable and harmful, and all the rest of the distinctions which guide our daily choices and help us take decisions we – hopefully – will not regret; and knowing the symptoms, the omens and the warning signs which allow us to guess what to expect and to tell a good move from a bad one.

In Bauman's definition, certainty is clearly associated to the concept of appropriateness championed by the Ribble and Bailey, further denoting their implied commitment to certainty and the predictability of the educational process. Certainty or the 'strong framing' of the pedagogical process (Bernstein, 2003) draws attention to the civilisational perils posed by digitalisation extending to the broader realm of the human creative potential. Biesta (2013) argues on the importance of risk and unpredictability for the pedagogical process. He opposes formulaic teaching that aims at the attainment of specified, planned and anticipated pedagogical outcomes that is nowadays exacerbated by the use of educational technology. As he eloquently argues, such "impermeable pedagogies" echo a robot-like modulated function premised on an 'input- output' match. Biesta (2013: 17), drawing on Dewey, highlights the importance of unpredictability of pedagogy for creativity:

> The quest for certainty, as John Dewey also knew, always gets us into trouble, not only because of the many conflicting certainties that are always on offer but also because this quest keeps us away from engaging with life itself—it keeps us away from the things that are right in front of our eyes, the things that really matter and that require our attention, right here and right now.

Ribble and Bailey's understanding of empowerment and their emphasis on safety that pre-specifies the educational outcomes contribute further to the dehumanisation of the pedagogical process in that they significantly constrain the margins for creative improvisation and the exercise of individual judgement rendering the teacher-student interaction essentially 'uneducational' (2007: 146).

As I have argued elsewhere (Shipp and Noula, 2017), safety and security driven educational agendas strip pedagogy of its humane character and the purpose of the formation of citizens reducing its scope to the sterile process of skills acquisition. Traditionally, the institution of mass education, as conceptualised for the needs of the industrial societies, has undertaken the role of both equipping the young citizens with the skills necessary to join the workforce but also the task of socialising them into the adult world. Most importantly, though, the role of education has been pivotal for the progress and development of human civilisation, particularly through processes of experimentation and accidental discovery. A minimum of risk involved in the pedagogical encounters is the price humanity has to pay for the sustainability of human freedom, progress and reinvention of

democratic living.

Ribble and Bailey's oblivion of creativity is best exemplified by their systematic and consistent framing of hacking as a deviant, 'unethical', criminal activity. The indiscriminate demonisation of hacking fails to acknowledge the alternative, creative aspects of the practice as an activity through which young people challenge their own cognitive field and the limitations of universal knowledge impeding progress and human development. The authors also disregard the contribution of hacking to innovation and the development of digital technology (Radziwill, 2015), concealing the fact that the 'move fast and break things' doctrine that invites engineers to push the limits has been endorsed by pioneering authoritative tech companies that imagined and revolutionised the lived digital universe (Taplin, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS/REFLECTIONS

Under the mantle of valid and widely accepted concerns in education (civility, individual responsibility, safety, employability) the nine elements of digital citizenship discursively legitimise the commercial profit-driven agenda of the ed-tech industry (Watters, 2016a). This ideologically-driven text becomes highly problematic due to the legitimacy it gains in formal education settings and academic research. The influence of the definition and its dominance in educational contexts is symptomatic of the lack of empirical evidence on the matrix of digitalisation-mediation-education-citizenship and of the absence of sufficient theorisation of the four concepts. Furthermore, circumstances related to the lack of technical knowledge, individual confidence, and empirical evidence from the side of education stakeholders favour the proliferation of Ribble and Bailey's definition of digital citizenship.

Ribble and Bailey found the logic of the anthology of the nine elements of digital citizenship distorting the chiefly heuristic concepts of citizenship and empowerment and misrepresenting the Deweyian legacy. Much of the justification of the definition of digital citizenship is grounded on widely accepted philosophical and educational discourses by means of which the two authors attribute validity to their deductive reasoning.

Reversing the classical Aristotelian conception of citizenship, they proceed outlining their proposed model of digital citizenship in prescriptive terms. Unlike the approaches of the critical tradition of

the sociology of education and especially in conflict with the philosophical approaches to citizenship pertaining to the philosophical thought of Spinoza (Balibar, 2008; Van Gunsteren, 1998), Ribble and Bailey contribute not just an apolitical but a depoliticising model for citizenship education in the digital era. Their top-down and ideologically-driven approach to citizenship undermines children's citizenship ignoring its political dimensions such as agency, social justice, critique (Westheimer). Preying on legitimate individual concerns and aspirations that pertain to social acceptance and professional success, the authors encourage passive and conformist attitudes that are implicitly defended as enabling employability and decent social standing (personal reputation) against the current backdrop of ad hoc, transient and expertly contested legal frameworks that attempt to regulate platform solutions and activity online.

Returning to Chouliaraki's argument on the mediated formation of the public self, it has been demonstrated that Ribble and Bailey's definition persistently and systematically stipulates the ethico-political premise of the process of self-mediation and formation of the public self through a depoliticising moralistic narrative of digital citizenship that frames an ideal of the social context of mediation. The assumed universalism of digital citizenship is posited on a globalist view of the human culture enabled by the lowest common denominator that is the digital. In this way, their theoretically decontextualised definition of digital citizenship, obscures the particular conditions that shape the mediated production of the public self and obfuscates the roles held by digital media users and producers.

Ribble and Bailey's definition customises the environment of self-mediation according to the neo-liberal imperatives of 'technocapitalism' (Suarez-Villa, 2009). Catering to its globalist agenda, subversive of democratic ideals such as participation and diversity, the proposed citizenship education model fosters uncritical attitudes, passive engagement with the corporate-led technological progress and a model of compliant citizenship whose focal point is employability and social acceptance.

Disregarding the primary role of citizenship education to encourage and sustain democratic citizenship, the authors zealously champion the authority of legality in what they perceive as the 'digital world' and which they distinguish from the non-digital human environments. Their militant advocacy that stipulates rules of operation in digital spaces resonates Castoriadis' thesis on the roots

of evil in human societies. Castoriadis (2013) argues that the fixation of human societies on 'strengthen[ing] the position of [their] laws, values and rules as unique in their perfection and as the only real ones' is in concert with their effort to present others as 'inferior, wrong, bad, disgusting, frightening, diabolical'. The case of the authors' portrayal of hacking and their emphasis on respect for copyrights epitomise the ideological character of digital citizenship. Oblivious to the authoritarian character of the digital ecosystem they embrace established legalities that shape institutions and everyday lives (Suarez-Villa, 2009). Thus, their proposed model of digital citizenship stands at odds with a democratising internet culture powered by the DIY self-organising practices (Buckingham, 2016) and the forms of innovation and collective intelligence that emerge as their by-products.

So far, the literature 'air-gaps' produced by the inherent delayed adaptation of social science and its difficulty to timely document and discuss the implications of technological developments have been filled by the edtech industry and its advocates. The latter, prioritise 'personalisation' and 'protection' technologies perpetuating the Silicon Valley individualistic ideology and the technologically revamped neo-liberal dogmas. These developments take place at the expense of democratic pedagogies, as they exacerbate long-standing problems in educational spaces such as competition and alienation (Noula and Govaris, 2017). Social scientists and education experts are, by implication, burdened with the political task of sustaining the culturally significant risky encounters of the pedagogical relationship (Biesta, 2013) and they hold the responsibility to guide evidence-based policy-making that fosters critical thinking (Noula, 2018) and civic attitudes that promote democratic living and are based on emancipatory approaches to media literacy and young people's learning *about* rather than *with* technology.

Education should be the locus where citizens obtain more knowledge about the way Internet structures operate. In this setting pedagogy should serve as the cornerstone in the process of the emancipatory use of technology, for the establishment of the Internet of Things should not deprive citizens who benefit from a vast network of interconnected services of their <u>agency</u>. Instead, citizens should be able to make decisions about themselves and the way they wish to use the services available to them. They should be able to improve their quality of life without discounting fundamental human rights including their rights to dignity, privacy and freedom of speech. They should be empowered to imagine and create their digitally enhanced environments.

To this end, social sciences and education research should claim their place in the field of media and digital literacies, problematise the transformation of citizenship and provide thoughtful imaginaries for education and citizenship in the digital era. Specifically, within the field of education, the challenge for social sciences is to avert the momentum of commercial agents and interests, supporting the introduction of educational technology as a means that facilitates processes of learning rather than an end in itself, while raising civic awareness surrounding processes of control of human behaviour.

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