

EDEN 2018 ANNUAL Conference

Exploring the Micro, Meso and Macro

Navigating between dimensions in the digital learning
landscape

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Introduction

The demand for people with new, enhanced skills is growing. The volume of information produced and shared in all fields is overwhelming. Building the data economy became part of the EU Digital Single Market. Powerful and sophisticated ICT is part of everyday life, and the world of learning is not an exception. Pressure is on all players of the online education community to keep up with new learning solutions, and better supply the skills currently demanded by growing economies.

Open Education continues its success, providing radical advances in knowledge acquisition, sharing, distribution, and improving business models. Digital credentials and open badges are the new currencies which are beginning to transform the economic models in education.

Social and economic tensions continue to raise the issues of scalability, the micro-credentialling of education, training and skill development processes. Practitioners and stakeholders are eagerly seeking right approaches to providing learning opportunities, and many scholars are researching holistic answers.

Micro, meso and macro aspects provide an interesting range of lenses for considering the problem. These aspects may be applied in a general sense, distinguishing between the learning of individuals, learning at the institutional or group levels through a meso lens, and the learning of organizations or societies directed through policies through the macro lens.

Navigating these dimensions are the reshaping of digital pedagogy and online instructional design; the social elements including digital societal mechanisms and the position of the individual in our new era. We have need of systematic awareness and research in the critical era of sustainable socio-cultural aspects as they relate to learning.

European Union initiatives emphasize solutions to emerging needs and seek to improve competitiveness and professional development; enhance cross-sectional skills; and fuel the engines of social innovation – creativity, entrepreneurship, critical thinking and problem solving.

The EDEN 2018 Genova Conference aims to respond to contemporary needs by:

- tracking and demonstrating evidence about the mechanisms and value chains across micro-, meso- and macro-learning
- exploiting the socio-cultural specifics related to the granularity of learning
- digging deeper into finding viable, achievable and scalable solutions
- learning more about didactical design through peer learning and scholarly observation
- discussing structural and operational questions of collaborative - social technologies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Open Universities: The Challenge for Renewal.....	1
<i>Alan Tait, The Open University, United Kingdom</i>	
E-Leadership Literacies for Technology-Enhanced Learning in Higher Education: A Mixed Methods Research Design and Preliminary Framework.....	1
<i>Deborah Arnold, Albert Sangrà, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain</i>	
Business Processes Support and Automatization Systems in Educational Institutions	10
<i>Katarina Tomičić-Pupek, Vjeran Strahonja, Lana Škvorc, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia</i>	
Characteristics of Digital and Network Society: Emerging Places and Spaces of Learning	19
<i>Margarita Teresevičienė, Giedrė Tamoliūnė, Justina Naujokaitienė, Danutė Pranckutė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania; Ulf Daniel Ehlers, Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University, Germany</i>	

DEVELOPMENTS IN DIGITAL LEARNING METHODOLOGY

A model of Online Collaborative Project-Based Learning (OCPBL) within a Digital Competence Course in Higher Education	22
<i>Montse Guitert, Teresa Romeu, Marc Romero, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain</i>	
Support Learning through Microcredentialling – The Case of the MicroHe Initiative.....	31
<i>Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University, Germany, Anthony Camilleri, Knowledge Innovation Center, Malta, Raimund Hudak, Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University, Germany, Henri Pirkkalainen, Tampere University, Finland, Matteo Uggeri, Fondazione Politecnico di Milano, Italy</i>	
Individual and Institutional Support in ODL: How the Macro may Benefit from the Micro.....	38
<i>Antonis Lionarakis, Anna Apostolidou, Antonia-Maria Hartofylaka, Maria Niari, Kyriaki Sfakiotaki, Hellenic Open University, Greece</i>	
IHE Delft’s Digital Education Transformation	47
<i>Nelson Jorge, Raquel dos Santos, Ger Tielemans, Erwin Ploeger, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, The Netherlands</i>	
“EdX Insights” Metrics from a Socio-Constructivist Pedagogical Perspective	53
<i>Inés Gil-Jaurena, Daniel Domínguez Figaredo, National Distance Education University (UNED), Spain, Anuchai Theeraroungchaisri, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, Tsuneo Yamada, The Open University of Japan, Japan</i>	
Teaching in Context: Integrating Mathematical Thinking and Personal Development Planning into the Curriculum for Part-Time, Distance-Learning Engineering Students.....	61
<i>Carol Morris, Sally Organ, Alec Goodyear, The Open University, United Kingdom</i>	
Enhancing Teachers’ Intercultural Conflict Management Competences through Digital Game-Based Learning: A Pedagogical Framework.....	69
<i>Frédérique Frossard, Mario Barajas, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain</i>	

LEARNER NEEDS AND ATTITUDES

Identifying Learner Types in Distance Training by Using Study Times.....	78
<i>Klaus D. Stiller, Regine Bachmaier, University of Regensburg, Germany</i>	

Implementing new Educational Strategies: Synergetic Effects from a University Overarching Project....	87
<i>Helen Asklund, Laura Brander, Linda Näsström, Mid Sweden University, Teaching and Learning Services, Sweden</i>	
Three Dimensions of Persistence in Distance Higher Education – The Main Actors:	
Mexican Non-Traditional Students.....	93
<i>Tomás Bautista-Godínez, Damián Canales-Sánchez, Ismene Ithaí Bras-Ruiz, Coordinación de Universidad Abierta y Educación a Distancia – UNAM, México</i>	
What Factors Influence Student Decisions to Drop Online Courses? Comparing Online and Face-to-Face Sections.....	99
<i>Alyse C. Hachey, University of Texas at El Paso, Claire Wladis, Katherine M. Conway, City University of New York, United States of America</i>	
Technical Innovation in Blended Learning: An EU Project on Continuous Vocational Education Using Multiple Devices	108
<i>Peter Mazohl, University of Technology Vienna, Austria, Ebba Ossiannilsson, Swedish Association for Distance Education, Sweden, Harald Makl, Pedagogical University College, Austria</i>	
Qualitative Learning Analytics to Understand the Students’ Sentiments and Emotional Presence in EduOpen.....	115
<i>Fedela Feldia Loperfido, Anna Dipace, Alessia Scarinci, University of Foggia, Italy</i>	
NEW ICT AND MEDIA	
Video Abstracts for Scientific Education.....	123
<i>Margret Plank, Technische Informationsbibliothek (TIB) – German National Library of Science and Technology, Germany, Paloma Marín-Arraiza, Faculty of Philosophy and Sciences – Campus Marília, São Paulo State University, Brazil, Attila Dávid Molnár, Centre for Science Communication and UNESCO Chair for Multimedia in Education, Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Hungary</i>	
Using a Blended Business Decision Simulation (BDS) to Gain Practical Business Experience	131
<i>Ingrid le Roux, University of Pretoria, South Africa</i>	
A Tale of Two Simulations in Higher Education: Exploring the Benefits of a Board Game and an Online Simulation	141
<i>Lynette Nagel, Bernice Beukes, Marina Kirstein, Rolien Kunz, University of Pretoria, South Africa</i>	
Assessing the Impact of Virtualizing Physical Labs	151
<i>Evgenia Paxinou, Vasilis Zafeiropoulos, Athanasios Sypsas, Chairi Kiourt, Dimitris Kalles, Hellenic Open University, Greece</i>	
SOCIAL MEDIA, DIGITAL COLLABORATIVE LEARNING	
Communication and Interaction in a Blog-Based Learning Space.....	159
<i>Michelle Harrison, Thompson Rivers University, Canada</i>	
Online Group Learning is Deeply Grounded in Shared Knowledge and Space	169
<i>Marco Bettoni, Steinbeis, Switzerland, Eddie Obeng, Pentacle, United Kingdom, Willi Bernhard, Nicole Bittel, Victoria Mirata, FFHS, Switzerland</i>	
Open Data for Learning: A Case Study in Higher Education.....	178
<i>Juliana E. Raffaghelli, Open University of Catalonia, Spain</i>	

Digital Tools in the Service of Social Media – Opportunities and Roles of Education and Content Supported by Mobile Communication Devices in Support of Informal Education and Digital Competences Development.....	191
<i>György Molnár, Zoltán Szűts, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department of Technical Education, Hungary</i>	

Using Social Media Platforms in the United Arab Emirates to Create Ethical, Cultural and Social Awareness through Emotional Intelligence Principles.....	199
<i>Maya AlHawary, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, United Arab Emirates</i>	

MOOCS: LATEST CONCEPTS AND CASES

From Books to MOOCs and Back Again: An Irish Case Study of Open Digital Textbooks.....	206
<i>Mark Brown, Eamon Costello, Mairéad Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Dublin City University, Republic of Ireland</i>	

Divergent Perceptions from MOOC Designers and Learners on Interaction and Learning Experience: Findings from the Global MOOQ Survey.....	215
<i>António Moreira Teixeira, Maria do Carmo Teixeira Pinto, Universidade Aberta, Portugal, Christian M. Stracke, Open University of the Netherlands, Netherlands, Achilles Kameas, Bill Vassiliadis, Hellenic Open University, Cleo Sgouropoulou, National Quality Infrastructure System, Greece</i>	

Assessing the Effect of Massive Online Open Courses as Remedial Courses in Higher Education	226
<i>Tommaso Agasisti, Giovanni Azzone, Mara Soncin, Politecnico di Milano School of Management, Italy</i>	

MOOCs in Local Young Tertiary Universities: Strategy and Metrics.....	234
<i>Anne-Dominique Salamin, HES-SO, David Russo, HES-SO Valais-Wallis, Switzerland</i>	

DIGITAL COMPETENCES AND SKILLS

A New Approach to Digital Competence Building for University Educators in Europe	242
<i>Fabio Nascimbeni, Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (UNIR), Spain, Daniel Villar-Onrubia, Katherine Wimpenny, Coventry University, United Kingdom, Daniel Burgos, Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (UNIR), Spain</i>	

Visual Turn in the Development of Digital Pedagogical Competencies	249
<i>András Benedek, MTA-BME Open Content Development Resource Group, Hungary</i>	

EPICT Certification Syllabus as Mean to Attest DigCompEdu Competences	255
<i>Giovanni Adorni, University of Genoa, Italy, Margaret Marshall, Epict UK, United Kingdom, Angela Maria Sugliano, EPICT Italia Association, Italy</i>	

The Role of Public Libraries to Support Formal Education Using Smart Technologies	261
<i>Sara Al Marzooqi, Abtar Darshan Singh, Hamdan bin Mohammed Smart University, United Arab Emirates, Edward Robeck, Salisbury University, United States of America</i>	

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Effective Strategies for Incorporating Open Educational Resources into the Classroom.....	271
<i>Les Pang, Rana Khan, University of Maryland University College, United States of America</i>	

Recognition of Valid Open and Online Learning	276
<i>Airina Volungevičienė, Marius Šadauskas, Danutė Pranckutė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania; Sandra Kucina Softic, SRCE, University of Zagreb, Croatia, Ferenc Tatrai, European Distance and eLearning Network, United Kingdom, Matthias Murawski, Markus Bick, ESCP Europe Business School Berlin, Germany, Julia Busche, Q21, Germany</i>	

Opening-up Education in South-Mediterranean Countries at the Macro, Meso and Micro Level	284
<i>Cristina Stefanelli, Mediterranean Universities Union, Italy, Katherine Wimpenny, Coventry University, United Kingdom, Fabio Nascimbeni, Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Spain</i>	

The Digital and Network Society Needs for Open Online Learning.....	291
<i>Airina Volungevičienė, Elena Trepulė, Estela Daukšienė, Marius Šadauskas, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, Baden-Wurtemberg Cooperative State University, Germany</i>	

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

A Digital Learning Ecologies Conceptual Framework in the Microsystem of Online Higher Education..	295
<i>Mitchell Peters, Montse Guitert Catasús, Marc Romero Carbonell, Open University of Catalonia (UOC), Spain</i>	
Changing Lifelong Learning Paradigm and the Digital Learning Age.....	304
<i>Aniko Kalman, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department of Technical Education, Hungary</i>	
Balanced Blended Learning: Support for Decision-Makers.....	312
<i>Marald Rouwen, Marjon Baas, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands</i>	
Towards Global Governance in Distance Education.....	316
<i>Elif Toprak, Mehmet Firat, Serpil Koçdar, N. Gizem Koçak, Seçil Kaya Gülen, Erhan Akdemir, Kazim Demirer, Anadolu University, Turkey</i>	
Towards a European Maturity model for Blended Education (EMBED).....	321
<i>Katie Goeman, KU Leuven, Belgium, George Ubachs, EADTU, The Netherlands</i>	
Towards the Creation of a Ranking System for Online Universities: Quali-Quantitative Analysis of a Participatory Workshop	325
<i>Flavio Manganello, Marcello Passarelli, Donatella Persico, Francesca Pozzi, Istituto Tecnologie Didattiche – Consiglio Nazionale Ricerche (ITD-CNR), Italy</i>	
Everything for Everybody? The Need for Distance Education to be Relevant to all its Students	335
<i>Ignatius Gous, University of South Africa, School of Humanities, College of Human Sciences, South Africa</i>	

LEARNING THEORY AND IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICE

Stuck in the Middle? Making Sense of the Impact of Micro, Meso and Macro Institutional, Structural and Organisational Factors on Implementing Learning Analytics	342
<i>Paul Prinsloo, University of South Africa, South Africa, Sharon Slade, The Open University, United Kingdom, Mohammad Khalil, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands</i>	
Connect or Disconnect: Academic Identity in a Digital Age	351
<i>Sue Watling, University of Hull, United Kingdom</i>	
Model-Based Approach for Penetrating Education Systems by Digital Transformation Knowledge.....	353
<i>Christian-Andreas Schumann, Frank Otto, Claudia Tittmann, Kevin Reuther, Eric Forkel, Jens Baum, Julia Kauper, West Saxon University of Zwickau, Martin-Andreas Schumann, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany, Feng Xiao, Tongji University, China</i>	
A Practice Orientated Framework to Support Successful Higher Education Online Learning	361
<i>Paula Shaw, University of Derby, England</i>	

NATIONAL DIGITAL EDUCATION CASES

The French Thematic Digital Universities – A 360° Perspective on Open and Digital Learning.....	370
<i>Deborah Arnold, AUNEGE, France</i>	
A Collaboration & Learning Environment to Enable to be a University Leader in Education Innovation.....	379
<i>Willem van Valkenburg, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands</i>	

Bavarian Virtual university – Best Practice for a Network of Higher Education Online.....	384
<i>Steffi Widera, Ingrid Martin, Bavarian Virtual University, Germany</i>	
Traditional and On-Line Universities, a Partnership for the Present and the Future of Education	391
<i>Maria Amata Garito, Alessandro Caforio, Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO, Italy</i>	
Blended Learning Teaching: The Story of a Social Network with a History	399
<i>Ana Rodríguez-Groba, Adriana Gewerc, Fernando Fraga-Varela, Almudena Alonso-Ferreiro, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain</i>	
SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL LEARNING	
MuseTech: A Web App to Enhance 21 st Century Skills through Heritage Education	408
<i>Antonella Poce, Francesco Agrusti, Maria Rosaria Re, Università Roma Tre, Italy</i>	
Boundary Crossing: International Students' Negotiating Higher Education Learning with Digital Tools and Resources	417
<i>Mengjie Jiang, Palitha Edirisingha, University of Leicester, United Kingdom</i>	
Supporting Learning in Traumatic Conflicts: Innovative Responses to Education in Refugee Camp Environments	429
<i>Alan Bruce, Imelda Graham, Universal Learning Systems, Ireland, Maria-Antònia Guardiola, UOC, Spain</i>	
Haptic Prototype Assembly Tool for Non-Sighted, Visually Impaired and Fully Sighted Design Students, Studying at a Distance	436
<i>Lisa Bowers, Ryan Hayle, Nick Braithwaite, The Open University, Farshid Amirabdollahian, University Hertfordshire, United Kingdom</i>	
E-LEARNING AT WORK AND FOR THE WORKPLACE	
Using Microlearning Modules in an Integrated Talent Acquisition Framework to Enhance Corporate Talent Management Process.....	448
<i>Teemu Patala, Context Learning, Finland, Alan Bruce, Universal Learning Systems, Ireland</i>	
Higher Credutation – Degree or Education? The Rise of Microcredentials and its Consequences for the University of the Future.....	456
<i>Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, Baden-Wurttemberg Cooperative State University, Germany</i>	
Online Distance Courses for Older Workers: A Maltese Case Study.....	466
<i>Joseph Vancell, University of Hull, United Kingdom</i>	
A Multi-Scale Approach to Learning Innovation Design.....	475
<i>Susanna Sancassani, Paolo Marengi, Daniela Casiraghi, METID Politecnico di Milano, Italy</i>	
TRAINING OF DIGITAL UNIVERSITY TEACHERS	
Distance Learning and Teaching: Understanding the Importance of Tuition Observations.....	483
<i>Chris Douce, School of Computing and Communications, The Open University, United Kingdom</i>	
Activity Theory as Design Tool for Educational Projects and Digital Artifacts.....	488
<i>Corrado Petrucco, Cinzia Ferranti, University of Padova, Italy</i>	
“The Cobbler Who Wears the Best Shoes”: How to Educate the Staff of the Higher Education Institutions Using Digital Technologies. Study of the Plekhanov University Experience	495
<i>Olga A. Grishina, Dinara R. Tutaeva, Alexey I. Grishin, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Russia</i>	
Educamps in Distance Education: Professional Development and Peer Learning for Student Teachers in ICT	501
<i>Sólveig Jakobsdóttir, University of Iceland, School of Education, Iceland</i>	

CHINA E-LEARNING PANORAMA

A Study on Designing Online Learning Activity	508
<i>Song Li, School of Education and Instruction, The Open University of China, China</i>	
The Open University of China and Chinese Approach to a Sustainable and Learning Society	516
<i>Yanwei Qi, Wei Li, The Open University of China, China</i>	
MOOCs Copyright protection in China	522
<i>Jie Li, The open university of China, China</i>	

POSTERS

The Theory – and Especially the Practical Implementation – of Spaced Repetition in Real Life Study Circumstances	526
<i>Ignatius Gous, University of South Africa, School of Humanities, College of Human Sciences, South Africa</i>	
Does a Rapid Prototyping Method Stimulate our Time-Pressured Teachers to Design Rich and Blended Learning Environments?	527
<i>Sylke Vandercruysse, Sofie Bamelis, Delphine Wante, Kurt Galle, VIVES University of Applied Science, Belgium</i>	
Alebrije Model for the Development and Supply of Educational Content	531
<i>Jorge León Martínez, Edith Tapia-Rangel, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico</i>	
International Collaborations in Blended Learning: A Double Degree Model.....	535
<i>Charles Krusekopf, Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC, Canada</i>	
Student Active Learning in Net Based Education – Educational Development in Teaching of Information Literacy.....	541
<i>Anna Gahnberg, Sonja Fagerholm, Swedish National Defence University, Anna Lindh Library, Sweden</i>	
Online Induction to Support Transition to Taught Postgraduate Study.....	544
<i>Megan Kime, University of Leeds, United Kingdom</i>	
An Innovative Tool to Assist the Creation of High Quality Open, and Distance Learning Courses – The Virtual Teachers Toolbox (VTT-BOX.EU)	550
<i>Peter Mazohl, University of Technology Vienna, Austria, Ebba Ossiannilsson, Swedish Association for Distance Education, Sweden, Harald Makl, Pedagogical University College, Austria, Maria Ampartzaki, Michail Kalogiannakis, University of Crete, Greece</i>	
University Students as Digital Content Creators	557
<i>Marco Toffanin, Alessio Surian, University of Padova, Italy</i>	
Efficiency of the Computer Aided Education in Basic Statistics Course	562
<i>Anita Csesznák, Réka Szobonya, Budapest Business School, Hungary</i>	
The Figure of the Tutor in the BA SDE on Line: An Explorative Survey on the Vision and Perception of Students	568
<i>Beatrice Partouche, Università degli Studi Foggia-Roma Tre, Sebastina Sabrina Trasolini, Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy</i>	
Bridging the Gap between Education, Training and the World of Work through the DC4JOBS Project's e-Platform	576
<i>Anca Colibaba, Universitatea Gr.T.Popa Iasi, Romania/ EuroED Foundation Romania, Irina Gheorghiu, Albert Ludwigs University Freiburg, Germany, Stefan Colibaba, Universitatea Al. I. Cuza Iasi, Cintia Colibaba, Universitatea Ion Ionescu de la Brad Iasi, Claudia Elena Dinu, Universitatea Gr.T.Popa Iasi, Ovidiu Ursoaie, Universitatea Iuliu Hatieganu Cluj-Napoca / QUEST, Romania</i>	

The Pedagogical Exploitation of Land Art with ICT for the Cultivation of Creativity: The Case of ActionBound (Augmented Reality Application).....	584
<i>Alexia Spanoudaki, University of Crete, Greece, Alexandros Stavrianos, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom</i>	
Improvement of Grants Support Process in Schools.....	590
<i>Martina Tomičić Furjan, Igor Pihir, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb, Croatia</i>	
Learning & Social Network at the University of Crete (ELearning LAB)	598
<i>Panagiotis Anastasiades, University of Crete, Department of Education – eLearning Lab, Greece</i>	
An Analysis of Content and Policies in Computer Science Education in United States	606
<i>Dorian Stoilescu, Western Sydney University, School of Education, Australia</i>	
“Connecting Schools” Project: Working for an Inclusive Learning Network.....	611
<i>Sonia Camara, Aireia-elearning, Itziar Kerexeta, University of Basque Country, Spain</i>	
Results of Advanced Statistics Education for Economists on B.Sc Course.....	616
<i>Éva Sándorné Kriszt, Anita Csesznák, Réka Szobonya, Budapest Business School, Hungary</i>	
Development Opportunities for Labour Market Competences at the Base of Higher Education.....	622
<i>Katalin Nagy, György Molnár, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Department of Technical Pedagogy, Hungary</i>	
Facilitating Young People’s Induction into the World of Work through the WWW Online Apprenticeship Simulator	624
<i>Anca Colibaba, Universitatea Gr.T. Popa Iasi / EuroED Foundation, Stefan Colibaba, Universitatea Al. I. Cuza Iasi, Romania, Anais Colibaba, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, Rodica Gardikiotis, Universitatea Gr.T. Popa Iasi, Ovidiu Ursa, Universitatea Iuliu Hatieganu Cluj-Napoca / QUEST, Romania</i>	
EMEMITALIA 2018 – WIDENING LEARNING HORIZONS	
Le Interazioni tra Docenti nei Social Network: Un Caso di Studio sui Gruppi Chiusi di Facebook	635
<i>Francesca Zanon, Denise Benvenuto, Università degli Studi di Udine, Italia</i>	
Digital Learning for Both Self-Directed and Cooperative Learning in Lifelong Learning.....	645
<i>Beatrice Ruini, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italy</i>	
Esperienze di Didattica Universitaria Attraverso una piattaforma Video: La Prospettiva del Docente e le Proposte di Student Engagement	653
<i>Cinzia Ferranti, Cecilia Dal Bon, Marco Toffanin, Università degli Studi di Padova, Italia</i>	
A Multiple Approach to Support International Collaboration on MOOC Design: The Experience of Tomorrow’s Land MOOC.....	663
<i>Valeria Baudo, Daniela Casiraghi, Alessandra Tomasini, Susanna Sancassani, Politecnico di Milano – METID, Italy</i>	
I MOOC per L’alta Formazione: I Master su EduOpen Attivati dall’Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia	673
<i>Annamaria De Santis, Katia Sannicandro, Bojan Fazlagic, Claudia Bellini, Cinzia Tedeschi, Tommaso Minerva, Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia</i>	
Esperienze Formative e Prodotti Innovativi Presso l’Università degli Studi di Pavia nel Quadro Strategico Europeo ET 2020.....	681
<i>Elena Caldirola, Rosalia Palumbo, Annalisa Golfredi, Enrica Crivelli, Daniela Boggiani, Donata Locatelli, Università degli Studi di Pavia, Italia</i>	

Sistemi e Software Open Source Nella Formazione Degli Insegnanti per Una Scuola Senza Esclusi.....	691
<i>Muio Pierluigi, Università della Calabria, Italia</i>	
ZenBOT – Agente per il Supporto delle Attività Formative in Ambiente Moodle.....	701
<i>Andrea Zappi, Roberto Beccari, Green Team Società Cooperativa, Italia</i>	
Comprensione Testuale e Successo Accademico degli Studenti a Distanza.....	709
<i>Luciano Di Mele, Gianluigi Cosi, Uninettuno University, Italia</i>	
Teaching Digital Skills to Future Teachers: A Blended-Learning Workshop Experience.....	718
<i>Floriana Falcinelli, Elisa Nini, Università degli Studi di Perugia, Italy</i>	
Innovazione e ICT Nell’insegnamento di Informatica del Corso di Laurea in Medicina e Chirurgia.....	726
<i>Maria Renza Guelfi, Marco Masoni, Jonida Shtylla, Dipartimento di Medicina Sperimentale e Clinica Università di Firenze, Andreas R. Formiconi, Dipartimento di Statistica, Informatica, Applicazioni 'G. Parenti', Università di Firenze, Italia</i>	
Valutazione e Certificazione Delle Competenze Negli Ambienti di Apprendimento Digitali.....	735
<i>Luciano Cecconi, Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia</i>	
MLTV, Rendere L’apprendimento e il Pensiero Visibili Nella Scuola Secondaria di Secondo Grado.....	745
<i>Silvia Panzavolta, Elena Mosa, Chiara Laici, Maria Guida, Letizia Cinganotto, INDIRE, Italia</i>	
Teachers’ Digital Culture: The Horizon of Italian Participants in a TFA Course.....	755
<i>Fedela Feldia Loperfido, Katia Caposeno, Anna Dipace, Alessia Scarinci, Università di Foggia, Italy, Jarmo Viteli, University of Tampere, Finland</i>	
Promuovere L’innovazione Didattica e lo Sviluppo Professionale Della Docenza Universitaria: Primi Risultati Dello Sportello E-Learning Dell’università’ di Firenze.....	761
<i>Marcantonio Catelani, Presidente Servizi Informatici Ateneo Fiorentino (SIAF), Andreas Robert Formiconi, Delegato del Rettore all’e-learning, Università di Firenze, Maria Ranieri, Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione e Psicologia, Università di Firenze, Francesca Pezzati, Università di Firenze SIAF, Italia, Juliana Elisa Raffaghelli, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spagna, Isabella Bruni, Università di Firenze SIAF, Italia</i>	
Online Tutoring to Enhance University Success.....	771
<i>Alice Barana, Cecilia Fissore, Marina Marchisio, Sergio Rabellino, University of Turin, Italy</i>	
Disegnare L’apprendimento: Un Modello Dinamico per Pianificare Percorsi dal Micro- al Meso- al Macro-Learning.....	780
<i>Flavia Giannoli, Docente formatore MIUR, Italia</i>	
Innovazione della Formazione: Il Modello di e-Learning Adottato dall’Esercito Italiano.....	790
<i>Marina Marchisio, Sergio Rabellino, Università di Torino, Enrico Spinello, Gianluca Torbidone, Comando per la Formazione e Scuola di Applicazione dell’Esercito, Italia</i>	
Mettere a Sistema L’apprendimento Differenziato: Il Caso Dell’ic Mariti di Fauglia.....	800
<i>M. Pieri, M. E. Cigognini, INDIRE – Torino – Firenze – Italia</i>	
Le Percezioni degli Studenti Universitari Sulle Fake-News: Una Sperimentazione Formativa ed Educativa.....	809
<i>Corrado Petrucco, Cinzia Ferranti, Università degli studi di Padova, Italia</i>	
Didattica per Competenze: Azioni e Figure Nella Formazione Universitaria.....	817
<i>Claudia Bellini, Annamaria De Santis, Katia Sannicandro, Tommaso Minerva, Luciano Cecconi, Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia</i>	

Competenze Critiche e Riflessive in un Corso Universitario Blended	826
<i>Nadia Sansone, Donatella Cesareni, Ilaria Bortolotti, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Italia</i>	
Attivazione, Erogazione e Monitoraggio dei Corsi di Laurea Blended dell'Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia	834
<i>Katia Sannicandro, Annamaria De Santis, Bojan Fazlagic, Claudia Bellini, Cinzia Tedeschi, Tommaso Minerva, Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia</i>	
Mappe Dinamiche per "Navigare la Conoscenza"	843
<i>Antonio Marzano, Sergio Miranda, DISUFF, Dipartimento di Scienze Umane Filosofiche e della Formazione, Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia</i>	
Formazione dei Futuri Insegnanti e Tecnologie: Atteggiamenti e Percezioni di Apprendimento in un Percorso Blended Basato sull'Approccio Trialogico	857
<i>Nadia Sansone, Donatella Cesareni, Federica Micale; Università La Sapienza, Roma, Italia</i>	
Scenari del Lavoro, Futuro e Formazione 4.0	865
<i>Prof. Giuditta Alessandrini, Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, Italia</i>	
Il Ruolo dei Gestì Significativi del Docente nei Video Multimediali per l'Educazione	871
<i>Riccardo Fattorini, Gisella Paoletti, Università degli Studi di Trieste, Italia</i>	
Imparare ad Insegnare il Pensiero Computazionale: Un'esperienza di Vera Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro Presso L'universita' di Genova	878
<i>A. Barla, B. Catania, M. Chessa, G. Delzanno, G. Guerrini, V. Mascardi, N. Noceti, F. Odone, M. Ribaudò, DIBRIS, Università di Genova, Italia</i>	
Gli Open Learners di EduOpen: Numeri e Prospettive	887
<i>Annamaria De Santis, Katia Sannicandro, Bojan Fazlagic, Claudia Bellini, Cinzia Tedeschi, Tommaso Minerva, Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia</i>	
Developing Competence Assessment Systems in e-Learning Communities	895
<i>Alice Barana, Luigi Di Caro, Michele Fioravera, Francesco Floris, Marina Marchisio, Sergio Rabellino, University of Turin, Italy</i>	
Un Significativo Isomorfismo la "Classe Di Bayes" Tra Teoria Pratica	905
<i>Paolo Maria Ferri, Stefano Moriggi, Università degli Studi Milano Bicocca, Italia</i>	
Il Numero 0 del Primo Giornale Online Della Cattedra Unesco in "Antropologia Della Salute. Biosfera e Sistemi di Cura"	914
<i>Anna Siri, Antonio Guerci, Università degli Studi di Genova, Donatella Gennai, Istituto Comprensivo Cogoletto, Mauro Carosio, Marina Rui, Università degli Studi di Genova, Italia</i>	

TEACHERS' DIGITAL CULTURE: THE HORIZON OF ITALIAN PARTICIPANTS IN A TFA COURSE

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the way Italian participants in a TFA course about Special Educational Needs shape their digital culture. The research was inspired to the Finnish Opeka project and was realized in November 2017 at the University of Foggia (IT). A 55 Likert-items questionnaire was administered by google module and several analyses were run through SPSS. Namely, a Principal Component Analysis was run by looking for four components structuring the participants' digital culture, according to literature. Then, the factors reliability and their correlation were calculated. Third, the differences among the four groups of participants composing the sample (Kindergarten, Primary school, Middle school, Secondary school) were analysed through MANOVA. Results show that the four factors differ from those proposed by literature, since they are shaped by a focus on rules and the support of the school community. All the factors have a high level of reliability and are correlated with one another, by characterizing a digital culture functioning as a system of reciprocally influencing components. Then, there are differences among groups especially on two factors, since participants get higher scores as the school levels go from the kindergarten to the secondary school.

Theoretical approach

European policies about education move toward the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in several life contexts. This approach is the result of the hard path that the knowledge society is doing (Messina & De Rossi, 2015) to integrate educational models in the contemporary society. That is, an enlargement of the educational contexts is needed, by integrating both formal and traditional educational institutions with no formal and informal ones. In such a panorama, the Bronfenbrenner's approach (1979) has a paramount importance. The ecological idea of macro, meso and microlevels characterizing the contexts where people live and develop should be taken into account, indeed, to understand the changes of boundaries, practices, relations, use of tools in learning contexts. This understanding can, in turn, support the further and integrate change of these components. In this process of change and positioning of contexts, the role of the teacher must be rethought and new teaching skills have to be developed. At the same time, indeed, they have to restructure and manage new relations among the educational contexts (such as school, family, informal learning environments, etc.) pupils handle with and have to teach the skills required by the contemporary world (e.g. digital skills, key competences, specific abilities, etc.). In this ongoing

movement from tradition to innovation, there is, therefore, a re-definition of the students' identity, the teacher-student relationship, the learning activities, the tools mediating learning, etc. Many research questions can arise from the observation of these processes; however, in this proposal we ask how teachers' digital culture is composed and look at the possible dimensions composing it. Viteli, Sairanen, and Vuorinen (2013), elaborated a four-factors schema to describe how both teachers' and schools' digital culture is shaped. More specifically, authors suggest that the following four dimensions characterize such a culture: (a) Leadership and Management; (b) Resources and Access to resources; (c) Confidence and Competence; (d) Motivation and Time. "Leadership and Management" dimension refers to the way teachers arrange the digital tools for teaching, their perception of the cooperative relations with colleagues and technical experts, the pedagogical support they think to receive by expert colleagues. The factor "Resources and access to resources" involves the idea of having insufficient resources, technical problems and technical support at school. The factor "Confidence and competence" refers to the skill and experience teachers have about the use of digital devices in the teaching activities. Instead "Time and Motivation" factor mainly involves the motivational dimension which supports the teachers' use of ICT in education.

Aims

The aims of this paper are:

- To analyse which factors are associated with the digital culture at school in Italian participants in a TFA course for burgeoning teachers of students with special educational needs;
- To analyse if and how those factors differentiate in relation to participants' level of schools they already teach or are specializing for (Kindergarten, Primary school, Middle school and Secondary school).

Context and participants

This research was inspired by Opeka (Viteli, Sairanen, & Vuorinen, 2013), which is a Finnish project lead by the University of Tampere (FI). It was aimed at grasping the digital culture of schools by answering a self-report questionnaire exploring the dimensions shaping the teachers' perception of ICT at school. During Opeka project (since 2004 and still ongoing), more than 3000 Finnish teachers were involved. Through several statistical analysis, it emerged that four different factors shape the teachers' digital culture, which are "Leadership and Management", "Resources and access to resources", "Confidence and Competence", and "Time and Motivation" (already described in paragraph "Theoretical framework"). In October 2017, the administration of the questionnaire was repeated in Apulia, a Southern Italy region. 149 teachers participating in a TFA (Tirocinio Formativo Attivo, Active Formative Training) course were involved. In Italy, TFA is one of the learning paths teachers can attend to get the license as teachers. Namely, if you want to teach in the kindergarten or in the primary school, you need to take a five-years master degree in Education. If you want to teach in the middle or in the secondary school, you need to take a master degree on a specific topic (e.g. Math, Literature, Biology, and so on) plus the TFA specialization. However, if you want to teach student with

special educational needs, you need to attend a TFA course devoted to this issue whatever level of school you are going to work in (even if you want to teach in the kindergarten or the primary school). Therefore, since we involved participants in a TFA about special educational needs, the sample is composed by four groups of teachers. Graph 1 shows the percentage distribution of the groups in the sample.

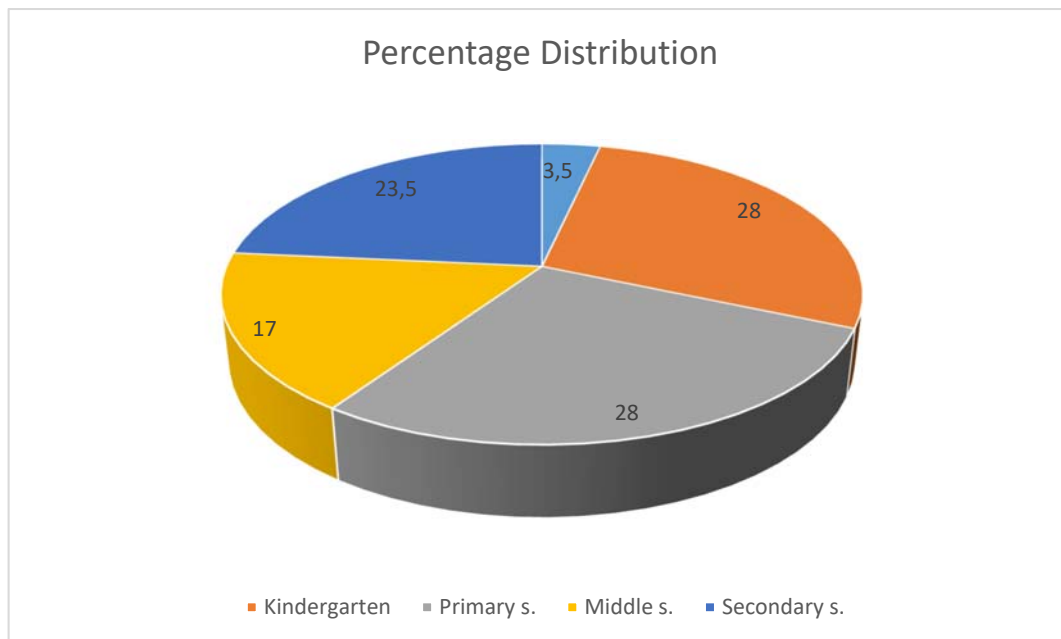


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of teachers in the four groups (Kindergarten, primary school, middle school and secondary school)

Data collection

The original Finnish questionnaire was translated to Italian by two researchers who first made a literal translation. Then, a broader team of researchers (composed by four experts) checked the translation and rearranged the questionnaire by taking into account the Italian cultural aspects about the digital thinking of teachers and the idiomatic expressions in the items. During a third step, 10 teachers were involved to complete the questionnaire and indicate eventual unintelligible aspects. As a further step of the questionnaire's preparation, the team arranged the final questions according to the teachers' suggestions. The definitive tool was a 60-items self-report questionnaire (5 demographic questions and 55 questions about the perception teachers have about the use of ICT in education). Each of the 55 items was structured as a five-points Likert scale (0=completely disagree, 5=completely agree) and the questionnaire was administered during the first week of the course by an online google module.

Data analysis methods

After collecting data, we used the following methods of analysis:

- Explorative factorial analysis through Principal Components Analysis (PCA);
- The calculation of the reliability of the factors emerged through the factorial analysis;
- The calculation of the correlation of the factors emerged through the factorial analysis;

- The creation of four sum variables corresponding to the reliable factors;
- The MANOVA test to detect differences among the four teachers' groups on the four factors.

All of the analysis was made through SPSS software.

Results

PCA was conducted on the 55 items with orthogonal rotation varimax. According to literature, PCA was run by looking for four factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, $KMO=.813$ ("great" according to Field, 2009) and all KMO values for individual items were above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2009). Bartlett's test of sphericity $\chi^2(1653) = 5,927, p < .001$ showed that all the correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. By analysing the items composing each factor, we defined the components as follows. Component 1 represents the "Use of ICT and teaching", since it implies items exploring the reasons why teachers could use digital tools during their job week or their students should use them (e.g., to build collaborative knowledge, for interdisciplinary learning activities, to interpret information, and so on). Component 2 represents "Innovative teaching and evaluation", which implies items grasping if and how teachers can use new technology for innovative learning and assessment activities (e.g. I use e-portfolios to evaluate students, I use learning analytics to assess the students' activities, I use virtual reality activities, and so on). Component 3 represents "Rules and digital skills", which involves those items analysing how teachers perceive the rules related to the use of technology (e.g., When I use a new digital tool I always read the terms of use and conditions, I guide students to protect themselves from the common risks related to the use of new technology, I know how to use digital materials for teaching, etc.). Component 4 represents "Educational community", which implies items exploring the technical support in the use of digital tools by colleagues and specialists (e.g. I receive technical support for the digital tools at school). Furthermore, it is saturated by items analysing the relational dimension of the school community and the eventual support it gives to the teachers (e.g. We share suggestions and support each other about the use of new technology for education).

After running the PCA, we checked the correlation among the four factors through Persons' r . Results show that Component 1 has a significant positive relationship with Component 2, $r=.61, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$; Component 3, $r=.72, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$; Component 4, $r=.31, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$. Component 3 has a positive significant relationship with Component 2, $r=.74, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$ and Component 4, $r=.36, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$. Component 4 has a positive significant relationship with Component 2, $r=.36, p$ (one-tailed) $<.01$ as well.

We also run MANOVA test to detect differences among the four Italian school levels (Kindergarten, Primary school, Middle school and Secondary school). It emerged that there is a significant difference between teachers belonging to the several levels of school when considered jointly on the Component 1 "Use of ICT and teaching" and the Component 2 "Innovative teaching and evaluation", Wilk's $\Lambda=.673, F(16, 431)=3.7, p=.000, \text{partial } \eta=.997$. A separate ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable, with each ANOVA evaluated at

an alpha level of .025. There was a significant difference among the teachers' groups on Factor 1, $F(4, 144)=11.85$, $p=.000$, partial $\eta^2=.248$ with secondary school ($M=52.08$) scoring higher than middle school ($M=46.92$), primary school ($M=42.71$) and kindergarten ($M=35.42$). There was a significant difference among the teachers' groups on Factor 2, $F(4,144)=3.299$, $p=.013$, partial $\eta^2=.084$ with secondary school teachers ($M=48.229$) scoring higher than middle school ($M=40.28$), primary school (39.286) and kindergarten ($M=38.048$). For Component 3 "Rules and digital skills" the assumption of Levene's test $>.05$ was not met. For Component 4 "Educational Community" $p>.025$.

Conclusions

Several conclusions arise from this research. The first point is about the kind of components shaping the Italian teachers' digital culture. We find of interest the eventual difference of the factors when compared with the dimensions composing the Finnish digital culture. Indeed, it seems that the Italian ones are more rules-related (in terms of technical indications to be followed when using a new digital device and the rules to preserve students by eventual risks). Furthermore, the community of the school teachers refer to seems to be more stressed in the Italian factors. This is understood as the ensemble of both relational aspects of the community (e.g. the supporting relations among colleagues, the sharing of tools and so on) and technical support by the community itself. The last but not the least, "Leadership and Management" and "Time and Motivation" aspects appear less highlighted in the Italian sample. This interpretation of the overall results emerged through PCA can suggest that the Italian participants are less confident with the use of technology at school, since they need to look for the technical rules and the colleagues' or experts' support. At the same time, however, they perceive the community as a resource for handling with digital teaching tools and activities.

Of course, a strong comparison between the Finnish and the Italian participants cannot be realized, since the two samples are not standardized and the questionnaire is not yet validated. Furthermore, our interpretation of the results can be biased by the knowledge of the local context. However, we do think that the teachers' digital culture belonging to both contexts is very much culturally mediated. In fact, it is connected to both individual (each teacher) and school (the single school eventually the teacher works at) microlevel. In integration to this, it is related to the mesolevel of the system of schools from the Southern Italy area (or the Finnish one) where the research was realized. In turn, it is connected to the macrolevel of the policies, values, meanings a single country or the Europe have about digital processes at school.

We do claim that these aspects are in some ways suggested by the results and that can be furtherly explored through future studies.

The second point we find interesting is the correlation among all the factors, which means that the digital culture of teachers can be understood as a system of integrated and reciprocally influencing components. The third and final point we want to highlight is about the differences that we found among groups, significant for Component 1 (Use of ICT and teaching) and Component 2 (Innovative teaching and evaluation). On each of these factors, higher school's

teachers have scoring higher than the middle school's one. These last have higher scoring than the teachers from the primary school and these last have higher scores than the teachers belonging to the kindergarten group. It seems, therefore, that the teachers' scores on these two dimensions get higher and higher as you go ahead with the school levels (indeed, the teachers from the kindergarten have the lowest scores at all). This result can be culturally mediated as well, since in the lower levels of school, in Italy, teachers are supposed to use more and more the digital devices for teaching since the creation of relatively recent polices. The middle and the secondary schools' educational system, instead, is required to use them since longer.

At the end, we can say that these results can be understood just with a micro-meso-macro view and that, in turn, can give a stronger understanding of the way the entire educational system is nowadays changing.

Further analysis can be realized to in depth grasp the phenomena. However, we think that this research can already suggest some implications in terms of arrangement of the TFA course analysed. For example, participants can be supported in metacognition processes to gain awareness about the meaning they build on the several digital culture dimensions, the way they position themselves in respect to the components, the feelings they have about the group they belong to, and so on. Furthermore, learning activities mixing the groups of participants (kindergarten, primary, middle and secondary) can be realized in order to stimulate a migration of competencies across groups and to realize vertical digital mediated learning activities for students.

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