

Participatory video and digital citizenship: a case-study within an instructional technology course for social educators

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Abstract

Digital challenges tied to the multifaceted landscape of citizenship are the focus of a workshop developed within an instructional technology course that took place in the academic year 2019-2020 in the degree course in Education Science (curriculum socio-pedagogical professional educator) at University of Macerata (Italy). The experience is framed in a multiple-case study where the case here described is intended as the last unit of analysis. The aim of the qualitative study is to check how a hands-on workshop on digital citizenship, which involved students in a participatory video project, affected their reflection about (1) the theme and the effectiveness of media formats used for the educational design and communication; (2) the collaborative attitudes that were involved for the creation of a video artefact designed as an educational resource.

The data were collected through different tools (reflection papers, questionnaires and interviews) and were coded with a content analysis approach to be, then, triangulated with the artefacts created by the 31 students of the sample who worked in small groups.

KEYWORDS: Participatory video, social educators' training, digital citizenship.

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1. Introduction

The article focuses on a training experience within the instructional technology course that took place in the academic year 2019-2020 in the degree course in Education Science (curriculum socio-pedagogical professional educator) at University of Macerata (Italy). A hands-on workshop on digital citizenship involved students in the creation of a short video with a twofold objective: (1) making students reflect on the theme and the effectiveness of media formats used for

the educational design and communication; (2) making students practice strategies of active learning where the creation of a video artefact, designed as an educational resource, is meant as a generative process for the educators' training.

Digital citizenship was chosen as the core theme for the training experience since it merges the attention of the educational contexts (formal, informal and no formal) on digital literacy and related competencies' areas (OECD, 2016; Tiven et al., 2018) and the need to face new challenging issues related to global and active citizenship which social educators need to manage in the contemporary professional contexts (Hoskins et al., 2008; Margiotta, 2017; Tramma, 2017).

The phrase "digital citizenship" refers to a broad area of interest and inquiry and includes concepts associated with ethics, safety, wellness, communality, and rights with the integration of the changes those concepts experienced with the advent of the digitalization and, most of all, of the social web.

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Among the others “engagement” is addressed as a key dimension connected to several visions of digital citizenship (Frau-Meigs et al., 2017) that are complementary to active citizenship defined as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy” (Hoskins et al., 2008, p. 389). Citizens’ active participation in the digital environments by using online tools and products is considered of paramount importance and promoted by several organizations and institutions at national level (e.g. US NGO ikeepsafe.org; the project Safer Internet Centre – Generazioni Connesse coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Education and Research), European level (e.g. European Commission’s Joint Research Centre and its DigCompEdu, Digital Competence Framework for Educators) and international level (e.g. ISTE, International Society for Technology Education).

The NGO Netsafe (2018) refers to the digital fluency as a needed background for digital citizenship where “fluency” embrace the “skills and strategies” to be able to wisely manage technology with “attitudes, underpinned by values” when activating social connections and deep “knowledge” of the environments born in the digital context. Nowadays our digital lifestyle is fully integrated with our offline lives so that a new ‘interreality’ living space (Riva, 2010) is marked by risky implications such as online challenges (Fedeli, 2019c) and addictions (Livingstone, & Palmer, 2012). In this framework digital citizenship is seen as “the ability to draw on this competency of ‘digital fluency’ to participate in life-enhancing opportunities (social, economic, cultural, civil) and achieve their goals in ways that make an important difference.” (Netsafe, 2018, p. 5).

Educating kids and young adults to be digitally literate and savvy digital citizens implies a holistic effort and synergy among educators, parents and caregivers. The process involves an open dialogue among all actors and may find several barriers due to the reluctance to face sensitive issues, such as being the target of bullying for example. Priebe, Mitchell, & Finkelhor (2013, p.12) in their research data discussion refer to surprising results addressing the non-correspondence between the parents’ and caregivers’ active mediation expressed with talking about specific Internet risks and youth disclosure attitude about unwanted Internet experiences and they stress “the importance of talking with youth about these things in a non-evaluating way”. How can educators touch those topics in an effective way without showing a judgment attitude? And how can student educators be trained to manage proper instructional strategies? In the present article an experimentation using participatory video approach was used to address the above mentioned questions.

2. Materials and Method

Participatory video (PV) approach has a long history whose origin can be traced back to the late 1960s with the “Fogo Process” when the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada promoted the “Challenge for Change” program. It was directed to residents of the Fogo Islands area of Newfoundland with the aim to empower the community by making them participate in a video project that could reflect the economic difficulties they were struggling with (Robertson, & Shaw, 1997).

The PV experienced several dimensions of use and contexts along the decades (Montero, & Moreno-Domínguez, 2015), but we can envision its cornerstones in the following aspects: a group-based collaborative effort to design and create a video product with a social intention; reflection and empowerment that are to be seen, at the same time, as outcomes and premises of the creative video production process.

PV can have a pre-determined theme to develop as a starting point. Participants as designers and producers of the video project can take advantage of different modes of communication and create powerful messages to be exploited in/by the community for social change.

The previous paragraph closed with a remark on the need to involve young audiences in an interactive open process where they can feel engaged and not under judgement. PV approach (Milne et al., 2012; White, 2003) can represent a successful strategy to: (1) overcome the top-down one-way communication; (2) support and encourage the learner to disclose his/her own viewpoints or experience of sensitive topics through a video project (3) activate a collaborative bottom-up decision-making effort through a process-oriented and product-oriented vision that brings to the creation of a final artefact that can be of social value.

PV, in fact, enables a so called “transactional communication” (White, 2003, p.68) where “communicating parties are tuning in to each other in an ongoing interaction”, a process which contributes in reducing the imbalance between the educator and the student allowing the latter to develop empowerment. This does not mean that the two roles (educator-student) disappear to merge in the same profile, but instead that an educational relation based on reciprocity is being activated:

“Reciprocity can assume, in education, the meaning of equality of value among all involved actors: a due symmetry that coexists with the asymmetry of roles and the different authoritativeness (educator-learner); but such difference should not preclude the bidirectional trajectory of the educational relation” (Stramaglia et al., 2018, p.85)

Digital challenges within the multifaceted landscape of citizenship was the focus of the workshop and the pre-determined theme chosen by the instructional

technology course teacher for the participatory video project which involved the class of 31 students who participated to the whole training experience (a total of 48 hours where 18 hours were dedicated exclusively to the hands-on workshop).

The initial section of the course introduced the instructional technology perspectives on design and implementation of educational actions with a focus on social media and digital storytelling while the hands-on workshop completed the theoretical part with a practical activity based on PV.

The workshop session was developed in the computer lab and students were encouraged to use the institutional e-portfolio system (Mahara) to collect their artefacts during the project. Students could also consult the teacher e-portfolio where course resources, instructions and guidelines were set to activate and support the hands-on activity.

Students divided into 9 small groups (2, 3 or 4 people) according to their preference with the only indication to work collaboratively with a maximum of 4 members per group.

Students were encouraged to analyse a problematic aspect connected to digital citizenship (e.g. the need to ensure different dimensions of wellbeing while using technology) and were provided with an initial set of resources (journal articles, case-studies reports, statistics, etc.) and guidelines to design and create a short video aimed at introducing the discussion over the theme for an educational purpose.

Guidelines included technical suggestions (software to use) and procedural inputs (the usefulness to design a storyboard before creating the video). Students could choose a specific problem-based theme situated in the disciplinary content (digital citizenship), the target audience and the context in which they would like to use the video and, finally, its style (interview-style, live action, animation, screencast, slideshow, etc.).

The final task included the presentation of the group work to the whole class using a digital tool they felt appropriate in order to explain the decisions made as student educators about the choice of the topic, the objective of the video and its potential use for the benefit of the community. PV approach was, in fact, also used to make students experience the role of change agents in a social context.

The workshop was used as a case –study to address the following questions: (1) how did PV affect the development of reflection and empowerment in relation to the disciplinary core topics? (2) How did PV influence the social change attitude?

The qualitative research used a multiple case-study approach (Baxter, & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003) where the case here described (academic year 2019-2010) is intended as the last unit of analysis of three case-

studies. The previous cases refer to workshops developed in the same course of the academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 (Fedeli, 2019a; Fedeli, 2019b) where the approach of collaborative video design was investigated for its transformative dimension in different directions (empathetic value and service learning).

The current case is meant also to understand the similarities between the cases and check if the efficacy of group work highlighted in the previous analysis is confirmed and what connotations it takes when the focus is social change.

In order to be able to investigate the two research questions the following data gathering tools were used: an initial reflection paper; an online final open-ended questionnaire, a final semi-structured interview. Besides the individual data collected (written reflection papers, written questionnaires, audio interviews) group data sources were analysed: the three artefacts required as outcomes of the workshop (storyboard, video and presentation of the work) (Fig. 1).

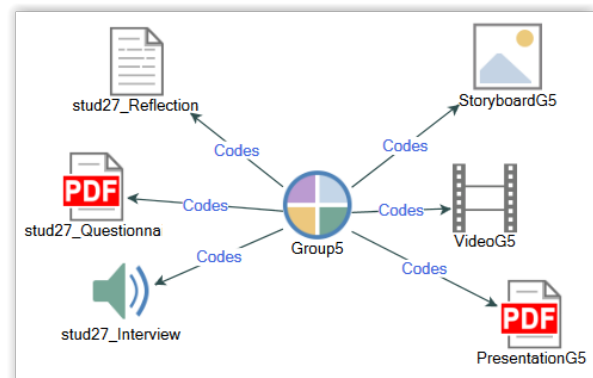


Fig. 1 - NVIVO map of the individual data sources related to one student of group 5 (stud27) and her group data source.

The data gathering process and tools were planned with the following time sequence:

- before the beginning of the workshop: students are requested to give their vision of digital citizenship and create a short reflection paper to be uploaded in their individual e-portfolio;
- during the last meeting of the workshop: students are asked to fill in the online questionnaire and upload in their e-portfolio all their group artefacts. In this last meeting each group presents its work to the class;
- after the conclusion of the workshop: students are interviewed once the teacher had analysed available sources and students had their presentations.

The reflection paper had the objective to collect data about the students' knowledge and understanding of the macro area of interest of digital citizenship addressed during the theoretical section of the course. Those

reflections were, then, compared with the answer obtained through the open-ended questions asked with the online questionnaire and the oral interview and, finally, with the artefacts created during the workshop. Specifically, the interviews had the advantage to let the teacher go deeper in the understanding of students' perceptions once they had time to make a collective reflection on their group work thanks to the presentation; the chance to show the videos and explain to the whole class the rationale behind the artefact was an opportunity for students to compare personal viewpoints, shared in the small group, with the enhanced audience of the class and the teacher following a transactional model (White, 2003).

The questionnaire and the interview covered directly four dimensions: (1) the students' perception of efficacy of the group work; (2) the role played by the three different artefacts to support the design and the production of the video; (3) the students' opinion about the PV approach for educational use; (4) the value of the connection between PV approach used in the workshop and the focus on digital citizenship.

The data were analysed with the support of the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO (version 11 plus) by using a content analysis approach for the textual data (Bardin, 1977). The interpretative categories used to code data were: "reflection"; "empowerment"; and "action" taking into account the PV characteristics and the research questions.

Images and videos, instead, were coded using descriptive categories. Videos were coded according to the chosen style (interview; creative artwork; short-story; video-report) and addressed problem-based theme (fake identities and information; harmful behaviours; risky challenges), while storyboards were coded according to their structure (sequential frames; unstructured mental map; table structure) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Photo of Group 5 paper-based and hand-drawn storyboard with sequential frames.

3. Results

As anticipated in the previous paragraph the analysis of data was developed by coding the textual sources in three different main categories namely "Reflection", "Empowerment", and "Action". As shown in the map (Fig. 3) each category (coloured nodes) has child nodes (subcategories), all nodes are located in a circular position just to mean the absence of a hierarchical value among categories and to highlight their strict connection.

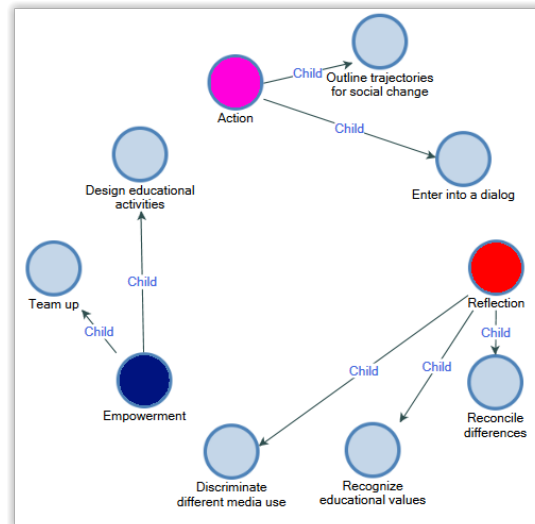


Fig 3 - Map of categories and subcategories.

The results of the analysis will be reported for each category and related subcategories with a short introductory description in order to better clarify the rationale of the interpretation process. Triangulation of data across categories will be, also, reported and meaningful results visualized with dedicated graph.

Reflection. This category includes three subcategories: "Recognize educational values"; "Reconcile differences", and "Discriminate different media use". PV aims at fostering reflection through a process-oriented approach and the research here described aimed at collecting students' inputs that can show their reasoning about how the PV process affected effective communication within the small group and what roles the different media used played for the students' understanding of the instructional design process they activated on digital citizenship.

Effective communication implies the activation of several skills such as listening, problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation (Lumsden et al., 2010) and "reconciling differences" was chosen as subcategory to collect students' references to a set of strategies they applied to reach an effective communication even if they experienced "differences". There are, in fact, several references to dissimilarities and the way students treated them to reach their common goal:

Stud18: “The discussion in group showed two opposite viewpoints and we decided to represent both in the video giving them the same relevance, so that we could reflect on the topic and let other viewers reflect as well”.

Stud20: “The final product [the video] is the concrete result of our different opinions, and it represents the decisions made and the management of those decisions by the group”.

Stud21: “Communication exchange among us was fundamental for going deeper in the topic, since the perspectives and the experiences we had were the primary stimulus to progress with the work”.

Stud27: “There was an in-depth and plural communication and discussion about the topic”.

Stud5: “We were people with contrasting ideas, but we succeeded in finding a compatible way and a compromise for the group”.

It is quite interesting that students’ never referred to the communication flow bringing an “I” position; students, instead, referred to the group and mentioned a “we” perspective in every statement that show the process of negotiation, and this meaning is perfectly reported by stud5: “we were people with contrasting ideas...we succeeded in finding a compromise for the group”. The peculiarity of each group member was not cancelled or ignored in the name of the final goal (the production of a video), but it was considered as a primary source to deepen the understanding of the topic and its dimensions; the communication was “plural” as stated by stud27 and as another student remarked, having different opinions means that the group need to make decisions, and that should be able to “manage” those decisions.

The management process appears very clearly described in the subcategory “Discriminate different media use”; students, in fact, demonstrated that a reflection on the functions of media (storyboard, video and presentation) have occurred and was of paramount importance for reaching their objectives:

Stud13: “The PPT presentation supported us in ‘putting the words’ and analyse in detail the video. The video lets you have a direct contact, the message is immediate”.

Stud15: “The PPT presentation helped us identify the key words”.

Stud16: “The PPT presentation supported the creation of a list of important aspects, the storyboard helped a lot in the production of the video since it let us gradually plan and visualize the video giving an idea of what the final product would be. The video was the

final act where we created and practically put all ideas we had.”

Stud 18: “The storyboard was useful to go step by step, the presentation to define the objectives and have a vision of the practical contexts in which the video could be used; the video was a very relevant step of reflection where the collaboration among the group member took place”.

Stud19: “The storyboard was useful to make it concrete the ideas and let us keep a straight line during the video production. The PPT presentation, instead, let us reflect in a deeper way about the topic, the objectives of the project and the message we wanted to disseminate. The video is the concrete results of this process”.

Stud22: “The storyboard was useful to design and have a framework. The PPT presentation can be used to introduce the video; the video is a fundamental connection to express the addressed topic”.

Stud29: “The storyboard was very important to define a first draft of the video project, the video made it concrete the topic and the presentation was useful to draw conclusions and make it explicit the message.”

Stud4: “The PPT presentation let us reorder the ideas, define the objectives and the possible applications of the topic in the educational context”.

To summarize, the students’ reflections find an agreement in the need to clearly express through “words” the objectives of the project in order to make a video useful in the educational contexts; they mostly identified that the PPT presentation could satisfy this need; a video is a powerful tool to disseminate with immediacy and attractiveness a message, but, according to students, it can rely on metaphors and, since in education it is important to offer a clear message, it would be good to associate a presentation to use a video for teaching/learning reasons. Videos are meant as creative products, but not just this, videos, as stud18 said, are where collaboration takes place, the reification of the group’s effort. Storyboards were meant mainly as a support for the design of the video and it would be interesting in a future investigation to analyse in a more detailed way the connection between the storyboard style and the effectiveness of the video design process that did not emerge in the current research.

Design is at the base of the educational value and students’ reflection on PV in such direction was twofold: students made references to PV usefulness as educational strategy whose benefit is seen for the video creators and made references, as well, to its educational potentialities for the benefit of the audience. Moreover three were the didactical/educational directions a PV approach can have when dealing with problem-based topics of digital citizenship: information, prevention,

open discussion. Students' statements in this direction are:

Group5: "the video project can help providing information, it offers a vision of the problem that is not ordinary, prevents risks, offers an alternative way to involve youth".

Stud19: "It is important for an educator to use a video project to sensitize the audience and involve young students to create their own videos to make them reflect on the topic".

Stud20: "The efficacy of the video project is to be seen in its flexibility of use in the formal and informal contexts of education".

Stud27: "educators and students could create together a video so that students can "touch with their hands" the topic, understand from a first person point of view something they are used to watch in videos created by other people and published in the social networks and that are generally watched with superficiality and in a mechanical way".

Empowerment. This category includes two subcategories: "Design educational activities"; and "Team up". Both subcategories are meant to give an interpretative organization to students' references to their acquired self-confidence and expertise as future educators in action in terms of collaborative skills and design competences. Differently from the subcategory previously discussed, but in line with them, here students references are analysed in terms of not mere recognition of value of group work or educational application of PV, but in terms of parameters they demonstrate to take into account to plan an educational action.

The extracts here reported from groups presentations can summarize the impact PV had on their attitude as educators:

Group7: "the video created with a double interview style can be easily used in the educational settings, specifically in secondary schools (where those topics of digital citizenship appear to be more urgent), maybe they can be used as motivational and brainstorming tools in student assemblies to introduce and discuss the topic."

Group1: "Such videos can be useful in projects managed by territory institutions that deals with addictions and social-based problems in order to prevent harmful behaviour with real, concrete examples".

Group8: "The educational projects in which parents and sons are involved can be a good opportunity to use video projects like the one we did. In this context of applications video could promote an open exchange and discussion where parents and young kids compare their life styles with or without technologies."

Parameters such as "context" and "approach" appear in students' data when they refer to kind of educational

institution (school/territorial body; formal/informal, etc.) and specific settings (student meeting/assembly; parent/son meeting, etc.) to apply a video project.

In the same way the subcategory "team up" was intended to collect references to group work that highlight an acquired awareness of skills needed to reach a successful collaboration and not merely the mention of satisfaction of working in groups. This subcategory appears to be strictly connected to the already discussed "Reconcile differences" and if we compare data of the two subcategories by group (Fig. 4) the matrix will show a consistency in the number of references. Data retrieved from students in groups 2, 3, 5, 7, in fact, had a major number of references coded in "team up" subcategory in respect to other groups and the same it can be said about the subcategory "Reconcile differences".

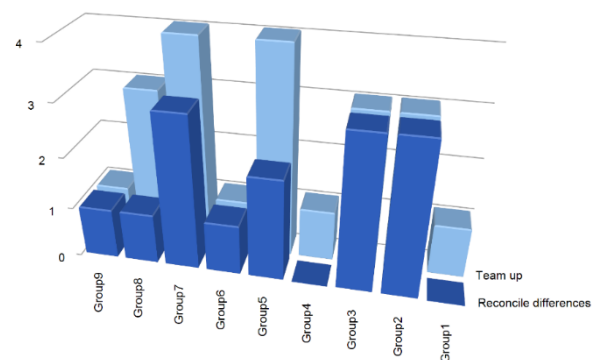


Fig 4 - Matrix coding: subcategories "Team up" and "Reconcile differences" are compared by Group.

Specifically students reported their vision of a good and balanced team work: almost all the groups identified first the individual preferences and skills of each member and, then, decided how to proceed with the work in terms of timing and roles. Stud17 says: "each of us contributed with the abilities and tools that could use at the best" and stud2 states: "the single tasks were divided equally so that along with the collaborative work each member had an individual responsibility". In those statements the value of being aware of basic principles in group work is clear: respect of individuality and the importance for everyone to feel protagonist of the work even when the group makes a decision in a different direction.

Action. This category includes two subcategories: "Enter into a dialogue", and "Outline trajectories for social change". Action is, here, meant in a social perspective when student educators can identify opportunities and modalities to open a dialogue with the territory and the community, and they are able to envision a project for social change.

Student data, in some cases, highlight a perspective that goes beyond the personal experience and take into account a holistic approach to social issues.

In two cases digital citizenship and problems addressed in the students video (internet/smartphone addiction; inappropriate behaviours; risky challenges) were analysed and put into relation with possible causes such as a deprived family background. Students mentioned the relevance for social change to involve actors from different contexts in order to have a comprehensive landscape of the problem and better chances to realize a successful synergy (e.g. between the educator and the teacher at school) in the development of a social project. Entering a dialogue with external stakeholders or with direct beneficiaries, as told by stud31, “let you collect and address the different nuances of the topic”. Group 5 refers to the net of the social relationships in a way different actors can accompany youngsters in their development, observing and opening a dialogue with them with delicacy and caution when entering their world. Social change was referred to as a path that starts with information and progress with a critical behaviour that can support the development of awareness.

To conclude PV was recognized as a precious opportunity for students to express what they really perceived about digital citizenship and what sources they could rely on to strengthen their knowledge and plan an educational use of the video. There was no significant difference among groups’ data related to the video style chosen. The video development revealed as an emotional and rational process at the same time, since the most engaging languages of the video coupled with the descriptive written language of the presentation, as stud25 said “Video is a means that moves the souls and the minds”.

4. Conclusion

The discussion of data appears to be consistent with results of the previous case studies (Fedeli, 2019a; Fedeli, 2019b) in terms of perceived efficacy of group-work and the engagement promoted by the collaborative video production in terms of social commitment. PV that was, here, analysed as an approach to train future social educators by involving students in a practical activity whose focus was digital citizenship shows successful results in the direction of an acquired self-reflection attitude by students not only about the relevance of the topic, but also in its contextualization and professional application. Students were able to perceive the advantages of active educational strategies specifically because the attention on the process (the group work) is joint to the motivation of reaching a common concrete goal, the

video (Kiili et al., 2012). In the case of the workshop here described, differently from the previous case studies, digital citizenship was chosen as pre-determined theme for the video. The topic revealed its power for two main reasons: students realized that, even if digital life is familiar to them, this is not enough to be prepared to face the challenges and the risks associated to this dimension and that, in order to use a video for social change the educator needs to take into account different parameters (kind of contexts, audience, actors involved, etc.) and provide additional resource to enrich and valorize the message you want to disseminate through a short video. As future educators students of the sample reported that they would use the same approach of PV to engage their future learners/beneficiaries in the active production of a video as an educational strategy. When asked why they would use PV their feedback was mostly focussed on the opportunity to encourage dialogue and discussion through an “object” (the video) that is concrete and that can easily reify people’s feelings and opinions, since it is created by the actor of the educational activity (the educator himself/herself or/and the students/beneficiaries).

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