Young people learning from digital media outside of school: The informal meets the formal

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Based on questionnaires, workshops, and interviews conducted with Portuguese teenagers, aged 12 to 16 years old (N=78), attending an urban and a rural school in the North of the country.

## Implications For Policy Makers About

# Abstract

The dissonance between what teenagers learn in classrooms and their everyday lives is not a recent phenomenon, but it is increasingly relevant as school systems are unable to follow the evolution of media and society beyond traditional concerns regarding the protection of young people. An overly scholarly view of learning continues to prevail in our society, which seems to marginalize the knowledge that young people develop with and through media and digital platforms. Based on questionnaires, workshops, and interviews conducted with Portuguese teenagers, aged 12 to 16 years old (N=78), attending an urban and a rural school in the North of the country, this paper aims to understand how these teens are learning to use the media, what motivates them, and if their media practices contribute to the acquisition of skills and competencies useful to their lives inside and outside school. The research main results confirm the existence of a gap between formal and informal education. Informal education is mainly motivated by their needs and peer influence. Colleagues and family, alongside the Internet and self-discovery, appear as important sources of knowledge. Another important conclusion is that informal learning strategies contribute to the development of skills and competencies that are useful from a school viewpoint.

# Outcome

The media continue outside of the classroom in many schools. There is a large gap between formal and informal learning practices.
The exception seems to be about issues regarding the protection of young people from inappropriate content and online predators. Most formal education systems do not see digital literacy as a priority because they mistakenly assume that teenagers already know everything as if they were born knowing. Media uses, practices, experiences and learning enter school with students but are not explored or discussed inside the classroom.
There is an overly scholarly view of learning, which marginalizes the knowledge acquired by young people in their leisure time, in digital platforms, in peer communication.
To respond to the multiple and constant appeals of the digital universe, young people develop learning strategies on their own and with peer groups. The media continue to be a subject only for break time and are hardly recognized as a source of learning; they are seen mainly as a source of entertainment and leisure, also by students.
Students themselves also consider natural the gap between those two worlds. However, when these issues are discussed with them, they realize the important role the media play in their lives as a source of information, and they recognize the skills they develop within and from media.
Teens perceive video games as positive, allowing them to develop several skills, particularly for learning English as a foreign language, but also for other subjects: Physic and Chemistry, History, Geometry, behavioural and cognitive behaviour, self-improvement, resilience, and reasoning, or arousing curiosity and teamwork.
The practices and preferences of those who are closer to teens (famlily and friends) have a great influence on the interests they develop, being important sources of motivation for the informal learning experienced by young people.
There are interesting media literacy projects in schools, but they are usually punctual and episodic, lacking a policy that supports them. Recommendations for effective implementation of media literacy in schools:
• Regarding media and technology, the concerns of educational policies (in Portugal) have been essentially related to access and technical skills over critical literacy that values aspects such as critical thinking, communication and culture (that should be corrected).
• Strong educational policy in this field has to foresee and be accompanied by a teacher training plan, either initial or in-service training.
• There is a need to produce and disseminate resources that support and motivate the development of Media Literacy competencies.