Understanding Implementation of the Digital Competence Framework
Part of the Modern Literacies Education in Schools (MoLES) Study

Laura R. Pinkerton

University of Oxford – Oxford Internet Institute & Department of Education

Background Literature

There has been a growing call for an improved modern literacies education (e.g. digital, information, and media literacy) to be provided in UK schools.

Young people are not "digital natives" who have passively absorbed the skills and insights necessary to participate safely and productively in a digitalised world, but instead are in need of active support from adults.[1,2,3,4]

In their *Growing Up with the Internet* report[5], the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications recommended that:

"Digital literacy... is vital for children to navigate the online world. It is also an essential requirement of the future workforce. It is no longer sufficient to teach digital skills in specialist computer science classes to only some pupils.

We recommend that digital literacy sit alongside reading, writing and mathematics as the fourth pillar of a child's education; and that no child should leave school without a well-rounded understanding of the digital world."

The Welsh Government's Digital Competence Framework[6] (DCF) is an ambitious attempt to meet young people's modern literacies needs through formal education.

Part of a larger study on school-based modern literacies education across the UK, the DCF-focused stage of my research will explore what modern literacy skills and knowledge are being taught in Welsh schools and what obstacles teachers face when offering a rigorous education in the modern literacies.

Ethics

The MoLES Study is currently awaiting funding decisions and will not start until Spring 2019 at the earliest. The Wales-based component of this study will not begin until Autumn 2020.

Since the DCF is compulsory, schools may be wary of openly sharing any difficulties they have had in adopting it, which may in turn expose them to criticism that they are not meeting the Government's (or public's) expectations. Data from the national survey will be anonymised before being shared so that participating schools and educators do not have to fear professional repercussions.

Vulnerable participants such as young children and their families may worry that criticizing their local school or the educators who they interact with daily may result in a negative backlash. Interview and focus group data will be carefully anonymised so that individuals and their group membership cannot be identified by any reports produced as a part of this study.

Methods

National Survey
- Distributed digitally to every primary school in Wales over the course of the 2020-21 school year.
- Completed by the headteacher and digital competency lead.

- Will identify:
  - If schools have adopted the DCF.
  - How they are implementing it.
  - What is influencing how they adopt and implement the DCF.

School-Based Case Study
Four interesting case schools – selected based on their survey responses – will be invited to participate in an intensive period of data collection, lasting approximately one week each.

- Classroom observations
- Headteacher and digital competency lead interviews
- Separate teacher, parent, and students focus group

- Will provide rich detail of:
  - How the DCF is being implemented and experienced by stakeholders (e.g. school leadership, teachers, students, and families) in practice.
  - What influences how the DCF is adopted and implemented.

Results

Results from the Welsh national survey and case study will be analysed in conjunction with data from the wider MoLES research, which asks:

1) What modern literacies (e.g. digital and information literacy) do young people need today?
2) Do the UK's four devolved national curricula cover these topics?
3) How are these skills and knowledge best delivered in UK schools?

Discussion

This research is one stage in a broader study that addresses a) what modern literacy skills and knowledge leading experts and past evidence from academic literature demonstrate young people need, and b) whether the four devolved national curricula of the UK adequately address these topics.

A narrative literature review will take place throughout the Spring and Summer of 2019, followed by expert interviews in Autumn 2019 (e.g. with academics studying children's digital rights, propaganda campaigns, algorithmic bias and manipulation, and artificial intelligence; media organisations such as as the BBC; and NGOs like the 5Rights Foundation, doteveryone, and the Royal Foundation's Taskforce on the Prevention of Cyberbullying).
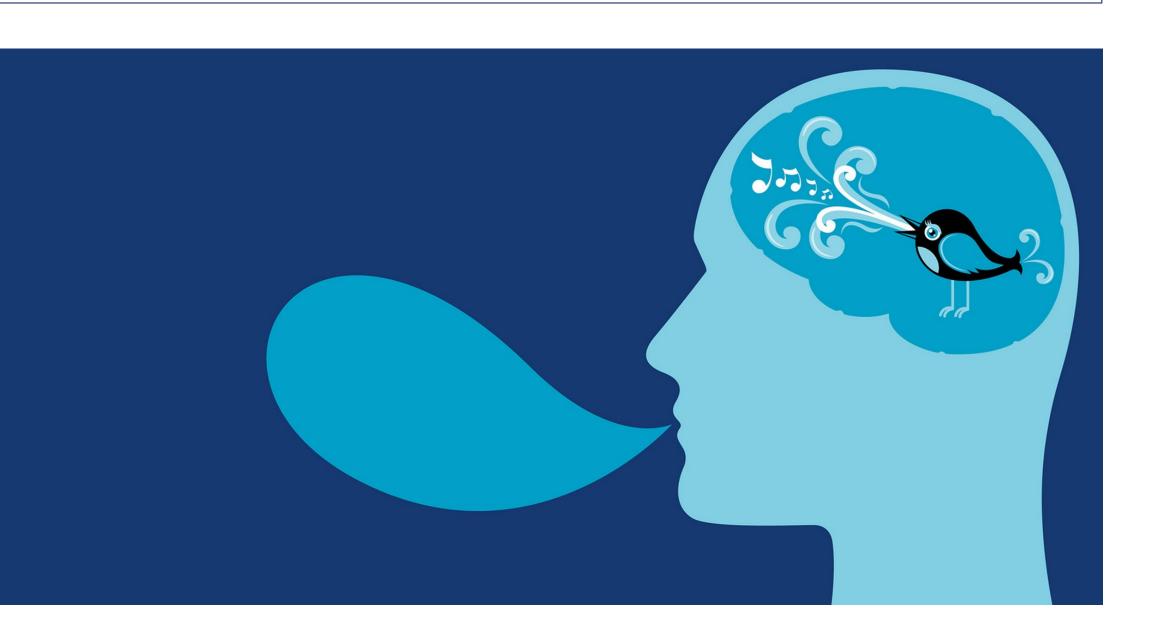
This will then be followed by the empirical work in Wales, culminating is a mega-analysis of modern literacies education across the UK and what needs to be changed to help prepare young people for an increasingly digitalised world.

Conclusions

It has become increasingly clear that there are significant risks embedded in the Internet and other networked, digital technologies. Young users in particular face the exploitation of their personal data, fake news, bullying, grooming, and exposure to disturbing material online.

Technical and regulatory solutions have so far failed to significantly reduce these risks, while the impact of changes to educational policy are not yet clear. Policymakers, educators, and the public need an evidence-based explanation of what modern literacy skills and knowledge young people need and how best to teach them.

Feedback Welcome!

I would greatly appreciate feedback on my proposed research, particularly from Welsh educational practitioners.

Contact

Laura R. Pinkerton
University of Oxford
Oxford Internet Institute
1 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3JS
Laura.Pinkerton@oii.ox.ac.uk

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