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## Inequality In Education And New Challenges In The Use Of Information And Communication Technologies

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### Abstract

This communication is aimed to address the inequalities that occur today among young people due to the use of the information and communication technologies. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are an important part of the lives of young people today, they are 'digital natives'. Internet, mobile phone and social networks are no longer virtual reality but has become another way to stay in touch with the rest of the world, for social participation and to access information. The opportunities and the potential offered by ICT are infinite but "despite creating possibilities for improving quality of life, the social model that is predominant increases old inequalities and generates new ones" (Flecha, 1994, p. 58). Unfortunately access to information that is "objective, complete, updated, accurate, practical and easy to use" (ERYICA, 2004) is a right that is not equally available to all young people. The new challenge in the information society makes it essential to facilitate access to ICT and to promote digital literacy, for both young people and youth work professionals. After analysing studies and statistics on young people's use of ICT, we come to the conclusion that the digital gap exists also among those who regularly use ICT. That is why new socio-cultural intervention models should be developed to minimize the effects of inequalities caused by the use of technologies.

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### 1. Introduction

We must remember that we live in an information society. This has led to changes in relationships, production, teaching, learning... Therefore, one of the key elements in ensuring equal opportunities is providing access to information, by offering tools and resources.

Today the use of computers and mobile phones is new for parts of the population, but at the same time it is part of everyday life, especially for young people.

Nowadays fast changes occur both in the technologies themselves and in the use that is made of them. In fact ICT are essential for economic as well as social development of the individual citizens, but also on regional and national level. This circumstance involves a serious risk of marginalization for those without access to ICT.

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But, as Alejandro Martínez González (2004) points out, the extension of ICT in our social context and the economy is highly visible and plays a key role – in contrast to the difficulty that parts of the population face to access these technologies.

With respect to this issue, two important questions should be taken into account: on one hand, although ICT are designed as a tool for promoting established socio-economic models, they are becoming key targets for the critic of these same models by the anti-establishment movements. In the recent movements during the Arab Spring, or the 15-M in Madrid, Internet, instant messaging and social networks were playing a critical role in the emergence and the maintenance of these movements. Gonzalo Abril (1997) explained that the loss of institutional control over the flow of communication – which is seen as a threat by some, means hope of progress and development to others. Developing new forms of democratization of the society; more participatory than the current representative democracy where the role of the citizens is being reduced to the exercise of voting rights.

Moreover, it is important to be aware that the technologies available to us, are those which are suitable for the social and economic hegemonic model. Therefore, if the interests were different, ICT and their uses would also be different. From a social educational intervention point of view, this leads us to speak of inequalities produced by the system and how to address them. We have seen that access to information, and more specifically communication systems, is critical.

### **1. The digital gap**

The technological and scientific development in which we are immersed affects all members of society in different ways. As pointed out by Manuel Area (2009), access to information technology and knowledge is not equally available to everyone, only to those who can afford the equipment and have the skills needed to use them. This causes an increase in social inequalities known as the digital gap. In this sense we talked about the first digital gap where obstacles to access are economic, geographic, social etc, and the second digital gap where the barriers are caused by lack of up-to-date knowledge or skills.

Today's teenagers and young people are the first generation that has grown up in the culture of ICT. However, although differences are smaller than for previous generations we found that differences still exist, both in access and in use. For example, several studies show us that the place of residence is a variable to consider when determining inequalities, since it affects the access and use of ICT.

Another important issue is that if it is true that most teenagers and young people have access to ICTs today, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, it is very important to establish a distinction between mere consumers of messaging, music downloads and videos, and those who have acquired the skills needed to manage competently in a society based on information and knowledge.

### **2. ICT use among young people**

According to the Survey on Equipment and Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Households (INE, 2011) the population between 10 and 15 years generally use ICT. 95.6% of this population use computers; the Internet is used by 87.1%, which implies that use is widespread and also that there is not a significant gender difference. This points also to the importance of mobile phones in particular, compared to other devices. The increased personal use of technological devices, especially mobile phones, is a characteristic of young people's use of ICT. The mobile phone allows them to be permanently 'available and connected'.

Furthermore, since the INE's research started, Internet access has been extended to mobile devices, increasing young people's connection to the world. Considerable focus is devoted to people who remain connected to the Internet several hours daily, and whose relationship with technology affects their daily lives. For children under 18, almost 80% of the time spent connected to Internet is for personal reasons. Boys use the Internet for personal reasons to a higher extent than girls (83% and 71% respectively), whereas girls use Internet more for study and work purposes (ten points more women than men in all age groups of youth).

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