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Towards a post-democratic era? Moral education against new forms of authoritarianism

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ABSTRACT

Educating in a convulsed political context demands a detailed analysis of the new circumstances of our times, especially the current democracy crisis. According to the latest reports issued by international evaluation organisations, one of the greatest challenges for democratic citizenship is the emergence and rise of authoritarianism within the framework of the so-called post-democracy, and also in the manifestations known as illiberal democracy. Moral and civic education has to respond to this challenge. With this in mind, we propose revitalising a participative and deliberative democracy model, rethinking the basic values in citizens' education, redefining the relation between what is public and what is private, and empowering sensitivity and free creation in the new maker culture.

KEYWORDS

Civic education; democracy; populism; ethical values; media education; maker culture

1. Post-democracy after 'the end of history'? The arrival of illiberal democracy

Current reflections on liberal democracy, its evolution, its profiles and its limits have given way to the concept that we wish to examine here: *post-democracy*. This concept, initially coined by Crouch (2004), does not refer to an era of surpassing or denying democracy, but to the present crisis of this political system, threatened by the resurgence and strengthening of authoritarianism, even in apparently consolidated or advanced democratic regimes.

This phenomenon has been verified by many reports issued by organisations that evaluate the status of democracy internationally. Some examples are the report by the Freedom House Institute (Freedom House, 2022), the Democracy Report of the V-Dem Institute (Democracy Report V-Dem Institute, 2022) of Gothenburg University, or the well-known Democracy Index (2021) of *The Economist*. Other publications have also appeared that warn about the deterioration of democracy (Runciman, 2018), the decline of democracy (Applebaum, 2020), or even the death of democracy in some countries (Levitsky & Ziblat, 2018), shadowed by new forms of authoritarianism (Frantz, 2018). Han (2022) talks about *infocracy* in reference to post-democracy in a digital world, characterized by the crisis of truth, the end of communicative action and the new

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power through big data. Thus, the question arises about the fate and paths of liberalism (of liberal democracy) as the main ideology of the 21st century.

After the Second World War, the consensus reached about liberal democracy being the political destination of advanced and free societies seemed to take root. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, this consensus was theoretically consolidated as the *End of History* (Fukuyama, 1992). According to Fukuyama, the *End of History* was democracy, a true zenith of social, political and economic progress, and society's totalitarian organisation attempts were put to one side (Fascism, Nazism and Soviet communism).

Today, however, the dream of society being completely fulfilled in democratic, (neo) liberal and capitalist terms is starting to break up. It is precisely here where the 'post-democracy' concept emerges, along with other forms of the so-called 'illiberal' democracy. Today, indicators reveal a worldwide increase in autocracy and authoritarianism, the rise in populist and excluding nationalisms, the questioning of division of powers, the creation of mass media and social networks, indifference to social minorities and inequalities and, basically, the consolidation in some places in the world of pseudo-democratic models; for example, we can find in some Eastern European countries models that may result in dictatorial systems, such as Russia with Putin, which have tragic global consequences.

Yet if we analyse the post-democracy idea from its origin at the beginning of this century, we can then see the variants that can be added to the democratic crisis process.

1.1. Post-democracy and criticism of the elitist version of democracy

Colin Crouch's 'post-democracy' concept (Crouch, 2004) refers to the present democracy crisis. According to this sociologist and political expert, the 21st century is witnessing a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, democracy is being increasingly followed all over the world. On the other hand, despite countries with elections and plebiscites increasing, this issue becomes less optimistic and employs increasingly more demanding democratic indicators. Crouch refers to a report by the Trilateral Commission (an institution that brings together experts from Western Europe, Japan and the United States) warning that something 'is going wrong in the democratic system of these countries' (Crouch, 2004, p. 8).

Democracy's health is weakening: there are doubts about representatives' legitimacy according to poor voting participation; there is a crisis in trusting democratic institutions and politicians; *demos* has weakened given, we add, the new emerging agents and powers, from multinational corporations to systems that control public opinion in networks and social communication technologies. In other words, there is a new scenario in which information is power now more than ever, and creating opinions takes new courses. The representation crisis is here (Greppi, 2012). In today's times of handling and manipulating big data, talking about 'free elections' might be slightly over-optimistic.

One of the causes that Crouch previously argued in this representation crisis is to gradually and subtly identify democracy as 'elitist liberal democracy' which is, all in all, a model or manifestation of this, but not the only one or necessarily the best one. In other words: Fukuyama's diagnosis is questionable, and history is reluctant to end its days in the idyllic lap of neoliberalism. The model that has been imposed has a well-localised background, has emerged from a very specific context, and has not offered all that it

promised. Due to North American influence, liberal democracy outlines electoral participation as the main type of political activity in which the vast majority of the population can engage; and what is more relevant: it confers ample freedom to pressure groups and companies so they can perform their activities and, in turn, it shapes a type of political community that refrains from interfering with market economy (Crouch, 2004).

In fact an elitist and different version of liberal democracy has been clearly shaped which, since the end of the past century, clashes with participative and deliberative democracy proposals (Dahl, 1989; Macpherson, 2003; Schmitter, 2002). Nonetheless, the origin of the elitist model of democracy dates back to the first third of the 20th century, and is portrayed in philosophical debate about the meaning and scope of the term *public opinion* at the heart of democracy. John Dewey actively took part in this debate.

At the beginning of the 20th century in the USA, Walter Lippmann (1922/2003) considered voters to be a mass, a crowd willing to satisfy his private interests, ignorant of, and insensitive to, matters of general interest. Experts in economics and finances, in diplomacy, laws and political relations, in industry and the mass media, etc., were those who outlined and led people's opinions by showing the way towards a democratic nation by *manufacturing its consent* if need be (Camps, 2004). Evidently, however, not everyone agreed with this recipe. Well into adulthood, John Dewey (1927–2004) responded to Lippmann's proposal by advocating democratic regeneration from trust in social action and citizenship. Democracy requires education from action because democracy is not merely a simple mechanism of selecting elites, but is a citizens' construct and a *way of life* that is sustained from training in participation and debate, from collaboration at the heart of the community; the real core of active public life. With this model, or from this perspective, we can deduce that one of the missions of media education today is to form a plural public opinion capable of calibrating excess information (or *infoxication*) based on socially responsible and epistemologically demanding, critical and lucid criteria.

Post-democracy means that in historic terms Lippmann beat Dewey. The present liberal democracy type responds, historically and eventually, to an elitist model that 'shows little interest in profound citizen engagement existing or in the role that some organisations far-removed from the business world might play' (Crouch, 2004, p. 10). However, and alternatively, it can be stated that power relations are not absolute, unfailing or stable, and redistribution of powers and responsibilities, that is, of liberties, shifts to the process known precisely as *democratic revitalisation*, a process about which education has a lot to tell. Education that goes more deeply into democracy is also a civic-political reactivation process of citizenship, and one that promotes peoples' development to be free agents capable of establishing their own lives, running their self-fulfilment projects, or being able to personally flourish (Nussbaum, 2012; Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015).

Although Crouch does not explicitly mention it, the same negative classification of liberal democracy as post-democracy involves assuming that the opposite is valid; that is, a broader and more participative conception of democracy that is clearly on Dewey's side given his dispute with Lippmann, and one that follows the current wake by Macpherson (2003), Elster (1998), Habermas (2002), and Gutmann and Thompson (2004), and Fishkin (2018).

Hence the need to reformulate fundamental values of moral and civic education in democracy. First of all, retrieving the sense of civic freedoms for participation, moral autonomy, prosperity and human development is an urgent matter (Bernal, Gozálvez & Burguet, 2019). It is also worth conciliating the value of freedom with equal dignity, and also with equity (social justice, redistributing resources, equal access to dignified social benefits, etc.; Blum, 2014; Piketty, 2020). Liberalism (liberal democracy) has played a fundamental role in the struggle against tyranny and absolutism, but defending equality cannot be removed from the genetic structure of democracy by the simplistic identification of this value with communism. Besides, the defence of civil liberties has been compromised even in formally democratic countries, that are in fact countries with a low-quality democracy or democracies in appearance only.

It is precisely mistrust in freedom as a fundamental value of democracy, and in favour of other aspirations like security and the ethnic shaping of a closed community, that has given way to new forms of post-democracy appearing, which are grouped in the 'illiberal democracy' epigraph as electoral systems that destroy the very axiological foundations of democracy.

1.2. Illiberal democracy and new authoritarianisms

Liberal democracy presently faces post-democracy challenges. Nonetheless, today's difficulties for democracy come from elsewhere: from denying the liberalism closely linked with the democratic system. 'Illiberal democracy' is a term coined by Zakaria (1997) to refer to the political system in which democratic elections exist, but are combined with authoritarian and populist governments capable of even undermining some fundamental civil liberties: due respect to minority groups and equal dignity for all members of these minority groups. By being clearly linked with elitist democracy, it is defined as partial or low-intensity democracy. Illiberal democracy is like the 'Tyranny of the Majority' concept coined by Tocqueville (1835/2018) and Mill (1859/2015). It suggests penetration on a world scale and, in recent years, of populist authoritarianism or authoritarian nationalism; that is, nationalism that encourages majorities to feel threatened by *the others* who are strange from a cultural or ideological point of view. It is defined as being used by the majority to even force a change of regime, which means that the fundamental principles and values of democracy have capsized (readers are referred to civil/human rights). Although its manifestations are quite different, *democratic illiberalism* basically means using an electoral mechanism combined with tendencies or actions that are on the limit, or even on the fringe, of superior values linked with a democratic constitution (Cortina, 2021).

By way of example, we mention the recent sudden appearance of democratic political parties with xenophobic connotations in America and Europe (although the illiberal tendencies also occasionally appear in classic political parties). To these parties, other forms of authoritarianism can be added that have been driven by democratic plebiscites, such as Chavism in Venezuela or Putin's neozarism in Russia.

In such extreme cases, democracy is used and left in a state of collapse, which is still a variant of post-democracy or a form of pseudo-democracy: elected and charismatic dictatorships, authoritarianisms with social backing, legitimisation by staging extremely media-influenced elections … This is the sign of the new *populist authoritarianism* (Frantz, 2018), one that devours democracy from within, and from where personalist

figures and governments emerge that employ elections to undermine the very spirit of democracy to slow dawn pluralism; abolish the role of criticism and the countervailing power of the institutions that supervise; minorities and alternative media leave the weighted, informed and deliberative public opinion in the dark; weaken the ethico-civic values that sustain democracy. In short, democracy is deployed as a simple mechanism against democracy as a way of life. The origin of democratic authoritarianism dates back to the elitist nature that presided over the construction of many modern democratic regimes (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018).

Recent authoritarianism, as Puddington (2017) analyses and defines it in a Freedom House report on the future of liberties worldwide, is characterised by seeking a match to the democratic legitimisation system which, even though it actually implies a concentration of powers (legislative and judiciary, media and economic, security forces and military power) that makes transformations arising from genuine pluralism, and normalised criticism, extremely difficult if not entirely impossible. From this analysis, we are living a decade of clear global decadence in democratic liberties, and the basic indicators that define democratic societies (transparent elections with guarantees, real pluralism, citizenship's participation and critical manifestation, a real separation of powers, defending civil rights and liberties at all costs, respect for minority groups' rights, media that do not depend on the government, etc.,) have gone backwards. This decade has marked the longest democratic depression in 40 years according to an analysis by Freedom House, which shows the constant erosion of political institutions in countries that legalise and justify certain forms of repression in apparently democratic societies. The techno-communication aspect is key insofar as it generalises the use of big data and social networks to build consent, to diffuse massively fake news and falsehoods, to lead to the fragmentation and polarisation of public opinion, and to create new digital niches (Gozálvez et al., 2019).

The danger of making democracy obscure is not theoretical, but extremely practical. Liberalism, which is currently questioned for being converted into an economic dogma by neoliberalism, faces serious problems as a model to create fair societies (i.e., that are equitable and sustainable, and show solidarity), but it is still necessary as a philosophy which advocates and has advocated for freedom, and opposed to totalitarianisms of all kinds, absolutisms, birth privileges, and excesses of power, even those of majorities. The freedom of some or many can never act as an argument to end the freedom of others or of a minority. This is particularly true when the assumed majority obeys the guidelines of self-proclaimed elites to do so (Babones, 2018).

This new democratic elitism, which is combined with authoritarianism and defends ethnic, cultural or national superiority, cannot remain indifferent to agents with educational responsibilities. This means that we have to rethink moral and civic education in intercultural terms, to opt for an open and cosmopolitan (post-conventional) sense for citizenship, or to look closely at critical media pedagogy from a new maker culture in the digital era. This is what we shall examine in the sections that follow.

2. Civic and political education when faced with the post-democracy challenge

In recent decades, traditionally democratic countries in Europe and in America have witnessed a growing political dislike and loss of civic commitment in young generations

(Camps, 2010; Han, 2022; Levitsky & Ziblat, 2018). This scenario is considered a true threat for democracies. Indifference to political participation is growing in such basic aspects like voting, interest in shared matters, social participation, etc. Thus the balance has become imbalanced and favours citizen rights claims, but does not take into account the duties that stem from participating and collaborating towards the common good. These are sufficiently serious reasons to warn politicians and education professionals, who are now beginning to understand the ethical and political education of new generations should be a priority—one that cannot be postponed.

It is becoming increasingly clear that not only the formal structures of a political democratic system provide these generations stability and strength, but so do civic virtues, commitment with democracy and its citizens' participation. Hence the growing need to form civically competent citizens in increasingly more plural and more multicultural societies that are committed to the common good (collective responsibilities) by acknowledging differences in the key of equality (Blum, 2014).

Today, revitalising moral and civic education requires acknowledging that the democratic values which spread through our present socio-political system towards historic achievement represent the historic success that has been achieved over the years, and in such a way that it appears like that which took place when technical progress was made. This is known as the *theory of social and moral evolution* (Habermas, 1990). According to this theory, societies generate technical progress and, in turn, the evolution of individuals' moral conscience. However, technical achievements last forever and there is no need to be watchful of any possibility of going backwards, but the same cannot be stated of ethical or moral achievements.

With these ethical and civic regression threats, the education system cannot be restricted to instructional tasks that have been conventionally performed or remain far-removed from the new circumstances of today's world. It must face the challenge of teaching co-existence, of making citizens responsible in increasingly more heterogeneous societies to promote equal dignity beyond different cultural identities, of teaching basic skills, virtues, values and attitudes to help students to develop their own capacities . . . The challenge of providing them the necessary tools to cope with the accelerated changes of our global world. That is, preparing them to become informed and active citizens who are committed to their democracies (Arbués et al., 2015).

For this purpose, overcoming post-democracy apathy and avoiding populist authoritarianisms demand developing, and very carefully and sensitively transmitting, everything that refers to values and civic virtues, beliefs and moral attitudes related to *democratic ways of life*. The rise of populist politics, or the revival of widespread racial tensions in several polities, demand a review of the liberal narrative, which has paradoxically led to both an authoritarian and illiberal trend, as we have seen, and a libertarian (and anti-social) trend (Conroy, 2020).

Given the democratic backward movement noted worldwide and the marked presence of illiberal authoritarianism, anyone involved in the education fact must reinvent themselves and look closely at the sense of democracy.

It is a matter of training citizens to become more civically competent and to act by bearing in mind others' perspective. On this aspect, and as Freinet (1972) contemplated, civic education is complemented with moral education because it is impossible to co-exist in peace and to respect freedom for all without moral norms.

2.1. Public education, values and inclusion

Ever since the public school came into being, its objective has been to train students in certain common values as opposed to individual or group peculiarities. It was about preparing young people to live and exercise the role of citizens. The school is a fundamental institution to shape citizens' identity, for which the State has been responsible and has not left it to the civil society criterion or to families. This is why socialisation is stressed with a set of common universal values that come before the specific cultural patterns of the social groups making up a country. This was the rationale of secular education, to leave each group's specificities or peculiarities, such as religious beliefs, out of the public education system. This model was unifying and egalitarian, and one based on common values that recognised differential values, provided that these values did not oppose the dominant culture (Bolívar, 2013; European Commission, 2018).

However, this liberal-republican model of education based on equality, a shared culture and the homogenisation of everyone within the national state framework is now obsolete in today's world. The migratory phenomena caused by globalising the economy have transformed the plural societies from the western world into multicultural societies, which has also led to more social inequalities and, therefore, to more problems for citizens' co-existence.

This change in scenario means that education systems have to deal with the civic and political education theme by adopting other criteria than those of the first modernity with which education began. The challenge involves combining respect for other different ways of life, other points of view, and other beliefs, ideologies, religions, etc., and the need to teach students the post-conventional ethico-political values that form the basis of a democratic system. As Kohlberg and Turiel (1971) state, the ultimate objective of public education is to build respect for constitutional values and human rights because the task of schools, like that of governments, is to communicate understanding between a place's laws and the basic human rights that these laws must protect.

However for pluralism, which results in multiculturalism, to not become a focal point for permanent conflicts, it must be governed by the basic triple rule for intercultural co-existence: respecting common constitutional values; tolerating non-contradictory differences with these values; accepting democratic game rules.

For all these reasons, we cannot talk about citizen values without mentioning inclusion (Habermas, 2002), because a citizen can only be someone who is completely integrated into the community, and who possesses all rights and duties in a situation of equality with all other citizens. Integrating someone into a democratic community must involve accepting the values that sustain it, and does not imply renouncing individual signs of identity or those of the cultural group into which the citizen is being integrated. Sometimes, however, it involves renouncing those values and customs that are not compatible with the democratic values of the group that one intends to co-exist with (Schnapper, 2007).

Educating for freedom also consists of asking people to think that it is the result of the law, and respect for the democratic law is the basis of co-existing under joint conditions of freedom and prosperity in the interests of common good, and without excluding a particular good, but enabling and harmonising it with other individual ones. The

degree of inclusion is measured by the degree of either someone's participation or the differentiated group in the common life, which comes in four areas: political, economic, social and cultural activity. Inclusion also expects equality and freedom in participation to be real and effective so that everyone is genuinely ensured equal opportunities.

All in all, we can state that education systems must always teach the common values of the human condition regardless of respect for cultural, religious, ethnic, etc., values, of the minority groups making it up and of acknowledging equal rights. However, these common typical values of democratic citizenship that, in turn, act as the axiological link of interculturality, result from the civic and moral progress that has been made by societies throughout their history. With such process, differential values can be included in the block of common values, and either completely or partially, to give way to constructive cultural cross-breeding.

2.2. Proposals for post-conventional, democratic and critical citizenship

Education for active, responsible and democratic citizenship, which is intercultural and post-conventional (using Kohlberg's category, Kohlberg, 1984), is one of the basic priorities of education systems in European countries. Ever since the European Union was set up, its constitution treaty, which we can consider to be its current version, namely the Treaty of Lisbon, has considered acquiring European citizenship being the result of adhering to the Union's common values, including tolerance and respecting differences.

To study citizenship in Europe (Eurydice, 2005, 2017, 2019), the Eurydice network considers that the term 'responsible citizenship' refers to matters related to raising awareness about, and acquiring knowledge of, rights and duties. It is also closely related to civic values, such as democracy and human rights, equality, participation, social cohesion, solidarity, tolerance to diversity and social justice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Nevertheless, as previously pointed out, in many Member States concern has been voiced in recent years about civic deficit in a considerable part of the population, particularly young people. This is known as youths' political dislike or civic apathy (indifference, deinstitutionalisation, low political and citizen participation). A common factor in most European countries is that the majority of youths support democratic institutions and their related values but, at the same time, they do not trust politics and professional politicians. This feeling of mistrust is generated by being unable to influence the system, and also by the system responding to citizenship's demands and needs.

Although it takes different names (Education for citizenship, Education in common values, Political training, Civic education, etc.), the same basic subject is taught at school in 19 EU countries. The aim of this subject is to deal with the aforementioned areas. It is true, however, that this subject in the school curriculum tends to be low-profile because it is taught for only 1 or 2 hours a week, by non-specialist teachers, and with evaluation procedures markedly different to the rest of courses.

In any case, the objective of education in this area is to ensure that youths become active responsible citizens capable of contributing to the development and well-being of the society they live in by doing away with post-democratic inertias. It is also important to highlight that these inertias against liberal democracy take place in a digital context, in which social networks play a decisive role, not always in a positive sense. For example,

social media spread hoaxes and fake news with clear repercussions on political life, as stated before. There is even talk of *epistemic vices* linked to social networks: sensationalism and emotional responses, decreased communication, argumentation and dialogue, the development of closed-mindedness and unreflective thinking … (Kotsonis, 2022). This new context requires a reformulation of the formal education curriculum, in order to (1) reactivate epistemic virtues from a critical perspective in students (D'Olimpio, 2021), and to (2) stimulate face-to-face relationships aimed at thoughtful debate about social reality (Sunstein, 2009). In one way or another, this objective could be part of the curriculum of all countries and appears at the three General Education levels. Yet according to the study by Veugelers et al. (2017), the way it is organised may differ considerably from one country to another. In any case, three main educational intervention areas can be contemplated to develop active and socially responsible citizenship, but from a post-conventional perspective that is ready to overcome the burden of post-democracy: (1) developing political culture or democratic political literacy, including the constitutional values that run in parallel to human rights; (2) developing critical intellectual and morally autonomous thinking that is committed to social justice; (3) developing the necessary competences to participate in public, social and cultural life responsibly and constructively, and both nationally and internationally, particularly in the new digital sphere and, for example, in order to globally stop the current ecological collapse.

To fulfil these objectives, it is necessary to set up learning processes that are complicated and hard to carry out, but offer mid- and long-term results, and a good coordination level between teachers and other social agents. It would be interesting to retrieve the educational proposal of the Just Communities according to Kohlberg (Kohlberg et al., 1989b) to build deliberative democracy based on justice, civic participation and care right from the very beginning. A current version of Kohlberg's proposal can be seen in the interesting initiatives to educate deliberative citizenship (Nishiyama, 2021).

It is just as important as formal education to insist on the family's decisive role, which is the space between what is private and what is public.

2.3. Developing the democratic ethos in the family area

Reconstructing active and intercultural citizenship can begin by taking the family as a key unit for learning democracy as a compatible way of life with respect for the legitimate authority. A capacity approach towards individual well-being must be taken to the core of family politics and public debates about raising children because the ethical reconstruction of future citizenship has to begin with the complicity between the intimate self and the space of what is public (Bernal et al., 2019).

To advance in a democratic society, citizenship must acquire individual and social conducts that can be integrated into what is public and what is private. Our first experience in exercising power relations takes place in a private place: in the family. This is where we build our way of being, the way we relate with others, the way to participate in power structures, and the way we make decisions all our lives.

This means that the family acts as a building site of citizenship and democratic values (Buxarrais & Zeledón, 2007), and the family contributes this space of necessary intersection between what is personal and the public sphere. However, given the dominant

cultural traits in many societies, the family has actually contributed to develop authoritarian and asymmetric relationships between genders and generations.

It is necessary to especially emphasise the family's awareness in the relation with developing capacities in these four areas: 1) civic education to promote and maintain autonomous thinking, empathy and common good conceptions; 2) a feminist orientation of the family to delineate the roles of mothers and fathers to support their children; 3) a fairer model to distribute resources that deals with structure inequality and reintroduces debates about social class, equal opportunities and outcomes; 4) extending families' public space to promote the 'public reason' of Rawls and democratic deliberation practices (Hartas, 2014).

Different periods of history have encountered a relevant scaffold in the family that supports the most notable social, economic, political and cultural events. History cannot be rebuilt regardless of the family setting because it has been the social institution *par excellence* that has prevailed for centuries, and all this despite the tensions and changes that it has experienced.

To change anti-democratic and authoritarian conducts, and given the complexity and quantity of the factors that intervene in its building, it is necessary to promote democratic spaces and experiences in everyday life (García López et al., 2009). The family as a cell of society reflects not only a part, but also the whole of social system relations. It is in this social complexity that a dialectic interrelation is found between what is global and what is micro (the family), and it constitutes the basis of society.

This is why the family has become a starting point for a subject's humanising and democratising process. However, it does not always fulfil its mission in the best way, and this fact justifies the existence of other education agents who help in this task; for example, the school which, in the end, is an agency that reinforces and corrects ethical experience at the heart of the family.

So we understand that a democratic family, no matter what its structure, requires women's autonomy, its interests and desires being acknowledged by the family and society, the right to control own and group resources, and equal participation in family decisions.

It is precisely the new digital environment into which our intercommunicated societies have been converted that opens up possibilities to establish new education connections between what is close (what is intimate and familiar) and what is public. This is what our last proposal is about: making the most of new communication technologies to build citizenship from the maker culture in another pedagogic attempt to overcome post-democratic apathy.

3. Maker culture and the need for a critical media education to overcome post-democracy

New generations are trained in an education context in which information and communication technologies are nearly omnipresent. With these technologies, values of collaboration, respect and inclusion can be transmitted through learning spaces and by exchanging experiences. Digital/collaborative/creative economy is becoming increasingly relevant in societies' development.

Indeed one of the latest trends to have appeared in the education field is the so-called 'maker culture' (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Rosenfeld & Sheridan, 2014) or 'maker movement' (Ceccaroni & Piera, 2017; García Rodríguez & Carrascal, 2017), which involves introducing a series of digital competences (robotics, programming, 3D printing, etc.), which are linked with the development of sensitivity and creativity through artistic and craft activities. This has involved new creation spaces to proliferate in different education settings, such as libraries, museums, not-for-profit organisations, schools and universities.

DIY («do-it-yourself») technology is based on the philosophy of co-building and collaborating towards a purpose, and helps to empower the design, construction and manufacturing of objects jointly. Such situations promote a series of very important ethical values for democratic citizenship's education: cooperation for social purposes, the value of sharing projects and collaborating online, and the use of common design standards to facilitate exchanges and rapid iteration (Anderson, 2012).

Although it might appear to be a new movement, some credit Seymour Papert as 'the father of the maker movement' (Martínez & Stager, 2013). The roots of Papert's constructivism lie in Dewey ('learning by doing') by considering that learning is the result of playing, experimenting and investigating. In fact, the movement's initial approach came from a higher education setting, specifically in the FabLabs of Gershenfeld (2005) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as part of a learning experiment that involved the intersection of computer sciences, design, art and engineering.

Despite being an emerging phenomenon, which does not enable us to foresee its consequences, we must doubtlessly be watchful because it implies an alternative route that advocates critical, creative and responsible citizenship. Furthermore, the globalisation phenomenon (Lindtner et al., 2018) reveals the importance of digital platforms in different areas of society, and opts for sustainability by expecting more sustainable, collaborative and transparent processes that, at the same time, provide a greater more social, equitable, shared and fairer benefit.

The creation of maker spaces, where children can be curious, ingenious and creative, and where they can apply their knowledge of mathematics, sciences and humanities, is a way of coping with social inclusion and diversity differently by providing mutual support between students and teachers (Mokhtar et al., 2013).

This new culture is included in the civically positive contributions of the new digital setting, and can be put to best educational use as opposed to the hazards of this new setting (i.e., new forms of addiction, infoxication, polarising public opinion, neopopulism when faced with falsehoods or pseudo-truths *en masse*, etc.). These hazards, on the other hand, need critical media and profoundly democratic education to be reinforced (Buckingham & Martínez-Rodríguez, 2013; Gozálvez, 2013).

4. Conclusion

Today's democratic crisis (post-democracy and illiberal democracy) invites us to look in depth at how we can improve our political system from different perspectives, and one of them is from moral and civic education. Rethinking democracy as a way of life involves learning from both reflection and action by starting with the family and continuing with schools. On the other hand, revitalising democracy in the digital setting could encourage the

best possible use of the maker culture and initiatives for all-round media education, and not only for technical education. In any case, critical media literacy is necessary that also contemplates the intervention of both the family and school, both of which must pay attention to not only the risks that digital culture entails, but also the opportunities that it contains.

All in all, it is a matter of preventing mass media-outlined authoritarianisms and overcoming civic apathy by, pedagogically speaking, allowing pupils, who are the citizens of today and tomorrow, to be able to well establish ways of life that are associated with ethical values in the new digital culture by taking personal and collective action. Without such values, the digital era will become an era of meaningless post-democracy at the service of newly minted elites. Now more than ever, this scenario justifies opting for a moral education that favours civic and ethical principles in tune with our time (Buxarrais & Farías, 2020).

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Notes on contributors

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