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ILLITERACY AND LITERACY IN EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL HISTORY: FROM SOCIAL CHALLENGE TO CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The study of illiteracy and literacy within European educational history highlights key developments and the ever-evolving challenges that shape educational policies, while also revealing the complex nature of illiteracy in contemporary society. The need to adapt education to social, cultural, and technological transformations has led to the recognition of new forms of literacy that go beyond the traditional understanding of reading and writing skills, expanding the competencies required for full participation in a constantly evolving society.

Since the early decades of the 20th century, education in Europe has recognized that illiteracy is not limited to basic reading and writing abilities but is closely linked to social and cultural inequalities that restrict access to educational opportunities and active participation in social life. The ongoing progress in EU educational policies aimed at promoting social inclusion and universal education demonstrates positive steps being taken; however, disparities remain pronounced and call for new strategies to address them.

Education is thus called upon to act as a tool for cultural recognition and social inclusion, fostering critical thinking and active citizenship. In the 21st century, the need for intercultural awareness and the ongoing advancement of technological developments emerges as critical factors in the development of all forms of literacy. Despite significant progress, structural contradictions persist, underscoring the need for social, political, and cultural transformations in educational policy to ensure genuine inclusion and equality for all citizens. This article examines the strategies developed in different historical periods to combat illiteracy and enhance literacy, focusing on social inclusion and the overcoming of barriers arising from cultural and social differences, while also highlighting the difficulty of eliminating structural inequalities that persist within European educational models.

Keywords: Illiteracy, literacy, educational strategies, social inclusion, multiliteracy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

From the early stages of educational thought in Europe, illiteracy has been a phenomenon closely associated with social marginalization and the lack of participation in cultural and democratic processes. Its initial conceptualization as the inability to read and write transcends its technical dimension, revealing a deep social divide reflected in the unequal distribution of educational and cultural capital. Historically and developmentally, the notion of literacy has

been linked not only to access to knowledge but also to the individual's ability to actively integrate into the social fabric, to participate in public discourse, and to shape their own cultural interpretations (Freire, 2000; Bourdieu, 1984).

The connection between writing and power, as well as between literacy practices and social hierarchies, has been a persistent element in modern thought. Especially from the 18th century onward, the emergence of Enlightenment and the consolidation of nation-states positioned education as a strategic tool for normative homogeneity. Illiteracy was no longer perceived merely as a pedagogical deficiency, but as an obstacle to the nation-state's strategic role, one grounded in the ability to control and unify citizens through a common language and shared cultural references (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 2009). Thus, its eradication became a primary concern of educational policies, embedded within a logic of progress, rationalization, and the cultivation of the "educated citizen", who would serve as a bearer of national values and the ethics of capitalist labor.

However, the emergence of new forms of social exclusion from the 1980s onward has reshaped the concept of illiteracy, gradually detaching it from the simple lack of basic skills. The digital revolution, intensified migration, and the broadening of cultural currents brought to light a multi-layered illiteracy linked to the inability to access complex forms of knowledge, digital literacy, and cultural participation. The phenomenon now reappears with different characteristics, not as absolute deprivation, but as functional inadequacy in environments that demand multiple and fluid competencies (UNESCO, 2004; Council of the European Union, 2012).

Understanding illiteracy therefore requires a historical approach that situates the concept within the changing social, economic, and cultural conditions of Europe. From the post-war imperatives of universal education to current strategies for promoting digital inclusion and lifelong learning, a shift in European educational policy becomes evident: from a one-dimensional fight against illiteracy to the enhancement of the "capacity to participate" in social and cultural networks (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Rassool, 1999). Literacy thus becomes not only a means of communication and survival, but also a tool for critical understanding and cultural reconstruction.

The aim of this study is to illuminate this dynamic transition by focusing on the evolution of the concepts of illiteracy, literacy, and social inclusion within the context of European education. The analysis seeks to trace the pedagogical, political, and cultural processes that have shaped related perceptions in Europe, highlighting the shift from a focus on eradicating ignorance to the promotion of active citizen participation, citizens who are expected to comprehend and assimilate the complex social and cultural messages of the contemporary world. From this perspective, literacy is conceived not as a passive skill but as a living cultural practice, capable of reshaping societal structures and enabling the questioning of dominant forms of knowledge.

2.0 ILLITERACY IN POST-WAR EUROPE

Following the Second World War, Europe faced the urgent need for radical moral and political reconstruction. The destruction wrought by the war, the dismantling of democratic institutions, and the rupture of the social fabric necessitated a new and more substantive foundation for

social life, one that would include all citizens and enhance their participation in society. Education, and particularly the fight against illiteracy, emerged as key instruments in the restoration of democratic values, civic participation, and equality before the law. In the immediate post-war period, illiteracy remained widespread in many European countries, disproportionately affecting rural populations, women, and socially marginalized groups. It was not merely perceived as a lack of knowledge, but as a profound cultural and social deficit that obstructed individuals' full participation in society. The lack of access to education made equal engagement in political and economic life impossible, positioning illiteracy as a significant barrier to the construction of a just and stable society (Noiriel, 1999; Tilly, 1992).

Post-war societies in Europe engaged in critical reflection on the type of education that could prevent a resurgence of fascism and safeguard democratic institutions. Universal access to basic education was interpreted as a cornerstone of political integration, closely linked to citizens' capacity to engage in public discourse, understand the functions of a constitutional state, and exercise their political rights. Illiteracy ceased to be regarded as a personal shortcoming or as the result of cultural backwardness and was redefined as a collective deficit that needed to be addressed through institutional interventions, state responsibility, and a humanistic approach to education (Hobsbawm, 1994; Baudelot, 1971).

In the aftermath of the war, European societies sought to reconstruct not only their political and social institutions but also their moral foundations. Within this framework of post-war moral renewal, the principle of universal education emerged as a shared objective of Western European policies. Social democracy, combined with the pressures exerted by labor movements, played a decisive role in shaping national strategies aimed at combating illiteracy and ensuring universal access to basic education (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Educational planning shifted away from elitist orientations toward the inclusion of all children, regardless of social or ethnic background. This was pursued through the introduction of compulsory education, the extension of schooling duration, and the mass establishment of educational institutions. In France, Germany, Italy, and later Spain, education became a key institution of reconstruction and reconciliation, oriented toward fostering shared political values, promoting social cohesion, and recognizing the right to education as a fundamental human right (Tröhler, 2011; Green, 2013).

The new educational ethos that developed from 1945 through the 1970s was grounded in the dissemination of humanistic values such as reason, democracy, and equality. Education functioned not only as a means of cognitive empowerment but also as a vehicle of ideological reconstruction, with the goal of shaping critically minded citizens capable of resisting totalitarian ideologies. Within this context, pedagogical thought was revitalized, embracing more participatory and less punitive approaches, strengthening the democratic role of schools and affirming the value of social dialogue as a form of learning (Dewey, 2001; Freinet, 1947).

Despite national particularities, a common European trend was clearly observable, one that aimed to build an educational system capable of eliminating class and cultural inequalities and addressing illiteracy not as a technical issue, but as an indicator of social injustice. Policies promoting universal education were closely tied to the belief that knowledge is not a private privilege but a public good that must be distributed equitably to lay the foundation for a resilient and just post-war democracy. With the establishment of transnational institutions such as

UNESCO and the Council of Europe, this objective gained particular significance, as literacy was recognized as a central pillar for promoting peaceful coexistence and development (UNESCO, 1952; European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016).

3.0 FROM BASIC LITERACY TO FUNCTIONAL AND MULTIPLE LITERACIES

The period from 1970 to 1990 is marked by a significant shift in the understanding of illiteracy and in the educational policies addressing it. The previous focus on acquiring basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic gradually gave way to an understanding of what came to be known as functional illiteracy. This term highlights the difficulty a substantial portion of the adult population faces in applying literacy skills in everyday contexts of communication, work, and public participation, despite having formally completed school education (OECD, 1983; Higgins, 2024).

Functional illiteracy differs fundamentally from traditional illiteracy, as it does not merely concern the inability to decode written language but rather reflects a limited capacity to respond to the complex cultural, technological, and economic demands of modern-day life. The rise of the information society and the expansion of services, media, and bureaucratic structures created a new field of demands, where literacy was no longer a one-dimensional skill but a multifaceted capacity for adaptation and interpretation (Luke, 1997). Within this new reality shaped by technological advances, a significant portion of the population, though formally literate, remained excluded from meaningful processes of social and political participation.

The economic and social changes of these decades intensified the fragmentation of educational needs and exposed the shortcomings of a standardized and homogenized school system. Rising unemployment, shifting labor market structures, and the technological transformation of professions made it clear that basic education was no longer sufficient to ensure social mobility or professional integration. As a result, the need for multiple literacies emerged, literacies that are tied to specific social and cultural contexts: technological, economic, environmental, political, digital, and intercultural literacies (Masny & Cole, 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

This theoretical renewal was supported by critical theories within the sociology of education, particularly the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein. Bourdieu (1990; 1984), analyzing the function of education as a mechanism of social reproduction, argued that academic success depends not only on individual effort but primarily on the cultural heritage of the student, which aligns with the dominant norms of the school. The concept of cultural capital explains why students from working-class or marginalized backgrounds struggle to appropriate school knowledge, while students from higher social classes access and internalize it more easily. Bernstein (2003) argued that different linguistic codes, the restricted code and the elaborated code, contribute to the perpetuation of social inequalities within schools, as the educational system privileges and rewards a style of language use (the elaborated code) that predominates among middle and upper classes.

The contribution of social theory was crucial, as it shifted the discourse on illiteracy from the level of individual deficiency to that of social structures. Illiteracy is no longer seen as a personal inability to learn, but rather because of cultural deprivation, a lack of access to the discourses, meanings, and experiences that schools assume to be universal, yet fail to provide equally to all students. Educational policy thus began to recognize the need for adaptive,

flexible, and inclusive models of learning that consider students' linguistic and cultural diversity (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Apple, 1995).

From this perspective, the integration of immigrants and of ethnic or linguistic minorities emerged as a major priority for European education systems. The growing presence of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East in Central and Western Europe brought to the forefront the issue of schools' cultural inappropriateness. Language barriers, prejudice, and the absence of curricula reflecting cultural diversity limited the equitable participation of these children in education. Second-language programs, intercultural education, and alternative remedial teaching strategies were developed in several countries (Sweden, France, the Netherlands) not only as tools of social policy but also as indicators of a more complex understanding of literacy, as a means of participation in multilingual and multicultural environments (Cummins, 1986; Castles & Kosack, 1985).

This period signaled the transition from a one-dimensional conception of literacy as a technical skill to a multi-level, dynamic, and socially embedded approach, which reflects not only what someone knows but also how, where, and why they use their knowledge. Consequently, the notion of illiteracy was expanded and enriched, transforming into a tool of social analysis and political advocacy, particularly for groups situated on the margins or underrepresented in society.

4.0 EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONAL MOBILIZATION

The 1980s marked a turning point in educational policy across Europe, as illiteracy gradually emerged as a matter of supranational institutional concern. The European Economic Community (EEC), confronted with rising inequalities, the social consequences of unemployment, and the need to modernize its productive model, sought to integrate education into the processes of political and economic unification. The fight against illiteracy was directly linked to the promotion of social cohesion and cultural proximity among the member states of Europe (European Commission, 1985; Bélanger & Tuijnman, 1997).

This political focus on illiteracy reflects both a broadening of the concept of literacy and the recognition of universal education as a fundamental pillar of European integration. The EEC began to approach literacy not merely as a cognitive skill, but as a foundation for active citizenship and economic inclusion. Functional illiteracy, the inability to use basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills in contemporary contexts of daily life and employment, became central to institutional deliberations (Field, 2006; Jarvis, 2004). The issue was no longer confined to children and youth, but extended to broader population groups, especially adults with limited education and restricted access to lifelong learning mechanisms.

The first policy approaches lifelong learning, articulated in institutional documents and working reports by the Council of Ministers, the OECD, and UNESCO, gained traction within the EEC as early as the 1980s. The right to continuing education was gradually recognized as a necessary condition for social justice and political participation (Giddens, 1998; Rubenson, 2006). In contrast to earlier periods, when policy focused primarily on remedying basic educational deficits, education was now integrated into processes of social mobility, productive adaptability, and cultural recognition.

Simultaneously, a new discourse emerged around the role of literacy in shaping European identity. Illiteracy was seen not only as an obstacle to economic development but also as a barrier to the formation of a shared public sphere, one founded on active participation, multilingualism, and common cultural references (European Commission, 1985). Central to this discourse was the need to overcome disparities in access to knowledge among different social groups, regions, and national education systems.

This policy approach found institutional expression through new European programs and tools. Among the most significant were early versions of the Comett program, aimed at linking universities with the labor market, and the Lingua program, which promoted linguistic diversity as a means of intercultural understanding and social inclusion (Bélanger & Tuijnman, 1997). These European programs supported the need for continuous training, professional development, and the cultivation of lifelong learning capacity, introducing for the first time the concept of educational inclusion at the community level.

The 1980s also witnessed a strengthening of initiatives targeting social groups facing greater barriers to literacy. The educational inclusion of immigrants, ethno-linguistic minorities, second-generation workers, women, and the elderly became a central axis of European policy discourse during this period (Field, 2006). Illiteracy was no longer viewed as an individual shortcoming, but rather as a structural outcome of social exclusion and unequal access to cultural capital, aligning with the theory of social reproduction as developed by Bourdieu and Bernstein in previous decades.

The notion of social cohesion became firmly established as a key goal of European policy, with illiteracy serving as an indicator of the deeper exclusions permeating European societies. Education policy was no longer treated solely as a national responsibility, but as a privileged domain for joint European action, aimed at preserving social peace and political stability (Rubenson, 2006).

Thus, the European institutional mobilization of the 1980s laid the groundwork for a later shift in emphasis, from the eradication of “illiteracy” to the demand for continuous access to knowledge. This shift redefined the role of education as an instrument of democracy, equality, and cultural inclusion.

5.0 DIGITAL AND CULTURAL LITERACY IN THE 21st CENTURY

The rapid technological and communicative acceleration at the beginning of the 21st century has led to a profound redefinition of the concept of literacy, highlighting new forms of exclusion that go beyond the traditional understanding of illiteracy. Inequalities in access to digital technologies are no longer limited to material availability but also involve individuals’ and social groups’ deeper capacity to actively participate in the public sphere of the digital world, to process complex data, and to comprehend how knowledge and social influence are constructed within the contemporary technological environment (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013).

The notion of “new illiteracy” captures this phenomenon with clarity. A digitally excluded citizen is not necessarily someone who lacks access to the internet or devices, but someone unable to interpret the complex sociocultural messages circulated through them. The critical

decoding of information, the ability to detect biases, to uncover the ideological dimensions of cultural products, and to participate in public dialogue through new media now define the boundaries between an active and a marginalized citizen (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Modern illiteracy is primarily cultural and political, as it pertains to citizens' ability to recognize and challenge structures of power.

Intercultural education has emerged as a vital domain of modern concern, not confined to the transmission of technical knowledge but oriented towards fostering cultural empathy and awareness. Through its dynamic processes, it seeks to shape citizens capable of recognizing and valuing diversity as an integral aspect of collective life. The promotion of intercultural coexistence through the educational process becomes a means of acknowledging the culturally "other" not as marginalized forms but as an equal partner in a world seeking for new balances of legitimacy and coexistence. Contrary to past assimilative logics, the intercultural approach incorporates multiple voices, linguistic specificities, and worldviews, reinforcing the negotiation of collective identities within educational contexts (Banks, 2019; Nieto, 2018).

When digital literacy is linked to cultural awareness and political participation, it becomes a tool for challenging cultural hegemony. The concept of cultural hegemony, as developed by Gramsci, refers to the ways in which dominant social groups maintain their power by promoting cultural norms that, over time, become perceived as self-evident and natural by society, thereby shaping its values and beliefs (Gramsci, 1971). In education, the persistence of cultural hegemony is expressed through curriculum selection, linguistic formulations, methodologies, and assessment models that often advance the dominant cultural narrative and limit the emergence of alternative perspectives.

Deconstructing hegemony through education requires more than the inclusion of content that recognizes diversity, it demands a radical revision of the relationship between knowledge and power. The educational process must function as a space for the encounter of cultural perspectives, free from the repressive dominance of a predetermined interpretive framework. Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Paulo Freire, places education at the heart of the liberation of the oppressed. According to Freire, education is not simply a process of knowledge transmission but a tool that enables the restructuring of social relations and the subversion of cultural power. Through participatory learning, students gain the ability to recognize social injustices and to challenge dominant ideological structures. Thus, education is not a passive acceptance of knowledge, but a process of its critical reconstruction (Freire, 2000).

In the same spirit, contemporary theories of digital education regard the internet as a space where, beyond reproducing dominant narratives, new forms of resistance and dissent can be cultivated. The digital platform, as a space of open dialogue and exchange, offers users the opportunity to question entrenched assumptions and promote critical thinking, provided it is utilized as a tool for learning and social transformation. In this way, the internet becomes a field for restructuring power relations and generating new cultural representations, underlining the need for a pedagogical approach that integrates critical thinking and the promotion of social justice (Jenkins et al., 2009).

Education policy is thus called upon to develop strategies that go beyond the instrumental use of technology. Providing technological skills without simultaneously fostering critical thinking and cultural empathy leads to a deepening of exclusion, as it reproduces pre-existing social

inequalities under a new digital guise (Selwyn, 2021). The 21st-century citizens must not only be digitally competent but also capable of navigating an environment of constant intercultural negotiation, with awareness of the social construction of knowledge and its ideological underpinnings.

Linking cultural and digital literacy to the values of democracy, equality, and recognition of otherness has become a fundamental issue in contemporary educational policy. Literacy, understood not merely as a personal educational right but as a participatory and critical process, transcends the development of individual skills to constitute the foundation for the reconstruction of the public sphere. In an era of multiculturalism and digital mediation, this process becomes even more urgent, as traditional forms of communication and knowledge are continually being questioned and transformed.

6.0 CONTEMPORARY EU STRATEGIES FOR LITERACY

In the 21st century, the concept of literacy has evolved into a multi-layered and dynamic domain that transcends the traditional boundaries of reading and writing. Within a context of constant social, technological, and cultural transformation, literacy emerges as a complex competence encompassing comprehension, critical analysis, and active engagement in the multiple modes of communication that shape both public and private life. The European Union, recognizing the complexity of these transformations, has developed specific strategies to strengthen literacy as a fundamental condition for equitable civic participation. The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) reported that approximately 20% of adults in Europe lack basic literacy skills, with consequences extending far beyond educational attainment to affect employment, social exclusion, and restricted political participation (European Commission, 2012).

EU policy has shifted away from viewing literacy as a purely technical skill, instead framing it as a core factor in individual empowerment, particularly in relation to one’s capacity to understand and critically process sociopolitical messages. The European Agenda for Lifelong Learning reinforces this position, emphasizing the importance of access to educational opportunities that foster active citizenship and social cohesion (European Commission, 2002). Education is no longer seen solely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission, but rather as a structure for social mobility and democratic engagement (Biesta, 2011).

The Upskilling Pathways initiative (2016), promoted by the European Commission, aims to provide key competencies (literacy, numeracy, digital skills) to adults with limited formal education. These policies go beyond addressing workforce demands; they are designed to ensure equitable participation in public life, support personal development, and promote social cohesion (Council of the European Union, 2016).

Literacy is closely tied to fundamental democratic principles and cultural pluralism. The European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) reinforces every individual's right to education, advocating for the expansion of literacy as a right to inclusion and self-realization. Education is no longer considered a neutral process but is recognized as a space where meanings are constructed, understandings of the world are shaped, and imposed cultural hierarchies are challenged (European Commission, 2017).

European strategies increasingly conceptualize multiliteracies through a broader lens, incorporating not only linguistic competence but also digital, visual, and intercultural skills. EU educational policy underscores the need to cultivate the ability to understand and creatively manage complex, multimodal flows of information, particularly in environments characterized by heightened communicative intensity and diversity (UNESCO, 2004). Literacy is no longer treated as an isolated skill, but as part of a broader system of sociocultural participation and understanding of the "other" (Hall, 1997).

The emphasis on critical literacy draws heavily on the theoretical insights of Paulo Freire, who conceptualized language as a tool for liberation and conscious emancipation. Integrating his approach into European educational planning strengthens learners' capacities to question cultural norms, analyze power relations, and propose alternative forms of collective existence (Freire, 2000). Literacy thus becomes a tool for cultural reorganization and political advocacy.

Cultural recognition through education requires moving beyond one-dimensional models of normality. Literacy is not confined to the acceptance of a single model of discourse and behavior but consists in the ability to understand the variety of cultural experiences and the historical narratives that shape them. The European Union, through its strategic frameworks, seeks to highlight the importance of intercultural understanding and to uphold the right to linguistic and cultural otherness as a foundational element of modern education (European Commission, 2009).

Contemporary European approaches thus redefine literacy as a multidimensional phenomenon intricately linked to society, politics, and culture. At the center of this conceptualization lies public discourse, which extends beyond the mere acquisition of technical knowledge to promote democracy, social inclusion, and the development of critical consciousness. Educational policy repositions the individual from a passive recipient of knowledge to an active agent, capable of interpreting, processing, and reshaping the world around them (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000).

7.0 CONCLUSIONS- A CRITICAL REVIEW

Illiteracy, as a phenomenon embedded in and perpetuated by social, political, and cultural structures, remains one of the most serious obstacles to full social and economic participation. From the 20th century to the present day, European education has invested significantly in combating illiteracy to strengthen social cohesion and democratic participation. Despite the notable advances brought by past strategies, inequalities have not been fully eradicated, making the need for a more inclusive and dynamic educational policy increasingly urgent to respond effectively to the complex challenges of the modern world.

The shift from basic literacy to multimodal literacies has emerged as one of the most significant developments in European education. In the past, literacy was primarily understood as the ability to read and write, with linguistic proficiency at its core. However, in the era of digital revolution and globalization, literacy has expanded to include skills necessary for the understanding and processing of multimodal information. The current "new illiteracy" concerns the inability of citizens to critically interpret complex socio-cultural messages and analyze digital-age data. The ongoing adaptation of education policy to meet contemporary literacy demands is essential for equipping citizens with the competencies required to face

emerging challenges and seizing the opportunities presented by a digitally mediated and pluralistic world (European Commission, 2012).

As it evolves, the European education policy must continuously respond to the challenges posed by social and cultural pluralism. Ensuring access to knowledge is now a prerequisite for the full inclusion of all citizens, and the recognition of otherness and cultural differences is critical to reinforcing democratic cohesion across Europe. Cultural hegemony, as analyzed by Antonio Gramsci, continues to exert a strong influence in many societies, complicating the development of an equitable educational field that acknowledges diverse cultural identities and fosters intercultural understanding (Gramsci, 1971). While the European Union has undertaken significant initiatives, such as the European Agenda for Lifelong Learning, educational inequalities in access persist (European Commission, 2001).

The deconstruction of cultural hegemony through education is an ongoing imperative in European societies, as traditional mechanisms for reproducing inequality remain in place. Literacy, as a core component of educational policy, must transcend narrow standards of linguistic competence and promote an educational environment capable of embracing diverse cultural expressions and cultivating varied forms of communication. Despite progress at the level of strategies and frameworks, social inequalities persist and are reproduced in new ways. However, the cultivation of critical thinking and the recognition of identity plurality contribute to a dynamic context for challenging dominant assumptions and offer possibilities for gradually dismantling exclusion. Under such conditions, education need not merely reproduce existing structures but can function as a powerful mechanism for advancing social justice and equality (Hall, 1997). Intercultural education, in its contemporary form, offers students the opportunity to recognize and question the social norms and assumptions that often shape educational processes.

The need for radical changes in the value systems of educational institutions has become critical for the genuine integration of pluralism into modern societies. Literacy, understood not simply as a technical skill but as a social and cultural tool, demands a revision of traditional pedagogical practices and the adoption of educational approaches responsive to the complex needs of the 21st century. The recognition and respect of cultural difference are not merely theoretical aspirations, but fundamental requirements for creating educational environments that promote the equal participation of all learners, regardless of their social or cultural background (UNESCO, 2004). This transformation cannot be achieved solely through educational policy; it requires a broader societal will to build a framework that truly serves social justice and equality.

The future of European education appears to be oriented toward the empowerment of multiliteracies, emphasizing the need for individuals to develop the capacity to receive and critically interpret an increasingly complex communicative landscape, ranging from oral and written discourse to digital media and the hybrid communication forms of the contemporary world. Technology, as an integral element of the educational experience, does not replace human critical faculty, but is called upon to shield it through the creation of new pedagogical practices capable of highlighting literacy as a dynamic tool for social inclusion and personal development. However, in a world where information proliferates and cultural identities

interact, the need to cultivate critical thinking and intercultural awareness does not diminish, but remains a constant compass for building a democratic, just and deeply conscious Europe.

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