Pedagogy and new humanism at the time of Covid

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Abstract

Schools, society as a whole, have been deeply affected by the emergence of Covid19. The shift to distance teaching and learning has exacerbated many pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities in education systems. This paper argues for the urgency for school systems to accept new challenges in training, organising inclusive environments towards the promotion of collective social and critical capacities, in synergy with the digital within a school that broadens its horizons, its classrooms, capable of bringing in human riches, assuming the richness of the student as a unique and unrepeatable subject who develops thanks to the relationship with the other, capable of transformative resilience, which looks at the human becoming by virtue of the encounters of places, including virtual ones, that are experienced in the course of life. A school pervaded by a new humanism, the only true wealth.

Keywords: Covid-19; Distance Teaching and Learning; Inequalities; School Organization; Teacher Education; New Humanism.

1. Liquid learning in contemporany society

The reflections contained in this contribution are aimed at laying the foundations for rethinking training, where the contribution of digital technology cannot be considered only as an instrumental competence, but must also be seen in a pedagogical key with respect to the new emerging humanism.

These considerations are generated by the rapid changes inherent in our society and by the progressive consolidation of the liquid society, widely predicted by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, which today is called upon to reflect organically on the effects that liquidity, unpredictability, the unexpected, disorder and pandemic produce in terms of the formation of the individual. The trust in the effectiveness of so-called traditional educational paths has been progressively abandoned and the urgency of transforming teachers into skilled equilibrists has been accepted, between the needs of aggregation and reciprocity characterised, according to Bauman, by the fact that "*change is the only permanent thing and uncertainty is the only certainty, nothing is forever" (Bauman & Leoncini, 2017).* (Bauman & Leoncini, 2017).

The emergency situation linked to the pandemic caused by Covid-19 accelerated the process of change in the school, requiring the immediate activation of 'distance learning' (DAD)[1], a raft in the middle of the storm, through which educational continuity could be maintained, which represented a challenge, an opportunity to develop a didactic of proximity and closeness to the needs of each student, without exception.

The digital school, which only two years ago seemed utopian, has become an emergency. It has engaged teachers and learners in a relationship mediated by DAD (Distance Learning) and DDI (Integrated Digital Learning).

If these are resources that have supported and continue to support the urgent needs of the school world at the present time, they should also be taken into account in the near future, when the links of this great pandemic emergency are loosened.

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[1] "Ordinarily DAD is defined as a teaching practice and methodology aimed at replacing all orpart of the teaching activities normally delivered in presence. It uses techniques and tools that have already been developed and tested in the field of distance learning and e-learning". FIDAE (Federation of Institutes of Educational Activities), thanks also to the collaboration with the national standardization body UNI, intended to create a reference practice ("Guidelines for the management system of distance and blended teaching in schools of all levels") in which the parameters of distance and blended teaching in the perspective of innovation linked to new technologies are indicated. We take most of the technical notions on digital from that text.

From the methodological point of view in schools, the proposal has been that of a structured and digitally coordinated teaching method where learning in presence, irreplaceable from the educational point of view because of the depth of the trace it leaves on the student, and learning at a distance, as an integration or deepening of the infinite possibilities that knowledge offers today, coexist. This allows students to break out of the space-time constraints that characterises daily school routines and 'fly' towards a logic of lifelong learning linked to digital technology.

Learning beyond the confines of the classroom does not imply that the student stays at home; digital teaching can be valid without necessarily thinking of it at a distance, but considering it within a learning process in those specific phases and sequences in which it is useful to give space to the autonomy and personal work of the student, to exploit the opportunities of blended learning, which uses different learning environments at the same time and not alternatively.

In this way, the pandemic gives us the idea of an educational perspective that develops in learning environments other than the traditional classroom. It is no longer the perimeters of the walls that circumscribe the place where learning takes place; this becomes a broader and more inclusive experience that can take place in other places, other spaces, other environments. If the focus is on learning, the aim of the research is to find the environment that best supports it in its different meanings: motivation, transmission, internalization, action.

This focus involves revisiting school spaces, which become agora, laboratory zones, individual study zones, outdoor zones and virtual spaces capable of ensuring integration, complementarity and interoperability.

It is thus possible to envisage a school of the future with open doors where it will be possible to use classrooms:

- mobile devices, *mobile devices*, by individual pupils (notebooks or tablets);

- network infrastructure allowing *wireless* connection of both mobile and fixed devices in the classroom;

- virtual spaces for sharing work (*drop-box, google drive, google classroom, Teams...*) used both individually and in groups;

- printed documentation materials (textbooks, reference materials, bibliographical material), and *online* (digital books, internet resources etc.).

The use of these resources will make it possible to implement approaches based on laboratory and problem-based teaching that encourage the manipulation of abstract concepts and

facilitate the construction of meanings, making students the authors of their own learning process.

2. Digital technologies and the new humanities

In the renewed school environment, it will be necessary to think of the digital environment as an educational environment, to inhabit it in a conscious and responsible manner. To this end, it will be necessary to work on *media education and media literacy.*

Media literacy, as defined by the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, is the process of enhancing "the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and produce messages in all media communication formats" (F. Cerretti, D. Fellini, R. Giannatelli, 2006). Giannatelli, 2006) that lead to look at media literacy in relation to the ability to read, find interesting content, access information; understand the meaning of the message, analyse data; express a critical judgment on the text, evaluate; tell about one's experiences and express one's thoughts with the different possible languages, produce information/messages (F. Cerretti, D. Fellini, R. Giannatelli, 2006).

This focus is also advocated in the European Key Competences of 2006 and 2018, which emphasize:

"Digital competence is the confident and critical use of Information Society Technologies (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic ICT skills: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet'.

It is therefore important *to* use the network and devices responsibly and consciously, since there are many positive implications in terms of the pliability of the tools, their interaction, their creation of more motivating paths, their bringing us closer to others, building bridges and relationships, even if they are virtual, but there are also many dangers that its incorrect use could entail (cyberbullying, hikikomori, candy girls, pedophilia, online grooming, sexting, Fomo, online games, etc.).

We need education to develop research and intervention lenses useful for observing the adolescents of our time in these particular areas of risk and marginality. It will be opportune to look at the international observatory that examines the neurobiological changes of adolescents and post-millennials today exposed to numerous socio-cognitive, emotional, affective changes especially in order to the prolonged exposure to technologies that make them potentially more dysregulated.

In this regard, the Guidelines for the teaching of civic education, adopted in application of Law No. 92 of 20 August 2019, have entrusted schools with the task of working on students to build digital citizenship, understood as "*an individual's ability to make conscious and*

responsible use of virtual means of communication. Developing this ability at school means, on the one hand, enabling the acquisition of useful information and skills to improve this new and deeply rooted way of being in the world, and, on the other, making young people aware of the risks and pitfalls that the digital environment entails".

Schools can and must educate children and adolescents to this awareness and responsibility at all stages of their education. To this end, students' need for knowledge is not satisfied by simply accumulating information in the various fields, but only by fully mastering the individual subject areas, with the elaboration of their multiple connections. A new alliance between science, history, the humanities, the arts and technology is therefore decisive, capable of outlining the prospect of a new humanism where schools will be entrusted with the tasks of:

- teaching how to recompose the great objects of knowledge (the universe, the planet, nature, life, humanity, society, the body, the mind, history) in a complex perspective, aimed at overcoming the fragmentation of the disciplines and integrating them into new overall frameworks;

- promoting the knowledge of a new humanism with respect to the ability to grasp the essential aspects of problems; to understand the implications for the human condition of new developments in science and technology; to evaluate the limits and possibilities of knowledge; to live and act in a changing world;

- spreading the awareness that the major problems of the current human condition (environmental degradation, climate chaos, energy crises, unequal distribution of resources, health and illness, the encounter and confrontation of cultures and religions, bioethical dilemmas, the search for a new quality of life) can be tackled and resolved through close cooperation not only between nations, but also between disciplines and cultures.

Defining this overall picture is the task of both scientific education (who am I and where am I in the universe, on earth, in evolution?) and humanistic education (who am I and where am I in human cultures, societies, history?).

In this sense, a further European reference paradigm is represented by the DigCompEdu document, whose objective is to "*provide a coherent model that allows teachers and trainers to check their own level of 'digital pedagogical competence' and to develop it further. This model is not intended to replace the tools defined at national level, but to enrich and extend them. Its added value consists in providing a guide for the development of educational policies at different levels, a conceptual model allowing the different actors of the education and training system to create concrete tools, suitable to respond to their needs, a common and coherent language to promote discussion and exchange of good practices and a reference*

point for Member States to validate the approach and the completeness of their tools and frameworks in this field".

Therefore, pedagogical aspects centred in the direction of a sustainable (Giovannini, 2018 and resilient (Malavasi, 2020) education emerge, especially for the enhancement of the capacity to "learn to learn": the educational relationship, peer communication and intergenerational dialogue. More specifically, the document *Time for transformative resilience: The COVID-19 emergency*, dedicated to the different *goals* of the UN 2030 Agenda, drafted by a group of ASviS, Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (Benczur et al., 2020), describes the concept of transformative resilience, presenting it as a new paradigm able to contribute to the achievement of the highest level of well-being for the person, starting from the constant commitment of different sectors and contexts (from family to territory), through forms of partnership for the cultivation of the common good.

If education has traditionally been conceived as a patient and laborious in-depth work on oneself and on knowledge, how can we educate and instruct those young people who have been accustomed to thinking that learning should coincide with entertainment and take place in a spectacular way, quickly, with little effort (Prada, 2012, p. 149)? How can we reconcile the tendentially slow pace of education with the frenzy that characterises contemporary lifestyles? What knowledge should be passed on to the new generations if, due to the speed of change, the knowledge possessed at any given time becomes obsolete within a few years? How can we insist pedagogically on the development of people's life projects when the precariousness of existential and working conditions and the inscrutability of the future have taught us that life can no longer be planned (Prada, 2012, pp. 148-149)? How to renew the world of education in the light of the affirmation of new digital technologies, which have caused the decline of literacy culture and its specific teaching-learning models based on a Gutenbergian approach (Mizzella, Ferri & Scenini, 2009)? How to re-examine the role of university, school and educational services in a complex, fragmented, chaotic, globalised, multi-ethnic, hi-tech society? Does it still make sense in such a context to focus pedagogical discourses and educational practices exclusively on man as has been done until now?

All these questions call for careful reflection on the identity of the pedagogue in the current scenario[2].

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[2] The term 'pedagogical' refers to the vast and heterogeneous archipelago of theories, practices and discourses that constitutes the field of education as a whole.

3. Conclusions

Referring not only to the world of schooling, Alessandro Baricco summarises the relationship with the digital as follows: "We founded (the digital civilisation) then we started to hate it and now we are making peace with it [...] we will find ourselves with a friendly civilisation that we will be able to correct because we will do so without resentment" (Baricco, 2020). The expression "without resentment" indicates the path of a lucid reflection that goes towards the future, choosing the path of integration and not that of polarisation: not the digital as an alternative to the educational relationship in presence, but in synergy, without fearing that the reflexive and conscious introduction of the digital into social dynamics, and in particular into the educational one, will lead to the alteration of our humanity and the loss of sincere and deep relationships. Through the digital medium, in the pandemic period and beyond, if we think of the distances that have been broken down in recent years by the power of digital media, we have paradoxically rediscovered human relationships, as well as an important stimulus to rethink a new humanism. If tomorrow's historians look at this time as a bottleneck in history, it is up to our generationto decide what to pass on to the other side (not so much what content, but what anthropological, aesthetic, and civic values are essential) and in what way. I believe that thinking about well-being and digital culture in these terms could be a task to be entrusted to'humanists' (in the broadest sense, not disciplinary), to pedagogues, because technology is the opportunity that puts the human being at the centre, and school is the place where this reflection can be based on intergenerational collaboration, which is the main way to the well-being of today and tomorrow.

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