"IN SEARCH OF EMOTIONS"
UNDER THE SIGN OF DISTANCE TEACHING

"ALLA RICERCA DI EMOZIONI"
SOTTO IL SEGNO DELLA DIDATTICA A DISTANZA

Mirca Montanari
Università degli Studi di Urbino
mirca.montanari@uniurb.it

Marta Costantini
Università degli Studi di Urbino
marta-costantini@libero.it

Abstract [1]

This contribution, of a theoretical nature, intends to reflect on the fundamental importance of promoting emotional education in school contexts about of the adoption of distance learning, due to the current dramatic pandemic emergency. The enhancement of emotional capital at school represents a demanding and challenging educational goal that is based on the awareness that competence and emotional intelligence generate metabletic processes, enhance existential capabilities, ensuring the participation and inclusion of each and everyone. In rethinking and redesigning the increasingly digitalized didactics, it is necessary to take into utmost consideration the centrality of emotionality in learning processes and the related strengthening of the "emotional quotient" in view of a way of doing school that opens to the labyrinths of emotional-affective languages by creating and proposing educational project itineraries aimed at well-being and cooperation.

Il presente contributo, di natura teorica, intende riflettere sulla fondamentale importanza della promozione dell'educazione emotiva nei contesti scolastici alla luce dell'adozione della didattica a distanza, dovuta all'attuale e drammatica emergenza pandemica. La valorizzazione del capitale emotivo a scuola rappresenta un impegnativo e sfidante obiettivo formativo che si basa sulla consapevolezza che la competenza e l'intelligenza affettiva generano processi metabletici, valorizzano capabilities esistenziali, garantendo la partecipazione e l'inclusione di tutti e di ciascuno. Nel ripensare e nel riprogettare la didattica, sempre più digitalizzata, è necessario tenere in massima considerazione la centralità dell'emotività nei processi apprenditivi e il relativo potenziamento del "quoziente emotivo" in vista di una modalità di fare scuola che si apra ai labirinti dei linguaggi emotivo-affettivi creando e proponendo itinerari progettuali educativi volti al ben-essere e alla cooperazione.

Keywords

Emotional education, emotional capital, distance learning, inclusion

Educazione emotiva, capitale emotivo, didattica a distanza, inclusione

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1   Author Mirca Montanari, are assigned paragraphs: Introducion, 1, 2.
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Introduction

Among the cross-curricular skills that today's school is called to develop significantly, the emotional dimension takes on a position of fundamental importance (Goleman, 2006), closely related to the complexity of cognitive and relational processes, in view of the construction of emotional, existential, personal and scholl well-being. The educational institution is currently in a state of suffering and uncertainty, mainly due to the dramatic consequences of the pandemic emergency, including the worsening of social and emotional development (Ianes & Bellacic-co, 2020) and the manifestation of a range of negative emotions on the part of children and adolescents during lockdown and distance learning. This requires redesigning, strengthening, revisiting and rethinking the emotional educational process (Ianes & Demo, 2007). A necessary and fertile revitalization of its specific and original alphabets, oriented to care and empathy, will allow the adoption of emotional-affective education as a substantial and significant element for the promotion of relationality and good educational practices in an inclusive perspective, i.e. aimed at the group and the individual (Ianes & Canevaro, 2015). Enhancing the emotional capital at school is a strong ethical commitment by all school stakeholders, to ensure the training of pupils- aware and reflective persons- in view of the prevention of discomfort and distress, this requires a careful and scrupulous educational act of consolidation of social capital (Mortari, 2007) which, combined with collaborative action, can form the basis of a new citizenship, a more active and participatory one, marked by the principles of responsibility, legality and solidarity (Law No. 92 of 20/08/19). When rethinking teaching, which is currently more and more carried out remotely and from home, it is necessary to take into account that the knowledge, the ability to do, the ability to be, as founding forms of knowledge, are reciprocally connected to the ability to feel, as an essential factor characterizing emotional literacy, or rather the gradual development of a better relationality and a progressive increase in the quality of life of each student, considered in their individual difference, divergence and specificity. As recommended by the European Council (2018), the personal and social capacity of lrearning to learn also derives from the self-regulation of socio-emotional-relational processes that contribute to cope with emotional illiteracy and its corollaries: relational isolation, depression, eating disorders, pathological addictions, early school leaving, etc...

As Baldacci (2018) rightly argues, it is desirable that emotional literacy is oriented to the formation of appropriate emotional-emotional habits, helping to strengthen the positive attitude of pupils towards school activities and learning.

"School affective education should be thought of in relation to both the curriculum in the strict sense (the paths related to the various disciplines) and the forms of school organization as a whole. Affectivity is a fundamental dimension of personal life, taking care of it is a duty" (p. 25).

1. The complexity of educational processes

The current social, cultural, economic, political, health, educational, religious, technological complexity that characterizes the liquid post-modern society (Bauman, 2020) has a significant impact on the developments and perspectives of the educational sciences, conditioning its theories, pedagogical orientations and promoting changes from the didactic and relational point of view. The educational institution is therefore called to take into account the many educational, formative, psychological, medical, anthropological, ethical and geo-political challenges of the contemporary times of globalization and digitization. The continuous and relentless modification and planetary transformation of life structures contributes to the construction of new and unexplored interconnections, interactions, knowledge, relationships, tensions, contradictions, boundaries and cultural frontiers within the complex human reticular system (Morin, 1994), within which educational processes assume an unquestionable importance. The complexity of

new educational emergencies has been amplified by the pandemic shock, induced by the spread of Covid-19 infection. As of early 2020, it has abruptly and unexpectedly interrupted the custom of human activities, breaking and subverting the old rules and imposing new ones, through ministerial and regional emergency decrees, making it more difficult than ever to imagine the future in the society of uncertainty and sad passions (Benasayag, 2016). Today more than ever, in the era of the Coronavirus, human destiny and existence, the very concept of democracy is subject to regressions, uncertainties, crises and blackouts of truth. They are, in fact, crossed by new forms of distress, different and diverse forms of special needs that currently populate the school, social and cultural landscape more and more often. These elements can be traced back to phenomena of emotional-psychic-relational malaise (Borgna, 2015), stress and anxiety from pandemic, addictions, new economic poverty, new forms of illiteracy affective-emotional that certainly require adequate responses also in the school environment, claiming a high level of paideia. The heterogeneity of class groups, the plurality of learning styles, the enhancement of new mindsets (disciplinary, synthetic, creative, existential and ethical intelligence), synergistically present in each student, are certainly the most stimulating and exciting challenges for the future. Gardner (1987) invites to observe students under a new light, providing teachers and educators with precious keys to interpret their resources and critical aspects. Recognizing and valuing the peculiar and singular talents, the learning styles of the different and diverse pupils, diversifying the educational action and guaranteeing each one the opportunity of success is highly desirable in order to avoid the design of pre-packaged, standardized, homologating and traditionally predictable training itineraries, favouring systemic and extra-curricular school contexts which are more responsive to the complexity of new educational emergencies. Taking care of every single student, from an inclusive point of view, dedicating attention to him/her and valuing his/her potential and differences means accompanying him/her in the many paths of knowledge, urging him/her to adopt new and multi-prospective readings of reality, through renewed, individualized, personalized (Baldacci, 2006) and differentiated didactic strategies (d'Alonzo, 2016) tailored to the student (Claparède, 1968). Educating to complexity accepts the challenge of diversity and of the different and peculiar individual characteristics, centered on the possible, desirable and shared co-construction of effective and concrete curricular and extracurricular project itineraries. This perspective is genuinely interested in the inclusion of each pupil, regardless of the existence of obstacles, barriers and resources to support or deny full participation in the processes of socialization, learning and communication, to ensure the consolidation of the democratic rights of citizenship, belonging, accessibility and equity (Gaspari, 2012).

2. Didactics at the time of the Coronavirus

Because of the health emergency, which has now become permanent, strict precautionary measures have been adopted throughout the national territory, i.e. isolation at home, quarantine of exposed subjects, limitation of groups, restrictions on travel, the closure of non-essential services and productive-commercial activities and the suspension of school and university face-to-face activities with the consequent, unforeseen and disorienting impact of social distancing on educational systems. In this context, the government measures (DPCM March 4, 2020, Decree Law No. 22 of April 8, 2020) have imposed, in every order and degree of school, the Distance Learning (DAD), currently called Integrated Digital Didactics (DDI), institutionalizing the digital teaching, previously coinciding with the use of some multimedia tools (electronic register, IWB, etc. ...), as a telematic medium for learning. The school world was, therefore, suddenly forced to invent a distance learning, as the only possibility of educational work, mediated by technologies, previously distrusted by some teachers or enthusiastically praised by others, however, linked to impromptu experiments more than to daily habits. Within a few weeks, the entire Italian educational system was faced with the urgent need to substitute, by any means whatsoev-

er, face-to-face didactics, the one that has always been organized and carried out in the defined space and time of the customary school experience. The compulsoriness of the DAD has led to the removal of the students from the precious and indispensable dimensions of socialization and sociality of the class-group. The word and the physical-emotional presence of teachers represent the focus of the educational relationship that, in this exceptional case, has been sacrificed in the name of promoting the processes of training remotely at the expense of the loss of the suggestion of the fac-to-face lessons and their valuable emotional charge (Recalcati, 2014) as detonators of learning processes. The DAD is not a real didactics because it is not based on the word that imprints the emotional brain of the student (LeDoux, 1998), does not fully contribute to the construction of the positive empathic relationship between teacher and student who needs to learn with attention and involvement by activating with awareness and mastery their "emotional quotient". "Relationships are not only important for social development, but they constitute real basic conditions for learning. Studies on the brain show that when you feel good in a group, you feel considered and valued by others and you are actively involved in learning, you enter a state of relaxed attention that is the best state to learn [...]. The social and emotional dimensions are, therefore, really important for school success, personal and social well-being of all children" (Morganti & Bocci, 2017, pp. 37-38).

The distance imposed by the Coronavirus has also decreed the disappearance of the "schoolmate", as a symbolic-institutional figure able to influence the construction of social and emotional identity (Valbusa & Mortari, 2017), reinforced by the significant relationship between peers. Distance teaching, which should be more appropriately defined as an emergency, has certainly made it possible to face the dramatic epochal pandemic event, but it has also represented a barrier to the construction of the empathic relationship between teacher and pupil, between the pupil and the class group, as well as reducing the attention and emotional involvement in learning. The disorienting impact of interpersonal distancing, inappropriately defined as social, on educational processes has resulted in physical emptiness and emotional distress, especially with regard to fragile and vulnerable people, called to adapt daily to the unexpected and complex situation of school and social life, making, in many cases, dysfunctional, as well as impractical, the compulsoriness of distancing.

3. Emotions at the heart of learning processes

In the School Plan 2020-2021, attached to Ministerial Decree 39 of June 26, 2020, the reference to emotions appears several times as evidence of the educational value of this dimension in human development. The emotional distress caused by the lockdown invites the school to take significant actions to support the learning-teaching processes in order to ensure an effective balance between safety, social-emotional well-being and respect for constitutional rights to health and education. This is a highly inclusive perspective, which in the awareness of the complexity of the educational event, despite the gnoseological incompleteness, recognizes in learning a multidimensional process, whose quality is based on anthropology as an integrated system of physiological, cognitive, emotional-relational and behavioral aspects capable of drawing simultaneously on reason and being, rationalization and subjectification. In an inclusive school, learning is significant if it is person-centered, able to speak to the heart and mind of the students and to fit into a communicative and relational context of mutual openings between teachers and students (Rogers, 1973). It is a process, of course, and not a result. An ecological process because the space-context is inhabited by different interactive networks (Bateson, 1972) that constitute a complex system. These are the so-called cross-modal competences, those cognitive-body-emotional-relational-social components that go beyond a deterministic and linear learning model, to accommodate the idea of embodiment ("incorporation" of cognition) and enactivism (cognition is the result of inter and intra-personal interactions), enhancing extended corporeity (mind-body-emotion) with an attention "to the physical, material and social environ-

ment, through which actions and relationships are realized" (Damiani & Ascione, 2017, p. 48). The approach of dynamic systems has shown that learning is the result of an interaction between body, brain and environment (Varela et al., 1991). Phenomenological-existential philosophy has explained that being in the world influences mental activity; the contributions of neuroscience, the discovery of mirror neurons, philosophical and psychological speculation, from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty's perceptions to the debates around the theory of mind, have overcome the so-called disjunctive paradigm that separated knowledge from feeling, mind from heart, intelligence and rationality from feelings, passions, emotions. The interweaving of the neurobiological processes of emotions with the body, with social action and with the complexity of human thought (Caruana & Viola, 2018) has taken on a fundamental value. While Piaget (1991) defined affectivity and intellectual functions as "two indissoluble aspects of every action" and Damasio (2003) emphasized that emotions only apparently link opposite poles, the having-to-be and the being, reason and passion, the Cartesian res cogitans and the res extensa, Nussbaum proposes a neostoic theory of emotions, identifying them with the constitutive part of the subject's capacity of reasoning (Nussbaum, 2009). The centrality of emotionality in learning processes is evident in Lucangeli's research thanks to the model of warm cognition, which leverages on the experience of "warm emotions", such as joy and happiness, for the improvement of knowledge. You learn better, when you are happy: the teacher should be a "wellness mediator" of the learning of disciplinary and curricular contents. The "great decider" of the quality of the learning process is not the reason, but the emotionality (Lucangeli, 2019). This is a thesis that harbors great assumption of responsibility by the entire educational community based on the need to overcome the model of formal and transmissive learning that puts the student in a condition of passivity, or, in the worst case, in a situation of fear, stress, generalized tension, emotional alert, shame and guilt. Negative emotions which generate attitudes of escape or defense, with the risk of creating real emotional short-circuits to the point of making them harmful mnemonic and autobiographical heritage. On the contrary, the school of warm cognition is welcoming, open to dialogue, is not afraid of confrontation and considers the error an "ally of learning", the class atmosphere becomes a relational and emotional experience that is meaningful for the personal and social development of the students.

4. Enhance emotional capital at school

The indisputable link between emotions and learning, in the awareness that school is "a relational system, in which existential tensions, desires, affections, emotions and feelings are expressed at all times, and that it is necessary to explore and study its folds, analyze its depths and ramifications, to use these analyses as a basis for building more solid and successfully designed intervention hypotheses and projects" (Lo Piccolo, 2020, p. 532). This deeply questions all teachers, in the need to put in place teaching practices which are respectful of the circularity between emotions and learning context. Such a circle can, in fact, be vicious in the case of maladaptive emotions or, on the contrary, virtuous when the emotion at stake favors "the pursuit of personally significant goals, managing transactions with the environment quickly and efficiently and optimizing individual activation and processing levels" (Fedeli, 2013, p. 53). The emotional dimension of the student can be a strong obstacle and compromise the functioning of the individual, school performance can give rise to a series of feelings and moods that affect self-esteem, motivation and sense of self-efficacy and empowerment (Bandura, 2000). The teacher has the task of educating students to the acquisition and consolidation of socio-emotional-relational skills, so that emotions promote learning, identity building, communication, relationship, socialization, orientation and autonomy as founding principles of school inclusion in respect of the right to self-determination (Cottini, 2016) and reasonable accommodation, with a view to a better quality of life. Emotional literacy, synonymous with resilience education, allows the person to redefine and re-appropriate the whole range of emotions, to contextualize

them, to restructure them, giving them new and regenerating meanings. It is about implementing emotional intelligence to know, manage and regulate emotions, reduce stress, anxiety and problematic behaviors, improve school performance, increase the amount of prosocial actions in class, school, family and life contexts, deal with conflicts and increase metacognition, produce benefits for the person, in the short, medium and long term. The approach must be ecological, i.e. integrated, cross-curricular, systematic and net-like, it must involve school and extra-curricular life, because "Homo Sentiens or Patiens not only personifies the man who feels, gets excited and actively relates with other individuals but he is the one who acts in terms of choices, orientations, ideas, values, actions; rational and emotional behaviors at the same time" (D'Ambrosio, 2019, p. 178). On the other hand, knowing how to feel should not be separated from knowing how to feel the feeling of others, an empathy that calls into question those role-taking emotions or social-emotional skills (Signorelli, 2017) that, alone, allow an understanding which is emotionally situated and respectful of the expressive function of being and relationship. This is all the more significant in the heterogeneity of the school population and in the face of each category of difference and diversity, because being empathetic allows the understanding of the meaning that someone else attributes to the situation. In addition, being "capable of an empathic presence means being able to approach someone else even when he or she is in the most difficult situations, and in some cases the capacity for emotional resonance of the other's experience can go so far as to break the frozen and freezing solitude of pain" (Mortari, 2015, p. 197). It is the adults, first of all, who must put in place emotional and prosocial skills. The profile of the quality teacher suggests, among others, the role of emotional leader, in order "to properly regulate one's own emotionality and welcome all the emotions of the students, helping them to recognize and name them, but, at the same time, guiding the behaviors that are triggered or influenced by them" (Cottini, 2019, pp. 283-384). In this sense, Montuschi's "pedagogy of caresses" come back to the present day, because every teacher has "a wide range of caresses to be used in the classroom, ranging from the recognition of school achievements, to the recognition of the personal qualities of the student, to the recognition of the existence of each one" (Montuschi, 1983, p. 86).

This is an inclusive pedagogical perspective, which, as already highlighted, has found a significant reworking in Lucangeli's warm cognition. It should be added, however, that this theory is mainly used for the training of teachers, which calls into question the lifelong learning training aimed at the acquisition of emotional leadership to integrate and enhance the inclusive and special didactics that can only be concerned simultaneously with the emotional and cognitive aspects of the Self (Galanti, 2020), put in place emotional intelligence and coping strategies, promote collaboration, design, effectiveness, relationships and emotions. The tools and methods through which to enhance emotional well-being are many and varied, from active and participatory methodologies of role play, dramatization, cooperative learning, circle time, problem solving, brainstorming and debate, to the different SEL programs proposed at national and international level, to REE (Rational Emotional Education) interventions, to strategies of emotional self-regulation. Narration represents a further and significant inclusive tool, aimed at promoting paths of emotional literacy through emotional and emotional involvement both in listening to a person or a story, and in autobiographical storytelling as an understanding and reconstruction of the Self (Demetrio, 1995).

5. Conclusions

In the current dramatic historical period, it is extremely important to transmit the value that emotional education assumes in the understanding of human events, with their burden of suffering, helplessness and fear. The incidence of the Coronavirus experience and its paralyzing effect takes on a fundamental emotional tone to be taken into great consideration in the search for educational planning itineraries that intersect with the chaotic, disorderly, contradictory and,

therefore, complex nature of life. In this perspective, it is desirable that the "new" didactics, arising from the health emergency, will be able to contribute to the formation of an emotional capital generated by a school that becomes a place of well-being for students and teachers by opening to the labyrinths of emotions and joining the reasons of the heart to the heart of reason, as the philosophical spirit of Pascal teaches us.

"Affections are always at the basis of every formation [...] the contemporary subject needs to overcome the traditional dualism (mind/affections), putting the affective dimensions back into circulation, getting used to recognize them, to relive them, to play with them; the school must engage the emotional dimension in a correct and transparent way; the formation of trainers (teachers first of all) cannot take place unles this affective dimension of the objectives is addressed: also in creating a communicative professionalism in the trainers, to enable them read the potential or the blocks/risks of the emotional-affective variables" (Cambi, 1998, p. 141).

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