TACIT EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS OF COVID-19. BETWEEN BODIES' LONELINESS AND RHETORIC OF SOCIALITY

GLI IMPLICITI EDUCATIVI DEL COVID-19. TRA SOLITUDINE DEI CORPI E RETORICA DELLA SOCIALITÀ

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Abstract

What has the pandemic allowed us to see with greater clarity, and what has appeared before our eyes as a precipitation towards drifts which are difficult to heal? One issue that has been widely called into question is that of the body, or rather the confinement of bodies in order to protect against the risk of infection. The narrative conveyed and acted upon regarding the body recalls a concept that associates well-being with the absence of disease and considers the negative effects on individual and collective well-being as inevitable consequences of the pandemic. What clearly emerges is an underestimation of the importance of all those components of health that are included in the concept of "corporeality". The relational and emotional aspects directly involve the theme of the body in interaction as well as that of sociality in training places. Training systems have the specific characteristic of being collective places, since their objective is not so much the transmission of knowledge as learning to construct knowledge and skills together. The perspective that emerges with increasing strength is that sociality constitutes the main way to experiment with performative methodologies for learning from and with others. In these times of digital technology and of the complexity that interconnects the various systems, the centers of education must accept these solicitations, otherwise they will lose their peculiarity and the reasons for their very existence.

Cosa la pandemia ci ha consentito di vedere con maggiore chiarezza e cosa si è presentato ai nostri occhi come un precipitare verso derive difficili da risanare? Un ambito ampiamente chiamato in causa è quello del corpo, o meglio del confinamento dei corpi al fine di proteggere dal rischio infettivo. La narrazione veicolata ed agita circa il corporeo richiama una concezione che affianca lo star bene all'assenza di malattia e considera come inevitabili conseguenze della pandemia l'insieme degli effetti negativi sul benessere individuale e collettivo. Emerge con evidenza una sottovalutazione dell'importanza di tutte quelle componenti dello stare in salute che vengono ricomprese nel concetto di "corporeità". Gli aspetti relazionali ed emotivi chiamano direttamente in causa il tema del corpo in interazione e quello della socialità nei luoghi di formazione. I sistemi formativi presentano la caratteristica specifica di essere luoghi collettivi, questo perché il loro obiettivo non è tanto il passaggio di conoscenze, bensì l'imparare a costruire insieme conoscenze e saperi. La prospettiva che si delinea con sempre maggior forza è quella secondo cui la socialità costituisca la via regia per sperimentare metodologie performative per apprendere dagli altri e con gli altri. I luoghi della formazione ai tempi del digitale e della complessità che interconnette i diversi sistemi non potranno che accogliere queste sollecitazioni pena la perdita della loro peculiarità e delle ragioni della loro stessa esistenza.

Keywords

Corporeality; Pandemic; Sociality; Training

Corporeità; Pandemia; Socialità; Formazione

1. Pandemic permits and constructions of meaning

Education in the time of COVID-19 is a complex and multifaceted issue that, however, requires to be investigated by a pedagogy that, consistent with its etymology, is committed to knowing in order to act, to learn from observation and experimentation of reality in order to provide paths of intervention.

A starting point could be represented by the fact that education is a diffusive phenomenon, it is "a happening" (Massa, 1997), it presents a variable consistency in the sense that it manifests itself both in intentional and conscious forms and in a latent and intangible way, through what the materiality and immateriality in which we are immersed communicates on many aspects of human and social living.

Starting from the main negative emotions that the pandemic has aroused, it may be of some pedagogical interest to explore the systems of meanings and cultural representations that have emerged as a priority, placing the pandemic as a magnifying glass or event of acceleration of processes. What has the pandemic allowed us to see more clearly and what has appeared before our eyes with the characteristics of a precipitation towards drifts difficult to recover from?

One domain widely called into question is that of the body, or rather the confinement of bodies in order to protect against infectious risk. The body has been recognized as an organism, susceptible to illness through contact with other organisms. The narrative conveyed and acted upon regarding the body recalls a conception that places well-being alongside the absence of disease, in contrast to what the WHO had declared in 1948. The prevalence of a linear perspective that does not include distinctions and that considers as inevitable consequences of the pandemic all the negative effects on individual and collective wellbeing invites us to reflect. What are the ideas of the body that have emerged as socially prevalent and at the basis of government decisions and measures? It is worth recalling, albeit briefly, the persistent nature of an approach to the body that reduces it to its physicality, to its dimension as an object. Although in the German language there are two terms to indicate the organic body (Körper) and the body as a manifestation of one's identity, of one's being, the "felt" body (Gamelli, 2019) or the "living" body (Mariani, 2020), we are still in the presence of a cultural - and in some ways scientific - vision that underestimates the singularities and, above all, disregards the knowledge about oneself, the others and the relationships of which the body is consistently part, in the face of the being of the body in the world and in one's own life. As rightly pointed out, it is clear that the interest inherent in the body is unbalanced on the biological or practical side (Cambi, 2010, p.73), with all the due and relative articulations, in any case confirming, for example, on the part of those who "act" bodies as in the field of motor and sports activities, that the complexity and inextricable interweaving that pertains to this particular "object" instead of being put on the subject undergoes radical operations of reductionism. It is as if one preferred to expunge from the body everything that cannot be framed in a context of "evidence", where especially the reference to the laws of biochemistry or neuro-anatomical-physiological knowledge can ensure that license of scientificity to lovers and professionals of a field which is in many ways slippery and enigmatic. In this regard, it is not uncommon to find the persistence of resistance to identify and define in productive ways, both in the scientific and in the operational spaces of motor sciences, research and intervention paths that see the collaboration between different scientific approaches and the sharing of working hypotheses; „in a broad sense, it follows that there is a need for an integrated approach between the „objective" dimensions, in the sense of intersubjectivity of the sciences (in particular, the so-called „hard" ones), and the subjective dimensions, such as the psychosocial, educational and cultural ones. What is hoped for is, in other words, a sharing - or at least a compatibility - of interpretative perspective between the sciences that investigate the psycho-physical components and those that investigate the socio-cultural and educational components of corporeality, to express a systemic and complex way of approaching the problems/phenomena related to the body, health and movement" (Cunti, 2015). The events related to the pandemic that have affected, directly or indirectly, the bodies of people, have somehow endorsed those separations traditionally present between the sphere of organismic physicality

and that relating to the mind, inner thought, feeling good. If the priority has been represented by the avoidance of contagion, all other issues related to health and well-being have been disregarded or at least brought back to individual capabilities and possibilities. Being faced with the need to devise individual solutions and experiencing them through the support of technological instrumentation seem to characterize only the beginning of a trend, or perhaps as indicated, a new social model. Between the so-called DAD (distance learning) and smart working, "the spaces of common experience have fragmented into individualizing domestic spheres. In this context, inequalities are exacerbated, causing people to lose the compensatory benefit offered by ties of proximity and also further weakening the link with institutions and public services" (Barberis, 2020, p. 38). In this respect, one should also think of the bans on sports practices and the important consequences that social impediments have had and will still have from the point of view of people's psycho-physical balance.

An underlying educational implicit can thus be identified in the underestimation of the importance of all those components of staying healthy that are included in the concept of "corporeality". The latter, as it is well known, refers to the experiences that are translated into bodily experiences, to what we are and feel we are with our bodies, not neglecting what is the knowledge of the body, that is, the universe of meanings that we have given to our small and large human events starting from their emotional content. We also know that the quality of primary interactions gives form and substance to all subsequent relationships, configuring a style, a way of being with others and, even before that, of living oneself. After all, the relational aspects and the emotional world are struggling to acquire a leading position in the various fields; this leads us to note the significant role attributed to technology at the expense of human variables and context. At this point, it is as if the pandemic has confirmed all this and made it more difficult to fully affirm an articulated and complex vision of health and illness and the consequent need for action that reflects it, intervening through composite actions of care.

Some research has explored the consequences of pandemic confinement on the quality of body image. Results hypothesize that the disruption of sociality and related constraints with their attendant carryover of anxiety and stress also signified a sort of hardening on gender-related patterns of physicality; this would have translated into a greater desire for females to be thin and males to see themselves as more muscular (Ruskin, 2020; Viren Swami et al., 2020). It is likely that the greater fragility linked to the negative emotions aroused by the pandemic also negatively affected people's ability to activate coping strategies; it is as if in a situation of difficulty and precariousness one is less willing to take courageous paths, so to speak, and prefers to fall back on the already known.

This dimension of taking refuge is, moreover, one with that of "withdrawing", where the place of this happening is that of the family, a system which, in the last year, has been severely tested from the point of view of its prerogatives of openness, and, therefore, of those exchanges with other environments and systems that allow for transformations. The closure to the outside world could then be configured as a lockdown or at least a co-evolutionary brake that future research could perhaps give us a glimpse of how much it has affected the families that, notoriously, with their social and transgenerational contributions and mandates, can show specific resistance to processes of change; after all, "the use of space has always been a fundamental element of every educational method. [...] the environmental disposition of the places where the educational process takes place, and their architectural structure, are posed as formative variables that cannot be ignored in any conceptual operation of a pedagogical order. (Massa, 1983, p. 147).

The social closure as a refuge seems to be manifested also in professional contexts related to training, where some researches (...) have found that the situation of distance learning has induced teachers to privilege usual didactic modalities to the detriment of the possibility to act forms of interaction, learning and teaching, less known but probably more effective and involving. In short, it is as if we found ourselves in the presence of a sort of regression, of a tendency to follow or perhaps retrace, abandoning recent explorations, roads that do not hold surprises

even if less satisfying. We could say that the withdrawal of the body from social relations, with all their generative power, in a place, moreover, such as that of the family, generally available to replicative dynamics of its own structures, has probably represented a predisposing condition for the spread of options of thought little inclined to experimentation.

With regards to this, recent contributions of scientific research in neuroscience, give us back the idea of "a mind that is rooted in the body states and neural systems of our brain" (Margiotta, 2011), an embodied mind, therefore, where there can be no knowledge except within the interaction between body and environment. According to the enactive perspective (Varela et al., 1991; Rossi, 2016), knowledge is not the mental representation of what we see externally, nor is it the result of a subjective construction: it rather coincides with the process of extrapolating meanings and elaborating a way of living, thinking, feeling and acting the world and in the world, which occurs through the sense-motor interactions and the systems of relations through which we recognize and are recognized. In this context of discourse, corporeality becomes the never-completed outcome of experiences, that is, of knowledge and learning related to them that the subject as a unity of mind and body realizes; in other words, "the enactive vision as a " knowledge mode " places the emphasis on corporeality, that is, on the "embodied" mind for which every experience would become knowledge not only for our mind but, contextually, also for our body" (Zambianchi, Scarpa, 2020, p. 132). We could also add, as an example, that even the ways of thinking about things are linked to actions that have affected certain objects, so that in the foreground is the experience that has been made; "the meaning then, in this perspective, would derive from the organism-environment relationship (embodied and situated cognition) and not from a representation on a symbolic basis [...]" (Mario, 2020 p. 53). We ask ourselves, at this point, with greater knowledge of the facts, what in the pandemic situation our bodies have suggested to our minds, what the former have allowed us to learn, to highlight the educational impact of the pandemic, its conditioning on an emotional and cognitive level, its directing in many ways our behavior. Restriction of experiences and specific quality of lived experiences represent and will represent an object to be investigated on a scientific level and in particular to be understood from the point of view of more specifically educational declinations.

2. Thinking and learning about science. Facets of sociality.

The theme of the body directly recalls that of the body in interaction and that of sociality in training places. Training systems have the peculiar characteristic, which gives them a specific identity, of being collective places. This is due to the fact that their objective is not merely the passage of knowledge, which could happen without problems through other sources and contexts, but rather the process of learning to construct knowledge and skills together. The fact that there are many people who learn represents, therefore, a conditio sine qua non since it is an indispensable resource for forming individuals capable of thinking about knowledge, acquiring new knowledge and developing their own ideas and convictions. Together with the increase in heterogeneity of the school audience, the emerging of many difficulties related to a transmission sic et simpliciter have led a large part of the teaching staff to question the quality of their role; many, in the face of growing critical motivational, psychological, behavioral students have wondered if they were abdicating their role as a teacher to play the role of psychologist, social worker, family mediator. Turning our attention to today, we certainly need professionals who mediate the relationship with knowledge, especially in light of an increasingly worrying drift towards attitudes of discredit of what is presented as scientific, as well as impermeability to rigorous and documented thought, in the face of attributions of reliability to what is presented with the traits of continuity with respect to their individual experiences, or perhaps immediately understandable without, we could say, reflective pauses. The fast, undemanding, operational thinking is the one captured and fed by social networks that make scientific information accessible, or better, they constitute a specific way to approach it. What we are facing is the spread of a collective ignorance that consists in the inability to discriminate and to draw critically. The so-called fake news, in this regard, would represent a phenomenon to be investigated from an

educational point of view because they highlight specific qualities of the mind in action, which builds thoughts on the basis of precise drives. Some of these involve, for example, the tendency to assign a license of credibility to what one wants to believe, through what has been called the "confirmation bias" (Nickerson, 1998). In this era of pandemic, certainly at an early stage but in many ways still to this day, simple explanations and easy solutions have been particularly successful and have prevailed on social media; from wanting to believe that there is a way to quickly overcome this condition to downplaying its extent, social media have also operated as a sort of tranquilizer of the growing states of anxiety and stress. Another aspect we are witnessing is that of the echo chambers, i.e. collective spaces in which opinions are spread and confirmed in an uncritical manner, since factchecking is not allowed, and therefore also doubt and the possibility to change one's mind.

It is evident that this can occur when the main tension is not to be appropriately informed but rather to be part of a group, to belong, to be there and to be recognized in some way. It is then of little importance the veracity of what one claims and, with reference to extreme situations, the values of danger or illegality of what one does, since the real danger, absolutely to be avoided, is to be excluded, not considered worthy of belonging. If this is the glue that holds together, without wanting to be excessive, entire generations of adolescents, one wonders if the educational systems are able to create new types of glue, that is to say, new plots of meaning to stay together, perhaps to learn, being recognized in their uniqueness and resources.

To partially complete the "educational" aspects of the web, we should also point out the fact that the algorithms of the web, especially those of Facebook and Google, constantly re-propose what we like, supporting our choices and thus contributing to the establishment of an information bubble that generates forms of resistance to change.

It is worth dwelling on this theme again, where the interest lies in the opportunity to look at the actual ways of living science and information, which have to do with individuals and communities, from which the training systems can only draw important elements of reflection for the construction of a competitive as well as effective action.

A further element is that fake news leverage on emotions and on the idea that what induces us to get excited has in some way characteristics of truthfulness; this is another side of the relationship between emotion and cognition that brings out the importance of understanding the so-called "emotional intelligence" also in terms of awareness of the links between our emotional world and the way we approach knowledge, study and learning. Again, the so-called "hoaxes" are very easily associated with conspiracy theories, intrigues to which we are led to believe due to lack of social trust and confidence in institutions, low self-esteem and a sort of illusion of power. This last aspect opens up a very important content which is that of the relationship with politics and institutions and, in general, with what is presented with the traits of officialdom; if schools and universities also have the purpose of forming aware and responsible citizenship, this relationship should be defined and, so to speak, exercised through all those transversal or specifically determined occasions to learn and elaborate on one's own being/becoming citizens capable of contributing to the common good. The urge to spread uncertain news is another element of the picture that is being composed with regard to the management of news and information on social networks. When faced, for example, with serious conditions of disease, or situations of generalized risk such as a pandemic, the prevailing idea is that it is better to spread them since they could be true, even in the absence of cognitive tools capable of unmasking the falsehood. An accomplice of these behaviors is certainly the possible sensational character that puts the spreader in a condition of increased popularity; the clamor of what is known often takes advantage, moreover, of the component of partiality, so much so that it is easy to find an attitude and, unfortunately, also, in many cases, a consequent behavior in favor or against something on the basis of limited elements of knowledge, which perhaps are assumed to be complete through the use of clippings of personal experiences. If this is also our mind's way of reconstructing information and reducing to unity what is ambiguous and fragmented, it is also true that a *forma mentis* is missing, a habit of thinking that is the result of learning and exercise, aimed at

configuring the complex set of aspects to which the phenomena of life mostly refer, composing links and plots of meaning. If the primary purpose of educational systems is to teach how to build culture, this can be pursued through a didactic that focuses on some key elements: the acquisition of a mental habitus that favors doubt, comparison and the assumption of a critical attitude; the ability to reflect on what one does when one learns (including one's own knowledge strategies); to work from phenomena and not from disciplines; to develop learning paths that are autonomous but above all shared; to learn how to make personal knowledge dialogue with the experience of knowing; to know how to link knowledge to its social utility. Specifically, with regard to the ability to sift through information and knowledge, some behaviours should be emphasized, such as selecting and comparing authoritative sources, referring to research and statistics, not relying on individual experiences/anecdotes, which often implies the application of a cause/effect logic. In this regard, a possible synthetic itinerary for the development of scientific knowledge could be as follows: what is the problem/phenomenon; what is the disciplinary/interdisciplinary research context in which it has been highlighted; who and why has it been dealt with (role of subjectivities and research communities); how has it been investigated; what results have been achieved; what have they been used for (social scope of the results and their effects); what prospects for development have opened up.

One of the settings to privilege, in coherence with what has been indicated, is that of dialogic interaction, to be placed side by side with other multiple learning environments in which one can learn and support this process in various forms and assuming different roles, both on behalf of learners and teachers. Sociality does not concern, therefore, being together in the sense of being co-present, side by side, but it rather constitutes a resource for learning and defines its criteria and methods. In the pandemic situation, we have lingered on this aspect for a considerable time, especially with reference to children and adolescents, when not going to school, not being able to see each other, has certainly significantly impoverished their experiences of identity growth. We wonder, however, what sociality represents for teachers. This question becomes in some ways more interesting, if it is true that the ways of teaching express a demand for learning and the choices of teachers are in close interaction with the behaviours of students. Sociality at school is not in principle "acted out", it rather happens, in the sense that, regardless of the specific teaching acts, the set of exchanges, of the conversational texture that is created among students does not directly become part of the quality of guided learning. At this point, we might ask ourselves why so many teachers have judged distance learning to be so much more tiring, or else, what is it that they felt was missing? One aspect that is particularly highlighted is the difficulty in intercepting student feedback; one thinks of all the times that teachers ask themselves if students express real attention and interest in class, and it is evident that the answer to this question has become particularly problematic in the situation they have experienced in distance teaching. But what would they have liked to have picked up through the computer monitors and what is struggling to emerge? It must be assumed that teachers, in the face of a particularly critical situation, have preferred to use traditional didactic methods of a transmissive type rather than a participatory and interactive type; this tendency can be traced back to the need to use familiar and better mastered forms of teaching that, compared to others, certainly more innovative and attractive but also in some ways more risky, can allow a better control of situations that are already not usual (Lucisano, 2020). Teachers need to know if on the other side of the screen the students are really there, and they try to respond to this need by trying to do as if they were in presence, that is, giving a meaning to the way each of them is in chat; just as in presence, the need to capture attitudes and manifestations of emotions is functional to a possible confirmation of being able to proceed along a linear trend, which is then that of the lesson, followed by questioning and evaluation. The feedback appears to be mainly functional to control, a sort of pass to continue without major hiccups that would lead, on the contrary, to follow alternative ramifications, or transitional routes that can then allow to return along the central path; a typical situation is, therefore, that in which the teacher feels he or she encounters obstacles to a pre-established proceeding that force him or her to slow down, to find escamot-

ages. How are emotions generally approached in teaching and how do teachers perceive the exchange with students? They are considered as reactions, positive or negative, mainly due to a way of interpreting and feeling external stimuli; more rarely they are perceived as closely related to a feeling that accompanies the students' schooling and that can be modified. The relevant literature has observed that teachers, being primarily concerned about having optimal learning achieved, allow the role of emotions to remain largely unexamined, suppressed, and minimized (Fitzsimmons, Lanphar, 2011; Smith, Davidson, Cameron, Bondi, 2009). They are generally afraid to share in the emotional dynamics, believing it to be something too personal, so that school, for so many of them, is essentially about "rationality" and emotions are simply not part of the school construct (Halstead, 2005); it follows that a frequent approach is to urge students to put emotions aside and focus on activities (Williams-Johnson et al, 2008). Therefore, even in the pandemic situation, a reductionist approach to the emotional component is confirmed, which is poorly considered and acted upon from the perspective of learning and training processes.

Considering again the theme of sociality and anchoring it to that of emotions, we could borrow Gamelli's words when, with regard to the body, he underlines that it "(...) is not an object, it does not exist in itself. Body is a word (like "mind", for that matter) whose meanings tend to be defined within a relationship, a context" (Gamelli, 2019, p. 29). Hence, the body, evidently imbued with emotions, "(...) should be the real object of an education/training/teaching to learn to place oneself in relation to the corporeal in an active and critical way, to interpret the diversity of the corporeal, to re-know it, understand it, appreciate it and respect it in oneself and in others" (ibid., p. 33). It has, after all, been found that "interaction creates a synchronization of brainwaves and this would be directly proportional to social dynamics and engagement during lessons (Dikker, Wan et al., 2017). This is evidence of a biological marker of the group's ability to succeed in working together and co-evolve, and the study also specifies how it is the bodily aspects of relational weaving that succeed in creating shared attention" (Gamelli, Ferri, Corbella, 2020, p.89). In this context of discourse, body language is not only denotative of objects and people, reducible to a stimulus and a response, but it must be inscribed in a relationship, in which the body space opened by the encounter contains the meanings of the interaction (Gamelli, 2005). The processes of knowledge that arise from bodily experience are in fact processes activated by a subject who, through it, enters into a relationship with an environment that is composed of objects, but especially by others, as holders and transmitters of knowledge and meanings that are the mirror of a "worldview" (Galimberti, 2005). (Galimberti, 2005); in short, the body actively involved in and with the world is oriented toward a contextual, social, cultural, and environmental starting point" (Overton, 2008, p. 3).

In conclusion, the perspective that emerges with increasing strength is that according to which sociality, as an environment in which to experiment with transformative methodologies by learning from others and with others, helps to "promote forms of self-regulatory learning, collaborative, oriented to produce concrete results in response to authentic tasks, based on research and discovery, in which practices allow to connect theory and experience, knowledge and emotions, body and mind, indoor and outdoor" (Zanato Orlandini, 2020, p. 16). The progressive delocalization of the processes of construction of personal identity, "which is confronted with a variegated socio-cultural belonging and with a plurality of places that are the object of our experience (never as available and accessible as today, but also homologated and homologating), questions our being and living in the world (Ibid, p. 17)".

The places of education in the age of digital technology and of the complexity that interconnects the various systems cannot but accept these requests, or else they will lose their peculiarity and the reasons for their very existence.

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