CONTESTI EDUCATIVI E DIDATTICA A DISTANZA

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS AND DISTANCE TEACHING

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Abstract

The current social change, also linked to the health emergency, places the issue of education, a decisive factor in global competition, at the centre of development. The educational challenge at the time of the pandemic and the development of online training activities is to fully implement autonomy, outlining an open school, as a permanent laboratory for research, experimentation and educational innovation, participation, to guarantee the right to study and equal opportunities for educational success. A school capable of welcoming and including, oriented towards maximum flexibility, diversification, efficiency and effectiveness of the school service, as well as integration and the best use of resources and facilities and the introduction of innovative technologies (L. 107/15). The school system at the time of the knowledge society, of the rapid processes of cultural, social and productive transformation of social distancing becomes a decisive place for the production of social ties, for the reduction of inequalities and above all for the enhancement of differences, where individuals realise their self-efficacy and self-realisation. Goal 4 of the 2018 European Council Recommendation highlights the need to "provide quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all". Educational institutions are called upon to promote the creation of what is known as a "educating community", in which the relationships between school and family, school and the world of work, and other educational agencies determine a network of actors co-responsible for the growth of young people, in adherence to the principles of inclusion and the rights of equality and dignity, with the aim of promoting educational success through the reduction of social gaps and the prevention of early school leaving. A community capable of pursuing the constitutional ideal of a democratic, solidarity-based and strongly cohesive society (Art. 2, 3, 34, 38 of the Constitution) that accepts the scope of the commitment needed to reconfigure the school curriculum through the tools of teaching, organisational, research, development and experimentation autonomy (L. 59/1997; Presidential Decree 275/1999; Ministerial Decree 234/2000; Presidential Decree 89/2009, Presidential Decree 81/2009) and the educational offer (PTOF, RAV, PDM) on the basis of the (multiple) needs of students with the tools of teaching flexibility, personalisation and orientation (Law 517/1977; Law 104/92; Law 53/2003; DM 27/12/2012; CM 8/2013).

Il mutamento sociale in atto, legato anche all'emergenza sanitaria, pone al centro dello sviluppo il nodo della formazione, fattore decisivo nella competizione globale. La sfida educativa nei tempi della Pandemia e dello svolgimento delle attività formative in modalità online, consiste nel dare piena attuazione all'autonomia, delineando una scuola aperta, quale laboratorio permanente di ricerca, sperimentazione e innovazione didattica, di partecipazione, a garanzia del diritto allo studio, e delle pari opportunità di successo formativo. Una scuola in grado di accogliere e includere, orientata alla massima flessibilità, diversificazione, efficienza ed efficacia del servizio scolastico, nonché all'integrazione e al miglior utilizzo delle risorse e delle strutture e all'introduzione di tecnologie innovative (L. 107/15). Il sistema scolastico nel tempo della società della conoscenza, dei rapidi processi di trasformazione culturale, sociale e produttiva del distanziamento sociale diventa luogo decisivo per la produzione di legami sociali, per la riduzione delle disuguaglianze e soprattutto per la valorizzazione delle differenze, ove i singoli realizzano la propria autoefficacia e autorealizzazione. L'Obiettivo 4 della Raccomandazione del Consiglio Europeo del 2018 evidenzia la necessità di «fornire un'educazione di qualità, equa ed inclusiva, e opportunità di apprendimento per tutti». Le istituzioni scolastiche sono chiamate a promuovere la creazione di quella che viene definita "comunità educante", in cui le relazioni tra la scuola e la famiglia, la scuola e il mondo del lavoro e le altre agenzie educative determinano una rete di soggetti corresponsabili della crescita dei giovani, in aderenza ai principi dell'inclusione e ai diritti di uguaglianza e dignità, con il fine di promuovere il successo formativo attraverso la riduzione del divario sociale e la prevenzione della dispersione scolastica. Una comunità capace di perseguire l'ideale costituzionale di una società democratica, solidale e fortemente coesa (art. 2, 3, 34, 38 cost.) che accoglie la portata dell'impegno necessario a riconfigurare il curricolo scolastico attraverso gli strumenti dell'autonomia didattica, organizzativa, di ricerca, sviluppo e sperimentazione (L. 59/1997; DPR 275/1999; D.M. 234/2000; DPR 89/2009, DPR 81/2009) e l'offerta formativa (PTOF, RAV, PDM) sulla base dei bisogni (molteplici) degli studenti con gli strumenti della flessibilità didattica, della personalizzazione e dell'orientamento (L. 517/1977; L. 104/92; L. 53/2003; DM 27/12/2012; CM 8/2013).

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1. Distance learning in times of pandemics

The current situation requires a considerable political and economic effort, which has already been translated into several international initiatives. UNICEF, as a matter of fact, has involved leading companies such as Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Zoom to foster connectivity and the dissemination of software, and the sharing of digital libraries. The OECD, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the EU through the European Central Bank, have also launched a policy to support the financial difficulties of the various states in order to create the conditions for a subsequent revival of the world economy.

Our society is characterised by an intensified exchange of information, a multiplication of images of the world and a consequent loss of the "sense of reality" (Vattimo, 1989 pp. 14-16, 21). One understands the need for a "pedagogical mediation" that is capable of equipping individuals with cognitive strategies to orient themselves in the chaos of the semiosphere, without being overwhelmed by the avalanche of messages (Baldacci, 2019 p. 213). The society of our time is connoted by indifference, a poor perception of the other and a lack of willingness to engage for the common good (Bauman, 2000; Morin, 2004; Boella, 2006, 2018; Pulcini, 2009; De Monticelli, 2015; Mortari, 2017), a universal tendency of the liquid-modern context. In such a scenario, society is called to develop a network of collaboration, increasing forms of solidarity and subsidiarity aimed at the promotion and development of the human person so that young people can learn to feel responsible (L. 59/97, art. 21; L. 30/2000; Title V of the Constitution; L. 53/2003).

The world has become smaller and has consequently assumed the typical behaviour of a village (McLuhan, 1989); the new worlds of knowledge are opening up to the solitary and not always aware inhabitant (Fragnito et al., 1997), while communications take place in real time and at great distances, with new frontiers of investigation that aim not only at individual cognitive processes but also at the cognitive relations that the individual entertains with other subjects and the processes of symbolic construction and negotiation involved in them. In a world pervaded by uncertainties and difficulties, it is necessary to encourage an unprecedented recovery of lived experience, which eschews repetition and standardisation, which requires education in freedom as a premise and demands the ability to project oneself into the future while safeguarding the present. Technologisation no longer only concerns the framing of the body, but also the body itself, which is becoming one of the territories in which technology is taking possession: see organ transplants, variously assisted generation, DNA manipulation, gender and sex change, cloning, all practices that are being organised into a system and that no bioethics and no political or religious prohibition will be able to stop or control (Costa, 2007 p. 16). Technologies are radically impacting on life forms, leading to the loss of meeting space and contacts through which to know and experience one's own bodily experience, and thus to prolonged exposure to bodiless relationships (Cambi, 2000).

The transformation of cultures and identities, social and cognitive complexity, new models of intelligence and communication become the challenge of complexity which, in turn, also becomes a challenge for education and schools. Complexity is, after all, what one discovers, both simple and heterogeneous, varied and unique at the same time. The school is immersed in a strong network of interactions that require it, by listening to the Socratic lesson, to build itself up as a community of thought that through dialogue shares a path made up of questions of sense, of meaning, establishing with the other participants a positive contact, aimed at collaboration and the sharing of ideas and opinions.

Current education systems are facing the challenge of innovation to respond to the changing context (OECD, 2018). In recent years, education policies have promoted innovation in the school system, going beyond the traditional concepts of space, time and education (OECD, 2016) in view of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the EU country (EU, 2015). The commitment of education systems is to "Provide high-quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all" (EC, 2018). The achievement of these objectives is a fundamental commitment of all components of the school community which, within their specific roles and responsibilities, contribute to ensuring the educational success of students (Legislative Decree No. 66, 2017).

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, during the first half of the year 2020, almost all educational ecosystems (schools, universities, private centres) around the world were forced to cancel in-person classes to contain the spread of COVID-19. Faced with a public health emergency whose spread was unexpected, exceptionally fast and poorly understood, politics, in order to keep teachers, staff, students and society safe, mandated distance learning. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation upgraded the COVID-19 outbreak to pandemic status and normal school activities were suspended, resulting in a difficult reorganisation of the school system, which was suddenly revolutionised and forced to rely exclusively on digital technologies and online learning. Digital technologies, even the most advanced ones, were not enough: other critical issues populated the management of distance learning, such as connectivity and the availability of adequate devices. The digital transformation can only work if it works for everyone and not just for a few, in line with the principles of social equity and the right to study. In the meantime, the pandemic remains on the international agenda as an emergency that is still far from being resolved; however, we are no longer in the "unknown land": we have learned to identify some priorities over others, to be resilient, to manage communication at a distance, to build empathic bonds in adverse conditions, to add to already complex conditions the management of distance. This contingency was considered as a critical event worsening the existing social inequalities, especially because of the different connotation of lockdowns in the Italian regions and the related consequences on the educational opportunities offered to students. The pandemic forced educational institutions to adapt teaching methodologies without adequate didactic redesign. The experience of what has been defined as an "emergency didactics" represents a complex and evolving path with many difficulties but also many resources. The pedagogical/educational response to epidemics such as COVID-19 engages schools in an extraordinary way by urging the innovative and efficient use of autonomy tools in order to limit the negative effects on disadvantaged children. As a matter of fact, there is no doubt that the health emergency has led, through forced solitude, to a greater impoverishment of education and social relations. Italy was the first country in Europe to implement a nationwide lockdown. Schools and universities started to close at the end of February 2020 starting in northern Italy, and from 10 March 2020 the government extended the lockdown measures to all regions of the country (UNICEF, 2021). Italian students lost 65 school days in attendance due to the lockdown measures adopted to cope with COVID-19, compared to an average of 27 days lost among high-income countries worldwide. In order to mitigate the impact of school closures and at the same time support distance learning processes, the Ministry of Education has allocated €85 million for distance learning activities; of this, €70 million has been earmarked for supplying digital devices and connectivity to children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, €10 million for schools to acquire digital educational platforms and €5 million for teacher training. However, ISTAT estimates that about 3 million children and young people between 6 and 17 years of age may have experienced difficulties in distance learning activities due to the lack of connectivity or adequate IT tools in their families; 28% of students also, between 14 and 18 years of age, in Italy know at least one classmate who stopped attending school (distance or in presence) after the lockdown (Save the Children, 2021). For all children and young people to be able to benefit equally from distance learning, it is not only necessary to have stable and affordable internet access and the availability of good quality digital technologies,

but also other tools that affect the quality of use and enjoyment of digital educational platforms are required. Relevant are, for example, the digital and transversal competences of the students, the tools and practical resources available to them, the learning experiences and educational opportunities, the forms of reasonable accommodation for students with special educational needs, and all the opportunities to meet and exchange with their peers, the accessibility of distance learning content. If we add to the ISTAT and UNICEF data those of the INDIRE survey, carried out among Italian teachers on teaching practices during the lockdown in July 2020, a figure emerges that is transversal to all orders of study. It is "a snapshot of a particular historical moment" that also highlights how socio-economic disadvantage, belonging to migrant families and being a student with SEN (Special Educational Needs) represent the main causes of exclusion. In primary and lower secondary schools, socio-economically disadvantaged students were clearly the most exposed to exclusion, alongside students with SEN, and at risk of dropping out. In secondary school, students who the school had already recognised as being at risk of drop-out were excluded from distance learning along with students with economic and social disadvantages. The continuous worsening of the COVID-19 health emergency increases the sedimentation of conditions of hardship and fuels situations of inequality, reproducing mechanisms of an unequal school (Benvenuto, 2019). The experience of distance learning, where it is not possible to carry out sporting, recreational and cultural, musical, artistic or theatrical activities, has generated new isolation, new suffering and new marginalisation, which have particularly affected pupils with special educational needs. There has been a lack of care for relationships, the availability of learning environments, including virtual ones, extra-curricular activities, the various forms of personalisation and guidance, experiential and workshop activities, motor activity, in other words all the activities capable of activating resilience processes, especially for the most disadvantaged pupils (ISTAT, 2012) who routinely attend schools with an insufficient level of infrastructure to guarantee the quality of learning. Forced distance learning" is a phenomenon that adds to an already complex state of Italian schools and requires constructive reflection and educational alliances in which the involvement of other actors such as families or the territory becomes necessary and fundamental.

2. New dimensions of inclusion

The so-called "forced confinement" imposes a physical space – the living space – in which, inevitably, it is no longer possible to experience that relationality and sharing among peers which is useful to promote a positive class climate. Faced with such a complex and ambiguous scenario, the role of reference adults and educators is more essential than ever in the work of taking care of the context for a critical approach useful to decode in advance what is encountered, since reality has become much more difficult to "understand" if not with new reading codes.

This condition is compounded by conditions of educational poverty, a real threat to the development of "non-cognitive" capacities (motivation, self-esteem, ability to affirm goals, aspirations, dreams) and of relational and social capacities (cooperation, communication, empathy), which are just as crucial to an individual's growth and to his or her contribution to collective well-being. The spread and concentration of poverty conditions together with the fight against school drop-out in times of pandemic represent strategic priorities for education systems, as well as a complex and global challenge that humanity has to face (Franzini, 2009). The problem of educational poverty in particular has been poorly addressed, as evidenced by data on the worsening conditions of children (Istat, 2017; Save the Children, 2017). If it is true that education is the key to understanding and interpreting the reality in which we live, educational poverty – that is, "the deprivation by children and adolescents of the possibility to learn, experiment, develop and allow their abilities, talents and aspirations to flourish freely" (Save the Children, 2014) – is all the more today a serious constraint to the achievement of those cognitive skills that are indispensable to make one's way in a world increasingly characterised by the knowledge economy, the speed of innovations and the speed of connections. Poverty in

children's learning and development is measured mainly in terms of the failure to acquire basic skills at school, yet child poverty is analysed in the document not only in terms of income, but also in terms of cultural, social and emotional development, in particular as deprivation of educational opportunities at school, in the family, in the 'educating community', with an initial survey of the phenomenon in Italy with the help of a special Index of Educational Poverty (IPE). The spread of child and educational poverty in Italy calls for special attention to the regions of Southern Italy (UNICEF, 2016; Doria Rossi, 2016) where the highest levels of school dropout, educational poverty, economic poverty and more frequent manifestations of social exclusion are concentrated, to which are added the dynamics of the labour market and the degree of education of parents (CARITAS, 2020).

Alongside broad sectors of society where it is possible to find material poverty, forms of deprivation of basic opportunities and chronic poverty, there coexist social layers that live with greater availability of economic resources, used, however, according to models that hardly favour real and lasting emancipation. As a matter of fact, educational poverty is a process that limits children's rights to an education and deprives them of the opportunity to learn and develop cognitive and non-cognitive skills. A link emerges between well-being and the spread of social disintegration, the lack of socio-educational models, within and outside families, deficiencies in the economic, health, family and housing context, the availability or otherwise of accessible spaces, the absence of childcare and protection services. It concerns poverty of relationships, isolation, poor nutrition and health care, lack of services, educational opportunities and non-formal learning. It involves the lack of opportunities for children and adolescents to learn and experiment, discover their skills, develop their competencies, nurture their talents and broaden their aspirations. A strong impulse to focus policies on overcoming and contrasting forms of child poverty has been found under the impulse of the European community (EC, 2011; EC Recommendations, 2013; EC Communication, 2017; NOP 2014 dedicated to social inclusion; FEAD, 2014-2020; ERDF; Miur call, 2020). It must be said, however, that as early as January 2018, the Ministry of Education had made public a strategy to counter early school leaving and educational poverty with the aim of reducing the school dropout rate (below 10 %, in line with the Europe 2020 target), and increasing investment in the development of basic skills and competences. The Government and Foundations of Banking Origin (Italian Acronym ACRI), through Memoranda of Understanding, should have promoted and supported experimental interventions aimed at removing the economic, social and cultural obstacles that prevent minors from fully benefiting from educational processes (in the three-year period 2016-2018, the Foundations fed the fund with about €360 million). Even earlier, Law No. 208 of 28/12/2015 placed greater attention on countering poverty by establishing the Fund for Countering Juvenile Educational Poverty (with approximately €80 million as an annual contribution for the three-year period 2019-21). The need to take charge and care of educational poverty through the co-construction of an antagonistic context (Striano, 2000), becomes an opportunity to rethink methodological practices and teaching approaches; "doing school" today means relating the complexity of radically new ways of learning with a daily work of guidance, attentive to method, new media and multi-dimensional research. As a result, in times of crisis, such as that of the pandemic, a didactic approach aimed at support, mediation, facilitation, a profound redefinition of educational action projected towards the enhancement of interpersonal relationships, the common construction of learning, becomes even more urgent (Santoianni, Striano, 2003 pp. 80-81).

In the current emergency context, disability is even more a condition evoking educational and training work that involves a complex help relationship. The person with a disability plays an active and central role both in the request and in the acceptance of the opportunities for help. The helping relationship is related to care, a central category in the pedagogical discourse. This is achieved by listening, taking charge and paying attention. The space of encounter with the different is a space of understanding, of construction of possible agreements, an understanding that requires reciprocity. In this perspective, understanding becomes a moment of encounter

in which the subjects must take on the other's point of view. Thanks to these educational dimensions, it is possible to build wider and wider spaces of understanding of the elaboration of a deeper meaning of reciprocity through complex and delicate processes of decentralisation, empathy and reflection. The promotion and development of an inclusive society require raising the levels of social awareness, participation, responsibility, reflexivity, which goes hand in hand with increasing the levels of learning, knowledge and education, as well as with the development of skills and competences of critical thinking and reflection of life agents. In these terms, social inclusion represents not only a pedagogical problem but also an educational emergency if we understand education as a process of growth and change intentionally oriented to achieve full humanity for all individuals within social contexts (Striano, 2010 p. 7). The complexity of the conceptualisation of disability requires an analysis that includes experiences, mental processes, relationships, the contexts in which they take place, the meanings that emerge for people, oppression and disadvantage experienced in particular circumstances (Medeghini, 2011, p.19). Inclusion is not just a prerogative of students with disabilities, but is a requirement for all pupils, no one excluded, otherwise a whole series of situations not necessarily pathological but equally impacting on the individual learning sphere may be overlooked (Booth and Ainscow, 2008 p. 107). The aim is to achieve the highest possible levels of autonomy by overcoming the logic of welfarism which "feeds on the possibility that those who feel victimised become permanently installed in this role (victimism); they become credible as victims so that they can always demand and never commit to promoting" (Canevaro, 2006 p. 48). Given the nature of the current scenario, the implementation of inclusive practices involves the support of human rights-based legislation and its effective implementation is a matter of momentous importance. Seeking and building inclusive contexts is also a political issue as it relates to equity, social justice and the removal of all obstacles to participation and the benefits of citizenship for all. One must bear in mind how difficult it has been over time to eliminate the factors of resistance and stigma about disability, generated by the static, inefficiency, slowness, lack of ability and fragility that are often associated with this condition.

Care in a pedagogical key can be defined as "a practice that takes place in a relationship in which someone takes another person to heart, dedicating himself, through cognitive, affective, material, social and political actions, to the promotion of a good quality of his existence" (Mortari, 2006 p. 55). Despite the official openings to promote more and more human and humanizing structures, which banish discrimination and social, political and cultural marginalisation in the name of the principle of inclusion (European Commission, Horizon 2020 Programme; UN, 2006; UNESCO 2008, 2005 and 1994), the window on reality presents a scenario full of contradictions: above all, there is still too much space between the declarations of the principles of equality in differences and their effective conquest by those who live a condition of "otherness" (Pavone, 2014). The systemic perspective inherent in the concept of a multi-dimensional inclusive process, indiscriminately involves the educational, social and political spheres of an entire educating community. Unlike integration (UNESCO, 2009), which is a process aimed at reducing exclusion and marginalisation, with an individualised/specialised compensatory approach in the exclusive educational sphere, inclusion directs the dimension of responses in an organic and systematic way towards a macro-social level and outlines the need for interventions that are not only sector-specific, but mainly multi-spherical-systemic. Our country, right from its brief but essential constitutional references, has promoted an overall inclusive vision of society and of schools in particular. The school of the new millennium is configured as a gym for citizenship, steeped in relationships ranging from those with peers to those with teachers; a place where individuals can achieve their own self-efficacy and self-realisation. Goal 4 highlights the need to "provide quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all" (Council Recommendation, 2018). In the light of new ministerial legislation and international guidelines, today's Italian school system is experiencing a dynamic process around the paradigm of inclusion, which actively involves all actors in the school (management, teachers, pupils, families) and the territory (municipality, health company, third sector) in a sort

of permanent laboratory of actions, interactions, solutions, models, approaches and strategies to promote the full acceptance, promotion and enhancement of differences. Thanks to sentence no. 215/1987 and the relative Ministerial Decree no. 262/88, a clear path of growth in the inclusive direction of our educational institution begins, and the full and unconditional right of all pupils with disabilities to attend school is reaffirmed. Inclusion is configured as a dynamic process that involves the entire school community in an educational approach based on strong ethical principles, respect for human dignity, equal opportunities, equity, the right to study and a series of fundamental values of civil life. This process is valid for all pupils and not only for those who are "qualified" as pupils with disabilities or other Special Educational Needs. The process of school inclusion, never taken for granted and always perfectible, is as broad as the educational process.

This is a professional action that requires a pedagogical approach that is able to establish a dialogue, negotiate a result, and cooperate, in order to increase the awareness of the entire educational community of the centrality and transversality of inclusive processes (Circular No. 8 of 6 March 2013). In this respect, Index for Inclusion represents a valuable resource to support the development of inclusive schools, a school of differences in which everyone's diversity is considered as a starting condition to be taken into account in order to build environments able to welcome everyone (Booth et al., 2002). The challenge posed by inclusion, which is also echoed in the pages of the Index, therefore implies not simply "making room" for differences – in the name of an abstract principle of tolerance of diversity – but rather affirming them, placing them at the centre of educational action as the generative core of the vital processes that develop precisely through the shift in perspective that sees diversity as a condition that emerges from the very identity of life and of people. School inclusion "is achieved through educational and didactic strategies aimed at the development of everyone's potential in respect of the right to self-determination and reasonable accommodation, in the perspective of the best quality of life" (UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Legislative Decree 66/2017). The educational community therefore requires to refer to implicit connectors, underlying educational choices, shared and consistent inclusive values that invest in the creation of inclusive cultures and policies and the development of practices that can build curricula for all and are capable of coordinating their learning.

Inclusion is the responsibility of all teachers towards all conditions of diversity: teachers, as part of the educational community, play an essential role in the development of education and their contribution is fundamental to the promotion of the human personality and modern society (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012). The latest Eurydice report, Equity in School Education in Europe: Structures, Policies and Student Performance, explores this issue and identifies structures and policies associated with greater equity in the system in relation to student outcomes in particular (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

3. Body well-being and learning processes
Awareness of the globality of the person, understood as a mind-body unit, opens up a new era for education by considering bodily and mental aspects not only as complementary, but also as interdependent and inextricably linked in behaviour (Gomez Paloma, 2004). The scenario so far described highlights a number of emergencies and challenges in terms of learning and well-being. The conditions of disadvantage exacerbated by the pandemic are further accentuated by the loss of all formal, informal and non-formal development opportunities related to motor skills. It is indeed clear that physical well-being influences the learning process. Well-being is an essential condition for feeling at ease with oneself and with others, and for correct communication. Even in the serious and difficult conditions in which it finds itself operating, schools cannot fail to reconfigure their curricula, drawing on the tools at their disposal to safeguard the integral development of each pupil. The twentieth century has been characterised by a renewed interdisciplinary interest in the role of the body in learning mechanisms. Bioeducational scienc-

es approach the issue of education with an interactive vision of the synergistic relationships between nature-culture-education and mind-brain-organism (Santoianni, Striano, 2003). Recent theories on cognitive development are rooted in a systemic concept of learning and neuroscience describes the brain as a complex system in which experiences and relationships with the environment modify structures and functions (Edelman, 1987). Cognition is linked to the body and the role played by the sense-motor system. Knowledge of the cross-brain pattern, i.e., the fact that the right hemisphere controls the movements of the left side of the body and vice versa, has enabled teachers to acquire attention and educational skills and to identify a pupil's difficulties on the fine and coarse manual operating level and on the level of general motor coordination. According to this perspective, learning assumes a strongly perceptive-motor connotation and takes place according to multimodal canons, which involve all aspects of the body: doing, touching, looking are therefore not arbitrary, amodal, abstract, as in the cognitive conception of knowledge. The human being is recognised as a complex biological and cultural organism.

The body has long been completely absent from the Italian school system, relegated to physical education. Students go to school as if they were immaterial beings, with serious consequences on learning, on the meaningfulness of the school experience, on frustration levels, on the ability to manage and control one's own physicality, on respect for all kinds of differences (Batini, 2014). As for the emotions, the body is also showing a progressive interest in the psycho-pedagogical field, conceived as an irreplaceable expression of the person, considered in its bio-psycho-social unity. Going back in time to the history of classical culture, since the time of Aristotle, with the Peripatetic school, it was believed that movement had a positive influence on learning and philosophy. In recent years, echoing this thought, the world of educational science, in concert with neuroscience, has been trying to understand how bodily movement is connected with memory and the learning of information.

The brain expresses its functionality only and exclusively because it is linked to a body located in a particular physical world, populated by other individuals. Recent research in the field of cognitive neuroscience has strongly conditioned the vision of the body and its relationship with the mind in learning processes. This leads us to consider actions with the body and through movement as a connection between technical conduct and symbolic interactive meaning. Learning is a dynamic and continuous process, the result of a set of neuro-biological mechanisms always situated and experienced with conditioning of the ecological context in which they occur. Learning is one of the fundamental psychological phenomena for evolution and involves many animal species as well as humans, of course. The development and survival of individuals is actually based on their ability to learn. More generally, we can define learning as a consequent behavioural modification induced by an interaction with the subject's environment that leads to the establishment of new response configurations to external stimuli. Learning, according to the definition proposed by the psychologist Ernest Hilgard (1971), is an intellectual process through which the individual acquires knowledge about the world that, subsequently, he or she uses to structure and orient his or her behaviour in a lasting way; it can be defined as a change in behaviour or perception as the result of experience. A student, therefore, who is guided in his or her learning by means of appropriate strategies that are as personalised as possible, will be able to develop an as yet unexpressed but potent potential. Over the last two decades, researchers have acquired a great amount of information on how our brains learn. Cognitive neuroscience today is able to make a decisive contribution to addressing this study through an approach that roots cognition in the body dimension: this is known as the embodied approach, referring to the bodily rootedness of cognitive abilities. When we claim the crucial role of "embodied cognition" in understanding the human condition, we cannot limit ourselves to studying the brain in isolation, but must contextualise it to corporeality and to the social environment in which it manifests its functional characteristics. States or processes are "embodied" insofar as they are representable in bodily format; this bodily representation precedes both phylogenetically and ontogenetically the propositional format (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Gallese, 2013), indeed Gallese pushes himself even further by stating that he is not even inclined to believe that the proposi-

tional format is completely separable from the bodily one. So, what does it mean to promote a conceptualisation of knowledge as embodied action? It means challenging the assimilation of the mind to an abstract entity or one that is uncoupled from the body, and to begin to consider human cognitive and elaborative faculties as deeply rooted in bodily mechanisms that shape the individual's interaction with the environment. This is equivalent to saying that the way in which an organism is "anchored" to the earth (with feet, legs, fins, two tails) constitutes the foundation for understanding its mental processes (Palmiero, Borsellino, 2014). In the field of cognitive science, the Embodied Cognition approach considers corporeality a favourable/necessary condition for the development of cognitive processes. These studies have demonstrated the fundamental importance of perceptual and motor systems in the formation of structures from which "global functions" arise, i.e., those "[...] activities that give rise to categorization, memory, and learning" (Frauenfelder, Santoianni, 2002, p. 222). The idea of a mind-body and embodied mind can be considered to be at the basis of Dewey's theories; any dualism is not dichotomous, but is rather the expression of a continuity between thought and reality within the complexity of experience. His attempt is to place the value of action as the foundation of thought. The mind is located within the world as an integral part of its continuous process. Thought has a practical origin, and operates within the implications that the individual establishes with things. Knowledge is understood as active participation (Dewey, 1961 pp. 196-198). Referring to the latest international research on Embodied Cognition (Lakoff, 1999; Ryle, 2007; Chemero, 2009; Atkinson, 2010; Fisher, 2012; Rivoltella, 2012; Gomez Paloma, 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017). The brain, the body and the environment are essentially co-determinations of each other and thus the result of co-evolution. The enhancement of corporeality is an enormous educational resource, because it makes it possible to create learning situations that enhance cognition using corporeality, conscious action and shared learning. It becomes a value, a way for students to discover and face the world and learn to live in the world in a responsible and autonomous way, contributing, moreover, to psychophysical wellbeing with a view to preventing discomfort. Psychomotricity, understood as a mentality, as a way of being, can be a tool that ensures the student's well-being, a well-being that facilitates the cognitive, organisational and relational aspects of school life. The knowledge and awareness of oneself, through which the subject opens up to others and to the reality around him, is of considerable importance. "Children become aware of their bodies, using them from birth as a means of self-knowledge in the world. Moving is the first factor in learning: searching, discovering, playing, jumping and running at school is a source of well-being and psycho-physical balance [...] The body has expressive and communicative potential [...]". (National Indications, 2012). Motor activity leads to complete development, produces a gradual expansion of previously assimilated behaviour and prepares for adult life. The body can facilitate the construction of knowledge as the active participation of the body during a didactic task allows the student to live and feed deep emotions, understood as reinforcing input, a product of the total involvement of the person in its entirety. (Gomez Paloma, 2014). The concept of corporeality as an object of investigation requires a dialogical exchange between a wide range of opinions and knowledge, through scientific-methodological contributions in continuous tension between the specificity and globality of its nature, between self-care and care of the other, between private and public sphere, inner communication and social communication, according to the paradigm of embodiment (Mariani, 2011 p. 14). In schools, the bodily dimension cannot be relegated to physical education alone, but it must also be part of the classroom. The acquisition of knowledge requires a flexible use of space, starting with the classroom itself, but also the availability of equipped places that facilitate operational approaches to the knowledge of science, technology, languages, music production, theatre and painting. Attention to space means attention to the person, to the children, seen as active, participating subjects. The centrality of the person, the new humanism and openness to the territory find in the learning environment the right context for organising knowledge and for feeling good: well-being and a welcoming atmosphere, flexibility, identity but also sociality are the key words.

In accordance with the National Indications for pre-school and first cycle education, it is

necessary for education systems to promote interdisciplinary educational pathways around core themes such as the body and its relationship with space and time, body language as an expressive communicative mode, non-verbal proxemic and emotional communication, games and sport, health and well-being. The educating community must reflect on the importance of the body-mind relationship and on the spaces that make possible the harmonious and integral development and growth of the pupil, with a suggestion full of new meanings, at a time of distance learning and on-line teaching. Educators have an essential and strategic task with a mediation function that needs to be increased; the virtual environment itself becomes a mediation device if it is brought back into intentional teaching action that makes use of new forms of flexibility to support the enhancement of corporeality. Well-being in this sense will depend on the situations to which the individual attributes positive value and on the possibilities offered by the environment to satisfy the needs redefined by M. Nussbaum (1993) as needs of the broader sphere of the person's rights. To summarise, schools have a challenge that is fulfilled in classroom life through the fostering of an atmosphere that is created in that specific context, a positive classroom climate: it reflects the school life and the socio-emotional life of the class (De Beni and Moè, 2000). The well-being depends, as a matter of fact, on the level of self-perception of the subject, on the possibility that the environment offers him/her to satisfy the needs of self-esteem and self-realisation, through diversified training opportunities that make him/her able to engage in a task, in other words to make him/her autonomous, allowing him/her to share his/her goal within his/her group and avoiding the distance from classroom activities, thus creating conditions, adjusting contexts, and creating a positive classroom climate. Education, therefore, according to a holistic view of the person, recognises the importance of not only the cognitive sphere, but also the physical and psycho-affective sphere, taking into account the socio-cultural context in which one is placed. From this experience, the pedagogue comes to the conclusion that there is not only a materially abandoned childhood (without parents and without food) but also a morally abandoned one that is just as dangerous.

Scientific research in the field of neuroscience (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2006) seems to confirm what Vygotsky had already grasped, namely that experiences have a great influence on brain development and therefore on the creation and selection of synaptic connections, thanks to neural plasticity. Brain development is not only determined by biological and genetic factors, but also by environmental ones: development is in this sense "experience-dependent". The cognitive aspects are intertwined with the socio-affective aspects of individuals with the dynamic relationships that these individuals entertain with the context in which they operate. The school paradigm is changing and with it the educational demand, which has become more complex and is no longer satisfied with content, but also pays attention to the form of communication, it becomes important to establish a relationship, that is, a humanly satisfying relationship.

Teaching as a reflective process requires educators to question their own strategies, methodologies and theoretical approaches, as well as professional prejudices, beliefs and points of view, to constantly re-examine objectives, practices and knowledge, both individually and within the professional community (Fabbri, Striano, Melacarne, 2008), acquiring a permanent habitus that allows for self-regulation and professional learning. In such contexts, therefore, the reflexive dimension as a regulatory function of action plays a major role, ensuring that the educator knows what he or she is doing when acting (Striano, 2001). The educator as a professional is the bearer of knowledge and skills that take shape also through a daily confrontation with the educational reality that requires a questioning of one's own professional action, starting from reflective practices on action and through action: it was therefore a situation-based training, based on the circularity between experience, reflexivity and professionalism (Mortari, 2009). The various problems that teachers have to face lead us to reflect on how important it is to invest in teacher professionalism by paying greater attention to the reflective knowledge that emerges from continually questioning the assumptions of professional action. As Clarizia points out, it is indeed believed that the personal level of congruity and ease/incongruity and discomfort (personal-professional) of the teacher also influences his/her communicative com-

petence (Clarizia, 2017).

The disposition to value the interpersonal relationship between educator and student as a frank and human one can be traced back to archaic societies. Human sociality is configured in the educational relationship with a dual characterisation: circular and asymmetrical, where the educator places himself at the service of the gradual conquest of the maturity of the student. Every intervention requires a tension towards action accompanied by the study of how to make it effective with respect to the aim. This places the educator in a state of responsibility, constant research and action, negotiation of meanings, weaving of relationships, reflection. The task of the educator at the time of the pandemic is to be a guide, mediator and facilitator, promoter of interactive, cooperative, innovative and flexible paths. The value of the relationship in the educational sphere does not only concern the teacher-student relationship, but also that with colleagues, with parents, with the whole school community defined as "educating community", in which the relationships between the school and the family, the school and the world of work and the other educational agencies succeed in creating a network of subjects who share the responsibility for the growth of young people, with a view to inclusion and compliance with the rights of equality and dignity, with the aim of reducing the causes of poverty and social gap, ensuring the right to study and educational success for all. In almost all societies, the family has the character of an institution, given the integrity of social, cultural and affective elements observed in it (Gallino, 2006 p. 533). As a rule, the family is a fundamental agent of socialisation from early childhood to adolescence, and for a considerable period of an individual's life the family represents the closest institution involving the most intimate part of the self. The family unit is the most involved institution in terms of affective, relational, economic and life project management, especially for people with disabilities. It is therefore essential to guarantee better forms of information and support in order to improve the quality of life of caregivers, who are overexposed to stress factors and high risks of burnout (Calzone, 2009; ISTAT, 2007; Tesseler et al., 1987; Pollock et al., 2001; Dell'Aglio, 1994). From this point of view, in order to mitigate the risk of problematic behaviour, it is necessary to strengthen interventions aimed at promoting an active role according to a competence perspective and at the same time aimed at improving the sphere of relationships oriented not only to improve the relationship between parents and professionals, but also to strengthen the network of social supports. The family is a fundamental link in the therapeutic process. Effective intervention requires attention both to the specific questions posed by the child and to the limitations associated with the disability and to the developmental stage and needs of the family (Zanobini, Usai, 2011, p. 234).

Conclusions

With the health emergency still in progress and the many factors that have worsened the students' conditions of disadvantage, it becomes clear that consolidating the educational relationship even in non-traditional educational environments is a feasible way to counteract the negative effects of the suspension of teaching activities in the classroom, laying the foundations for a resumption of the educational process that valorises the obstacles generated by the pandemic, turning them into opportunities for reflection and growth for everyone. In the event that we, as educators, had to deal with conditions whose margins for change were scarce, we would always have the possibility of interacting through the elements of context, the elements of the implicit curriculum, the organisational model that each school can adopt: the arrangement of the environment, understood both in its physical or virtual connotation and at a relational level, the documentation and articulation of the times and spaces of the school day. Through the students' own activities with their own times, spaces, forms of grouping, documentation of activities, the school acquires its own identity, it becomes a welcoming and motivating place for socialising and learning, a sort of aquarium in which the professional and organisational culture of the teachers and the figures who contribute to creating quality educational environments is reflected. The need arises, in this careful and participatory construction, to identify mediators, i.e., to build reference points that are so significant as to endure over time; cooperation between peers,

communication, sharing to cope with the exacerbation of forms of discomfort. The relationship between discomfort and well-being is not stable, it involves the conquest of self-esteem and the recognition of a positive image even in the subject, who presents him/herself as incapable of feeling well. Wellbeing, therefore, is once again measured not so much on the superficiality of the condition of happiness of rapid consumption, but on a wellbeing that has more and more substantial reasons in its existence; and, therefore, self-acceptance is linked to a recognition of one's own potential, one's own abilities, one's own skills (Canevaro, 2000, p.105). The constitutional ideal of the school as a place of education, growth and freedom is the one to which we must continue to aspire by seeking to "cultivate humanity" (Nussbaum, 2006), building a concept of citizenship based on respect and appreciation of others, in a context in which each pupil, regardless of differences in gender, ethnic origin, culture, development and abilities, is valued, treated with respect and guaranteed in his or her right to equal opportunities and the expression of talents. This need is unequivocally clarified by Amartya Sen when he proposes a concept of human development at the heart of which are people's needs and human capabilities. Wellbeing, in this sense, will depend on the situations to which the individual attributes positive value and on the possibilities offered by the environment to satisfy the needs redefined by Marta Nussbaum as needs within the broader sphere of personal rights. In a nutshell, schools will need to have aggregate surveys on the level of awareness of the various factors that affect wellbeing at school and the real possibilities for inclusion. In this way, school policies related to the main educational choices will be able to reconsider the role of inclusion as a regulating principle of the school community as a whole. In particular, schools will be able to develop a curriculum able to define specific competences at the end of their educational pathways, characterised by learning objectives set at national level, and prepared on the basis of the abilities, aptitudes and preferences of each pupil, regardless of his/her context. Teachers have the duty to step out of the logic of the current emergency and, in a critical/problematic perspective, recover the valuable and effective role that technologies can play in the teaching-learning process. Distance learning creates a virtual space that, if on the one hand has alienating and anaesthetising implications on the imagination (Postman, 1982; Popper 2002), on the other hand, if brought back into the intentional and programmatic action by educational professionals, its positive implications with respect to the activation of logical processes can be grasped. Virtual reality offers moments of simulation with repercussions on students' cognitive, affective and relational development. Needless to say, the sphere of "verisimilitude" should not be confused with that of "truthfulness", as Baudrillard would say: in flight simulations, "the map precedes the territory" but "the map is not the territory". It is essential to overcome the current misunderstanding of using ICT, i.e., information and communication technologies, as an emergency tool, as a remedy for social distancing, or worse, as a way of perpetuating traditional didactics of a transmissive type, neglecting the high potential of these tools in inclusive didactics, in didactic innovation and in the generativity of learning paths.

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