L'IMPATTO DELLA PANDEMIA SULLA QUALITÀ DI VITA

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON QUALITY OF LIFE

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight how the situation related to the spread of Covid-19 infection has disrupted the lives of all citizens, changing their lifestyles. A year ago, the World Health Organisation declared the spread of the virus, which established the start of the pandemic. This situation has had major repercussions on people's lives, affecting not only their mental and physical wellbeing but also brought about various effects of social isolation. Social distancing has forced people to change their habits and experiment with new ways of working, going to school and relating to each other. New technologies have proved very useful in this respect, as they have been able to make people feel close and united despite distance. However, while the new technological means have made it possible to move our lives forward, at the same time they can be very harmful if not used in a conscious and responsible manner. This is why it is essential that students, teachers, parents and educators become skilled in the use of these technologies, so as to extrapolate from them their strengths, without them changing the true essence of human relationships.

Il presente lavoro ha lo scopo di sottolineare il modo in cui la situazione legata alla diffusione dell'infezione da Covid-19 abbia stravolto le vite di tutti i cittadini, modificandone lo stile di vita. L'Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità, ormai da un anno, ha dichiarato il propagarsi dell'infezione da Covid-19, accertando l'inizio della pandemia. Tale situazione ha generato importanti ripercussioni nella vita delle persone, incidendo non solo sul benessere psico-fisico ma anche sugli effetti dell'isolamento sociale. Il distanziamento ha costretto la popolazione a cambiare abitudini e sperimentare nuovi modi di lavorare, fare scuola e relazionarsi. In questo si sono rivelate molto utili le nuove tecnologie, che sono state capaci di rendere le persone vicini ed uniti nonostante la distanza. I nuovi mezzi tecnologici però, se da un lato hanno permesso di far proseguire le nostre vite, possono al contempo risultare molto dannosi se non usati in maniera consapevole e responsabile. È per questo motivo fondamentale che studenti, insegnanti, genitori ed educatori, vengano resi competenti nell'utilizzo di tali tecnologie, in modo da estrapolare da esse i punti di forza, senza che queste modifichino la vera essenza della relazione.

Keywords

Pandemic, didactics, technology, relationship, well-being
Pandemia, didattica, tecnologia, relazione, benessere

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Introduction

It is now clear that the spread of the pandemic has had major repercussions on people's psychological and physical wellbeing, especially on the weakest members of society, depriving them of clear points of reference. Social distancing has been indispensable to combat the spread of the Coronavirus infection, but this has generated numerous repercussions for citizens from a psycho-physical perspective (Crescenzo, D'Ambrosi, Ferrara, Maiorino, Marciano, Paolucci, 2020). The spread of the coronavirus has also led to the closure of schools and a rethinking of teaching. It is thanks to the use of numerous technological tools that school has been allowed to continue, albeit at a distance (Ciurnelli, Izzo, 2020). The pandemic has also shown us our vulnerabilities in our relationship with technology and urgently questions us on how this relationship should evolve in the near future. The frequently mentioned opposition between a real analogue world (positive) and a virtual digital world (negative) is significantly re-scaled when the digital world becomes almost the only possible space for relationships to be shared in real time. It is clear how the numerous technological means made available have made the current historical period less onerous and disheartening, but at the same time their constant inclusion in people's lives has also changed the very meaning of human relationships, which have certainly become more accessible but less authentic (Merlini, Boldrini, 2006). It is in the face of the massive use of technology that it becomes a priority to train teachers and educators, developing specific skills that make them able to plan new and effective educational practice that does not leave anyone behind (De Angelis, Montefusco, Santonicola, 2020). First of all, making adults competent in the use of new technological tools is fundamental, since the almost exclusive use of mediatised communication negatively affects the development of relationships, as meeting face to face is lost (Bonini, 2020). In this regard, it is considered essential to emphasise that the spread of the pandemic has inevitably led to an increase in sedentary levels, particularly in children. The spread of Covid 19 has also caused the closure of parks, gyms, playgrounds and public gardens, which has made it even more difficult to use facilities and areas designed for movement and social relations, thereby increasing the already massive use of technology (Fumagalli, Schembri, Tortella, 2020). It is therefore clear that in such circumstances the periods dedicated to play and social relations are also lost, causing significant repercussions in the psycho-physical development of the individual (Farina, 2020).

1. Covid19 and psychological repercussions

It is well known how the spread of the pandemic has changed the lifestyle of the entire population, causing a deep sense of bewilderment and generating important repercussions in the psychological and social sphere of citizens in all age groups (Antonicelli et al. 2020; Gritti et al., 2020). In particular, numerous studies have shown that the psychological experience associated with the spread of the coronavirus is characterised by specific stress factors (IASC, 2020).

These include a strong sense of fear regarding the possibility of being infected or being able to infect, a fear also linked to a sense of guilt, triggered by the possibility of harming the health of another person or worse, a loved one.

A strong fear of death is also engendered, which is connected to the possibility of experiencing traumatic bereavement. This is characterised by the impossibility of being able to say goodbye to loved ones when the implementation of ceremonies and funeral rites that favour the socialisation of grief is no longer possible (Antonicelli et al., 2020).

It has therefore been noted that states of anxiety, panic attacks, sleep difficulties and the emergence of previous problems represent the psychopathological dynamics in consequence of the emergency (Wang et al., 2020a).

This demonstrates how the onset of the pandemic has provoked considerably stressful situations for everyone, which have greatly affected psycho-physical wellbeing, and triggered specific responses to the traumatic event (Porges & Dana, 2019). It is clear, however, that not everyone has the same capacity to respond and adapt to a stressful situation, and it is likely that the pandemic and all the changes it has generated have destabilised those who were already

experiencing situations of extreme emotional fragility, both individually and within the family. Specifically, the current situation has undoubtedly burdened the lives of citizens, and enforced social isolation has exacerbated their stressful situation. Enforced social isolation has been required to combat the spread of the epidemic but in doing so, people have been prevented from finding places of safety beyond their own families.

The problems that have emerged for citizens as a result of the pandemic reveal a great need to receive adequate support to safeguard their well-being. For this reason, it is fundamental to increase the network of psychological and educational support for all age groups, in order to make it accessible to everyone, so as to support citizens by offering them useful skills to cope with particularly stressful situations (Crescenzo, D'Ambrosi, Ferrara, Maiorino, Marciano, Paolucci, 2020).

2. Distance learning, a new way of being

The spread of the pandemic has led to major changes in the way we work and study, affecting the lives of all citizens without exception. Faced with such a scenario, schools as well as society as a whole have experienced great changes, which have completely transformed the lifestyles not only of pupils but also of teachers and parents. The school has had to face a new challenge, a new way of doing school and specifically completely new teaching methods. In order to continue to accompany and guide students during this difficult unprecedented time, the school has had to change form and deliver its teaching through the use of new technological means (Ciurnelli, Izzo, 2020). These have made it possible to remain connected and united, and have certainly succeeded in hindering social isolation and reducing the generation gap between students and teachers (Prensky, 2001). The prolonged closure of educational institutions and the use of distance learning (DAD) has made it more difficult for pupils to learn (Batini et al., 2018; Batini & Bartolucci, 2016) and has generated negative effects such as isolation, passivity, digital addiction and cognitive fatigue (Sarsini, 2020). Naturally, students have felt the brunt of these changes and, unfortunately, there is now a danger of educational and economic poverty. This is linked to negative feelings, such as apprehension, uncertainty about the future and a total lack of motivation, which have negatively affected learning and could lead to an increase in the phenomenon of dropping out of school (Ciurnelli, Izzo, 2020). In order to combat these phenomena, it is clear that schools must make an effort to change their form and become a motivating, stimulating and welcoming place, with the aim of focusing on the needs and well-being of students (Batini & Scierri, 2019).

The pandemic has therefore imposed on teachers and students a major transformation not only with regard to the contexts related to learning, but also to the extensive use of technological devices. This has led to considerable difficulties (De Angelis, Montefusco, Santonicola, 2020). In a very short time, teachers have had to learn how to make contact with their students using new technologies, and try to maintain their attention as far as possible in such circumstances. The ultimate aim is to promote active teaching, which has the capacity to stimulate pupils' motivation and sense of self-efficacy, in short, to make them feel useful and competent (Scierri et al., 2018). All these changes have taken place in a very short period of time, hence the failure to train teachers in the use of the new tools through training courses; the luckiest were able to anchor themselves to younger and more experienced colleagues and managers, given the total absence of ministerial guidelines (Ciurnelli, Izzo, 2020). Parents have also had great difficulty in that following the transition from school to the home environment they have had to increase levels of attention and support to help their children, sometimes very young ones.

The inclusion of a digital learning environment in our lives extends to a dynamic that is capable of creating a real relationships which suggests that the digital network no longer represents a place, but a new relational dynamic (Colombo, 2013).

Its profoundly relational essence makes the digital network a particular environment in which it is possible to develop learning and teaching. It is able to establish a new otherness that might completely transform relationships not only with self and others but also with reality, as

far as changing the way of being in the world of man (Arsena, 2020).

Faced with such a scenario, it is clear that the main objective today is to be able to translate the teaching experience, moving from the analogical, real and static format typical of face to face educational relationships, to the digital format considered indispensable today (Arsena, 2020). What is fundamental to bear in mind in this context is that the new digital mode that characterises teaching practice represents a new mode of behaviour, a new communicative and educational sharing environment. Therefore, one cannot think of using the same methods, frequent during the face to face lesson, as they would make learning ineffective (Ibid.). In the light of this, it is essential to develop adequate skills in educators and teachers, in order to enable them to plan effective teaching procedures in person and at the same time strive to develop strategies that also lend themselves to teaching carried out at a distance or in blended mode (De Angelis, Montefusco, Santonicola, 2020). While technology is a valid tool, on its own it cannot ensure any effectiveness for teaching; this fact makes it clear that the problem is not related to the tools chosen, but to the way they are used (Ibidem).

In the light of this it is clear that if the use of distance learning becomes indispensable, the lesson will necessarily have to be rethought from a technological point of view, requiring modification and recontextualization of the process of educational communication. In this regard, it has been noted that with a view to involve and motivate students and make lessons more participatory, it would be useful to reduce the time related to explanation by the teacher, make greater use of examples and demonstrations as well as increase the use of exercises and time dedicated to feedback (SApIE, 2020).

The school should therefore take on board the challenges that have emerged as a result of the pandemic and try to focus on the main problems. This involves encouraging relational experiences and trying to teach students an authentic way of understanding and building relationships (Cagol, Viola, 2020).

It is already considered of great importance in face-to-face teaching, but even more so at a distance, to try to create a deep sense of belonging among the pupils. It might therefore be useful from a didactic point of view, to devote the right attention to familiar routines, with the aim of creating warmth among group members and stimulating a sense of sincere interest in each other (Corbella, Ferri, Gamelli, 2020).

One of the characteristics that must not be lacking in the work of teachers and educators, particularly in these difficult times, is creativity (Petrella, 2020). Through the creative and flexible use of technology it is possible to generate interesting results. Educators also need to be skilled in choosing the appropriate tools, platform and methods to be adopted, and should always discuss with parents and children in order to consider the best options (Schwartz et al., 2014). It is also essential that teachers show flexibility and adapt their professional skills to new situations. In this way they are able to reorganise themselves, particularly with regard to: time management, setting objectives and learning new ways of interacting with colleagues, families and citizens (Petrella, 2020).

It is therefore clear that even in the light of these new transformations, the role of teachers continues to be crucial for the development of inclusive and quality teaching, both at a distance and face to face, capable of guaranteeing educational success for every pupil (De Angelis, Montefusco, Santonicola, 2020).

3. The risk of 'mediatised' communication

As has already been widely argued, digital media have proved to be essential, allowing us not to give up on everyday life. It is important to emphasise, however, that the internet has not been able to cancel distances but to 'mediatise' them (Couldry, Hepp, 2013). It has been seen that in the face of the numerous difficulties of workers and students, technology and new digital tools have had the merit of making this period less difficult. Alongside a change to one's routine they have made it possible to carry on with one's personal, professional and educational life.

At the same time, however, this new way of communicating and relating to each other has

made us lose the very essence of interpersonal communication and this may result in man's inability to understand one another anymore (Bonini, 2020).

The almost exclusive use of mediatised communication makes relationships difficult, as it takes place to the detriment of the physical encounter between people. The encounter with others elsewhere no longer requires real physical movement. Through digital tools, the other person can experience the sharing of our space, as (s)he is near and close to us (Merlini, Boldrini, 2006).

Alongside verbal communication, body language is considered indispensable to engage a relationship with someone else, as it facilitates an understanding of the specifics of the encounter?) (Ibid.).

Even the use of masks, which have become compulsory in many contexts, including schools, on the one hand have demonstrated their effectiveness, but at the same time their use has compromised social communication. This is because the proper use of a mask requires it to cover almost the entire face, which, as we know, is a very important channel for verbal and non-verbal communication. The great importance attributed to facial expression is known, and it is also been demonstrated that through neurocognitive mechanisms (Haxby, Hoffman, Gobbini, 2002), we are able to construe the movements of facial muscles, interpreting them as paraverbal messages (Crivelli, Fridlund, 2018) or even as expressions of internal mental states. In most cases the facial expressions of others help us to understand the emotional state of the other. At the same time some facial movements can even become contagious and mirror neuron theorists claim that this type of emotional contagion is the basis of empathy (Rizzolatti, Caruana, 2017). The mask therefore represents a real barrier, which is particularly invalidating for more vulnerable subjects, such as the hearing impaired and the deaf, as it makes it difficult for them to read lips and therefore feel integrated. A solution to this great problem has been the use of distance learning, which makes it possible to discover the faces of students and teachers, thanks to or, if you like, because of the distance created by a screen. However, this cannot be interpreted as the only solution, as the unveiling of the face takes place at the expense of the rest of the body, which remains hidden and unobserved (Cagol, Viola, 2020).

When teaching is exclusively mediated by a screen it becomes impossible to experience and observe the body of others. This leads to a reduction of the phenomena of mirroring (Riva, 2019) and also of the activation of mirror neurons that have the ability to grasp the emotions and intentions of the other. In the light of this it is important to understand how for everyone the situation described so far has become a reason for psychological and physical stress. In particular for young people, the current problems do not just mean discomfort,but a sense of real impossibility which makes it difficult for them to experience and build relationships (Cagol, Viola, 2020).

The current situation unfortunately obliges us to remain distant from each other, in order to preserve our own and other people's wellbeing. This is why it is a priority to focus on the concept of "caring for distance", which offers new and alternative possibilities for the body to train its sense of closeness to the other. The Accademia sull'Arte del Gesto (Academy of the Art of Gesture), founded in 2007 in Florence, offers an interesting response to the current health emergency. Specifically, it is committed to developing a pathway for approaching and deepening the languages of the body, through a closeness with nature and the art of its local area. In order to counter the distance that characterises this dramatic moment in history, this institution has developed real practices of "caring for distance" (Stella, 2020).

In addition, the commitment to caring for distance underlines the importance of developing and implementing pedagogical ideas regarding outdoor education (OE), (Bortolotti, Farné, Terrusi, 2018), which has long been the subject of many discussions on rethinking the ways and places of teaching. Once again, the importance of making the sensory experience part of the educational paradigm is stressed, in order to stimulate a new way of experiencing and inhabiting the school environment (Stella, 2020).

4. Covid and repercussions on movement

The coronavirus epidemic has undeniably generated changes in the opportunities for movement and the enjoyment of physical activity (Fumagalli, Schembri, Tortella, 2020), causing an increase in sedentariness and increasing the risk of the onset of pathologies with major repercussions, including on a psychological level.

Indeed, physical activity is considered important from childhood, as it positively influences health and cognitive development. It has also been found that physical activity is an important factor in the development of executive functions, i.e. a set of functions linked to the prefrontal cortex, which are able to ensure an individual's success at school, socio-culturally and at work (Diamond, Ling, 2020).

It has also been noted that there has been a reduction in children's physical activity, an effect also explained by the closure of parks, playgrounds, gyms and public gardens. These closures have made it even more difficult for children to take advantage of environments which enable movement and social relations. Consequently this has increased sedentary activities, such as watching TV and playing digital games (Fumagalli, Schembri, Tortella, 2020).

In the light of this it is possible to see how periods dedicated to movement and play have decreased, causing many repercussions in psycho-physical development. This happens because play during pre-school age contributes to structuring the personality and constitutes a propaedeutic period for adult life (Farina, 2020). Play is fundamental in a child's life because it enables children to experience perseverance, attention, respect for rules and co-operation.

Children have been deprived of the possibility of sharing this play time with their peers, depriving them of relationships which are fundamental for the healthy and balanced growth (Ibid).

Unfortunately, if the technological means available have proved to be profitable to make up for various shortcomings with adults and adolescents, they have not proved suitable for children from a play point of view. In fact, children's play cannot and must not be thought of and experienced exclusively in a virtual way, since it is fundamental for a child to be able to move in a real, physical space, in proximity to others, in order to experience himself and others in an authentic way (Farina, 2020).

Today it therefore becomes a priority to create the conditions for a new collective way of living, which is based on the well-being and creativity of individuals and supports the need for relationships (Colazzo, Manfreda, 2019).

In this regard, it is essential to train teachers, educators and sports instructors to pay more attention to the motor development of children. The aim is to go beyond any individual and environmental opportunities promoting more than ever attention to the practice of physical exercise. It is all the more urgent today to rethink public spaces that offer children, as well as young people and adults, the opportunity to carry out physical exercise and social experiences, thereby educating the new generation, teaching them that movement is essential for the development of the psycho-physical well-being of everyone (Fumagalli, Schembri, Tortella, 2020). It is therefore considered necessary that educators, teachers and sports instructors examine and redesign their teaching programmes, in order to increase the level of motor skills in children, thereby enabling them to cope with any future moments of difficulty (Ibid.).

We are faced with an important challenge, that of a new beginning, in which educational figures cannot be found unprepared. To this end, they must commit themselves to creating the conditions for a new collective life. First of all, it will be fundamental to aim at wellbeing, to promote creativity and to support people's need for relationships. It is also necessary to make use of the new and different ways that have allowed us, albeit in an unusual way, to take care of others (Colazzo, Manfreda, 2019).

Conclusions

The repercussions of the current historical period have produced significant changes from a social, cultural, health and political point of view. In particular, young people are experiencing a sense of resignation and hopelessness with regard to the future, forced to live in a pres-

ent whose outcome they cannot control (Allodola, Buccolo, Mongili, 2020). Young people are faced with numerous challenges that require new skills, including the ability to build a "smart" identity to help them meet the challenges of an increasingly interconnected and digital world. The growing and constant use of new technologies has had the negative effect of producing an uncontrolled situation of hyper-connection and alienation (Limone, Toto, 2020). This is why, alongside the general health crisis we are witnessing, we must also give due importance to the crisis in values and education that characterises our contemporary age (Tramma, 2008). In this context, in order to give hope to young people, it is essential to highlight not only the negative aspects of this crisis but also its positive side, linked to the possibility of transformation, evolution and the planning of a new future. It is precisely in the face of such a scenario that the role of education proves essential, as it reinforces the possibility for each individual to achieve his or her own personal well-being. This is possible provided that each person in the course of his/her life receives adequate tools that allow them to increase self-awareness and to discover their strengths and weaknesses so as to be able to face the risks that life poses, and take the opportunity for development from negative experiences (Allodola, Buccolo, Mongili, 2020). It is clear that through this new way of working, the very essence of relationships is missing. However, at the same time we have the opportunity to experiment and face the emergency with new methods, ensuring that our resilience, problem solving and empowerment skills are not lost (Petrella, 2020).

Therefore it is important to address the issue of distance, trying to redesign the spaces dedicated to the educational relationship, and reconsider, in a new light, environments that can facilitate authentic relationships (Stella, 2020).

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