

PRESENCE AND DISTANCE IN EDUCATION AND FORMATION PROCESSES: SOME SHORT REFLECTIONS

PRESENZA E DISTANZA NEI PROCESSI EDUCATIVI E FORMATIVI: BREVI NOTE RIFLESSIVE

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Abstract

Moving from the awareness that the new didactics forms launched by the pandemic emergency require a radical attitude change by those who educate facing their own actions, the following notes try to reflect on the educator's positioning and posture modalities with a specific pedagogical approach.

Standing at the margins of a versus logic that naively opposes presence and distance and reiterates the obsolete oppositions between technocrats and technophobes, both potentialities and criticalities of the different educational interaction forms will be identified from a critical-hermeneutic heuristic perspective, capable of interpreting and contextualising the new frontiers of media and ICT culturally and historically.

In fact, the specificity of the pedagogical or pedagogical-didactical word view on ICT lies in a constant discussion that makes use of the social-semiological and perceptive-technological dimensions, but it is also able to transcend them.

Muovendo dalla consapevolezza che le nuove forme della didattica inaugurate dall'emergenza pandemica impongono di modificare in maniera radicale l'atteggiamento di chi educa di fronte al proprio agire, le note che seguono tentano di condurre una riflessione specificamente pedagogica sulle modalità di posizionamento e di postura dell'educatore.

Tenendoci ai margini di una logica del versus che oppone ingenuamente presenza e distanza reiterando le ormai obsolete opposizioni tra tecnofobi e tecnocrati, si individueranno le potenzialità e le criticità delle diverse forme di interazione educativa in una prospettiva euristica critico-ermeneutica, capace di interpretare e contestualizzare storicamente e culturalmente le nuove frontiere dei media e delle tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione. La *word view* pedagogica o pedagogico-didattica sulle tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione, trova, infatti, la sua specificità in un confronto costante che si avvale delle dimensioni semiologico-sociali e percettivo-tecnologiche, ma che è capace, al contempo, di trascenderle.

Keywords

Presence, distance, teacher professionalism, information technologies.

Presenza, distanza, professionalità docente, tecnologie dell'informazione.

In introducing these brief reflections, there is an obligation to underline a certain discomfort in arguing about a possible comparison between presence and distance in the educational and didactic relationship. This discomfort moves from being oscillating between the role that questions me professionally and the role that, as the parent of an adolescent who cognitively and carnally lives a didactic that, from an emergency and occasional phase, is gradually becoming everyday life, provokes me and does not it makes me a cautious observer in reflecting on a phenomenology that has broken the age-old “black box” of the school.

Families entered the classrooms, albeit virtual ones. That “box” was brightly lit by computer monitors. The teaching activity went unknowingly, under the magnifying glass of the families, who were able to closely judge the knowledge and teaching skills of the teachers. And what I like to emphasize, beyond my ubiquitous presence and my oblique gaze, is the breakthrough in the political-cultural debate of the discovery of the school as the central institution of our societies.

This centrality is due not only to its educational contribution of education and training towards the younger generations, but also to its concurrent action towards the wider social organization.

Around the school gravitate children, teenagers, young people, adults, parents and the elderly, the whole family, teachers, transport, catering, public administration and, more generally, the world of work, whose approach is subordinate to many to the possibility of being able to count on the school time of their children.

I also state that, as I have always connoted some of my reflections on the media, I do not fall into the trap of versus: apocalyptic versus integrated, technophobic versus technocrat, information versus understanding, textuality versus hyper-textuality and hypermedia, linearity versus circularity, reality versus virtuality, culture of the “lampshade” versus the culture of the electronic impulse. These are real theoretical-ideological viruses conveyed by pseudo-cultural hackers who, on the one hand, are able to immediately center the alternativity / exclusivity of positions and to “intercept” the collective imagination, on the other hand they often risk “one-eyed” interpretations, partial interpretations inadequate to account for a complex and articulated cultural, pedagogical and didactic debate (Attinà, 2004).

Similarly, a certain publicity aimed at the radicalization of positions that contrast presence and absence in the different levels of formation appears to me to be completely counterproductive.

Once again, I appeal to a critical-hermeneutic dimension, capable of interpreting and contextualizing historically and culturally the new frontiers of media and information and communication technologies.

Precisely the character of a reflective and critical-hermeneutic pedagogical knowledge assumes a decisive, almost metatheoretical role, to prevent new technologies from causing a dangerous detachment and phantasmatic evasion in the non-place, in the non-time and in the non-face. The pedagogical or pedagogical-didactic word view on information and communication technologies, in other words, finds its specificity in a critical-hermeneutic dimension that makes use of the semiological-social and perceptual-technological dimensions, but at the same time is capable of transcend them.

Taking this perspective, I do not personally share the belief, albeit nurtured by some distinguished colleagues and by some media publications, that the reputation of the professional category of teachers has worsened from the dramatic experience of Covid-19.

Beyond resistances, improvisations and rigidities, distance teaching has involved a great work of collective initiation into conducted experiences and knowledge of which the great mass of teachers and even students had no inkling, much less conscience. It would be important to invest in this completely anomalous story, not to relegate it therefore to the constraints of an emergency to be filed as soon as possible, and to ensure that the autonomy and flexibility that can no longer be done without, can also be exercised on the noble, but culpably ignored, theme of what is learned and taught in schools.

Of course the school, in this moment that reveals itself as a historical rather than chronological watershed, is Andersian a naked king, but what would the school have been if it had not had the readiness - sometimes immediate, sometimes elephantine - to rely on distance.

If not the Illician death of the school, that Pasolini suspension of the school would surely have come true, without, however, as Pasolini himself hoped, to have in a short time a new vision of the school and its organizational and methodological apparatus. The distance, however, guaranteed the practice of routines and everyday life which, otherwise, would have been inevitably and dramatically compromised.

The distance has certainly exposed the fragility, the cracks of a teaching professionalism that has not been able to conceptualize the media, which has neglected the connection between the scientific-pedagogical-semiotic-ideological paradigm (which considers the knowledge of language and its values / meanings / meaning) and the technological paradigm (which considers the use of different techniques as central), within an educational communication through the media, which is at the same time critical knowledge of socially contextualized media languages, use of technological media in the individual and collaborative study-learning of knowledge, and original expressive-artistic form of technological and social communication.

Hence, a first paradox emerges: in the absence of a rigorous premise of conceptualization, distance has proved to be an exponentially strengthened presence in terms of content. Does it make sense (here a strictly autobiographical dimension of a parental nature takes over) to have everything studied about the cell, its composition, its functions without a laboratory side in which to observe, experiment, discuss? Without wishing to diminish the power of memory, isn't it a useless mnemonic torture that is being perpetrated and perpetuated to the detriment of students?

I repeat: it is not a generalized accusation against the teaching class. We have limited ourselves, even at the level of national and local policies, to updating on the functioning of the various platforms, with some innovative methodological / didactic ideas often ending in slides, PowerPoint elsewhere pre-manufactured and reused out of context, without seriously warning the need to revise the contents and cognitive techniques of institutional formation, to act in short on knowledge and on its own 'organization' (to put it in Gramscian terms).

Not only with what to train, but also and above all about what and to what to train. This is not, should not be, a problem of subjects or disciplines to be added: more generally, there is a problem of articulation, aggregation and integration of the areas of experience, prefiguring a model that makes the school an apparatus of mediation both of texts (objectified and stable knowledge) and of networks (knowledge under construction and therefore mobile).

The hope is therefore that of an amphibious school as defined by Maragliano, capable of moving and making people move at the same time (and with equal awareness) on solid and liquid knowledge.

There is a classroom topology and, in direct correspondence with this, a cognitive topology of the book operates: one recalls the other and both respond to a one-way communication model, the one that goes from a single center to a theoretically homologated periphery. Another thing is the multidirectional communication that characterizes the activities of a learning community operating on the net. It is not necessarily better or worse, it is simply other, on the level of nature and therefore of the material and cognitive topology of experience (Colazzo, Maragliano, 2020a, b).

In diversity, therefore, and not in the opposition of an interaction that sees presence and / or distance, while using the best energies, the best predisposition to a training that harnesses the potential of the virtual community, which is not limited to a commitment to modernize the material equipment of schools, teachers and students (with distributions of tablets, for example), but which invests the very nature of the knowledge of which the teaching (be it one or two or three, i.e. textual, reticular, or even mixed) constitutes mediation, we cannot avoid identifying the structural limits of an interaction at a distance.

Educational communication is always an attempt to escape from transmissive unidirection-

ality. As Dolci warns, mortgaging the very possibility of mass communication, communication does not exist without a reciprocal creative adaptation, without a relational configuration. Communication is a relationship, it is having in common, it is an activity that appeals to creativity and growth.

Only by tracing and promoting the substantial difference between transmitting and communicating is it possible to recover the integrative perspective of experience, which is the most proper space for action that does not concern the adoption of this or that technological tool but the identification of school cultural system, the identification of what makes sense to continue learning and what does not, to make room for something else.

But there is, in my opinion, something that is lacking, something that is not in the skeleton of distance: it is the dimension of silence or, better, in the interaction at a distance, silence is confused and identified with the absence of connection. Silence, that pedagogical-didactic device already so dear to Montessori and re-centralized by Demetrio in its being a privileged place where the capacity for authentic listening takes shape (Attinà, Martino, 2016; Demetrio, 2012), silence, which becomes the auroral moment of listening in a dialectical game in which one becomes an echo of the other, seems to be the great absentee.

Similarly, listening, which is a subjective condition of intense involvement, is not resolved in a simple operation of looking outwards or mirroring, which is not resolved in mere feeling or in an egocentric, superficial, indecentric, rigid listening. that deforms and misunderstands the messages,

Listening, which wants to qualify as authentic, critical and selective listening, is a demanding process both on the emotional side and on the strictly cognitive one, because it poses the need for an education in the syntax of listening, appears deformed in the interaction at a distance.

The same recreation, that pause normally characterized by voices, by the smells typical of an interaction in presence, is transformed, from a distance, into a telematic pause that requires a mere action of silencing webcam and audio which, evidently, has no affinity with a silence and listening characterized by even minimal pedagogical significance.

Whenever a teacher enters a classroom he puts himself on stage. The classroom, far from being an architectural border space, is a sort of counter-place where the teacher, co-star actor, using his own dramatic ability, contributes to the staging of knowledge. The classroom is a space of expression and representation, a place where presence is given and translated through a relationship that is not only the primarily educational one (teacher-learner), but that which is established between the speaking body (teacher) and the space of figuration of the action (classroom). The classroom, just like the scene, is the place where existence is exposed to the other.

In fact, teaching is always a dramatization, an action. The drama, which takes shape in that amphitheater that is the school or university classroom, uses two mediums: the body of the teacher on the stage and the word that takes shape through the narration.

Whenever a teacher enters the classroom he interprets a triple script: that of the scholar, the pedagogue and the speaker. Paola Martino stated:

“The teacher - Nikolaj Stepanovič affirms without hesitation - supports these three roles. The teacher is always a scholar, in other words he is always called to testify his knowledge. Communicative competence, understood here as “the ability to identify and implement, at any time, the communication methods best suited to one’s intention, context, purpose and recipients”, cannot be achieved without mastering didactic object, if you do not have a disciplinary competence (Moscato, 2008). Again, the teacher is also always a pedagogue, a figure who guides, accompanies the learner, but where? What is the direction of the journey that the teacher, like a new Socrates, must indicate? The educational relationship is supported by an erotic dimension, it is constantly enlivened by eros, by this active force, by this point in which every singular existence arises. Eros, this tension of continuous slippage, this drive towards truth, is a desire for the absent, for what is lacking, and, therefore, an interminable opening towards otherness and, as knowledge of the singular, the possibility of preserving the authentic power to be

of each. Pedagogical eros is always promotional, never indulgent or condescending.

In Nikolaj Stepanovič a vocation for teaching emerges which, far from being the result of a method and a technique, is the result of instant seduction. Education is, in fact, a love contagion, a vital relationship, not a transfer, a transmission, a filling, but a tension, a task, a commitment, something that is still to come, and, again, a lack, a fault, a movement, a going towards.

Knowledge, far from being something that flows from the fullest to the most empty of us, is to guard, to preserve a lack (Recalcati, 2014). Learning is a void to be opened and the teacher, like Socrates, Recalcati reminds us (2014), must produce this void to make creation possible, which is always a disobedient gesture that provokes, arouses personalization. To learn it is necessary to let oneself be touched by the other, but to let oneself be touched by looking for an escape route, keeping oneself as subjects and not reifying oneself as a loving object “(Martino, 2016, p. 174).

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