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TEACHING ENHANCED LEARNING FOR ENGAGING
AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Edited by
Ida Cortoni, Veronica Lo Presti, and Eleonora Sparano



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2. THE PANDEMIC EVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ITALIAN SCHOOL¹

by Giulia Bianchi Matè*, Emanuele Toscano**

Abstract: *The essay examines the pandemic impact on educational and school Italian system expressing the requirement to realize a new approach in order to exceed distance/presence combination. This approach has allowed the input towards an interconnected and multimedia knowledge that has enhanced the narration and the relationship with the territory/environment. The pandemic had numerous implications that have been investigated through the analyses of psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, educators.*

Key words: Distance learning, pandemic SARS-CoV-2, impact on school, impact on society.

Introduction

«[...] On 31 December 2019, the WHO China Country Office was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. As of 3 January 2020, a total of 44 patients with pneumonia of

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unknown etiology have been reported to WHO by the national authorities in China. [...]» (WHO - World Health Organization, 2020)².

OMS recorded with these words the first case of contagion in Wuhan city, China, caused by an unknown pathogen.

The global contagion explosion has shown how either wealthy companies or poorer (most unfortunate) societies have been united by the nightmare of mass death, often occurring alone, showing organisational and psychological fragility never detected before.

Suddenly the pandemic has led to a sudden change in social and mental space, with the consequent spread of anguish, loneliness, and isolation, which have demonstrated how sociality often has been only an apparent phenomenon. Alessandro Campi states: «[...] *Pandemic made explicit this condition, typical of post-modernity and its deep alienating aspects* [...]» (Campi, 2020)³.

The need to quickly achieve a technological advance is one of the consequences of this situation, previously imagined but never fully launched, such as to allow both distance learning and smart working.

1. *The indications issued by Italian Institution, Organizations and Science*

The pre-pandemic school system in Italy presented countless problems related above all to the precariousness of

² Who, (5-1-2020). *COVID-19 China*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unkown-cause-china/en/> [last access 9/1/2023].

³ Campi A., (2020). *Dopo. Come la pandemia può cambiare la politica, l'economia, la comunicazione e le relazioni internazionali*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore.

teaching and non-teaching staff, run-down school building, scarce resources, high dropout rates.

In this regard, we highlight some data taken from monitoring Report on education and training section of the European Commission (CE, 2019), which annually presents an assessment about the European education and training system. The report highlights that young people between the ages 18-24 who had dropped out of education and training in 2009 were 19.1%, while in 2018 this rate had dropped to 14.5%. Another important fact is related to the investments in the educational system, reduced and distributed unevenly. Public expenditure on education, both as a percentage of GDP (Gross Domestic Product 3.8%) and as a percentage of total public expenditure (7.9%), was among the lowest in the European Union. The data return a clear picture: while the share of GDP assigned to early childhood education and primary and secondary education was substantially in line with European standards, expense on tertiary education was the lowest, with just 0.3% of GDP in 2017, well below the EU average of 0.7%. Therefore, the European Union Council adopted a specific recommendation to Italy in the framework of the 2019 European semester in order to «[...] *improve educational outcomes, even through appropriate targeted investments, and promote upskilling, in particular by strengthening digital skills* [...]»⁴.

Finally, another critical fact was the evident lack of teachers in some subjects and, *vice versa*, the overabundance in others. Teacher shortages have been most critical in disciplines such as science and mathematics, foreign languages and learning support, especially in Northern Italy. While the majority of teachers

⁴ Commissione europea, (2019). *Relazione di monitoraggio del settore dell'istruzione e della formazione 2019 istruzione e formazione Italia*, Lussemburgo: Ufficio delle pubblicazioni dell'unione europea. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-italy_it.pdf. [last access 9/1/2023].

(80%) are from the South, mostly teaching posts are available in the North of the country and are impossible to be filled permanently, due to excessive teacher's turnover. Indirect evidence of the persistent shortage was the percentage of teachers with temporary (supply teachers) contracts (Argentin, 2021)⁵. In the 2018/2019 school year, there were 164.000 supply teachers, equal to 18.5% of the total, increasing compared to the 135.000 of the previous year. As the vast majority with fixed-term contracts don't have the automatic right to occupy the same post in the following school year, this corresponds to an expected turnover rate of more than 20%, considering anticipated retirements (CE, 2019).

The emergency launch of the DAD begun following a process of cultural and technological transformation that had already started with the National Digital School Plan (PNSD), a fundamental pillar of L. 107/2015, the so-called «The good school», at whose centre it's located the innovation of school system and the opportunities of digital education. This cultural action started from the idea of a renovated school, understood as a learning space, not just physical, a place where you can develop skills and life experiences. The goal was to make technologies becoming ordinary activities at school service, not only for training and learning, but also for administration, gathering all environments, including: classrooms, common areas, laboratory spaces, individual and informal spaces, throughout the territory (MIUR, n.d.)⁶. PNSD objectives included the contrast to structural and infrastructural deficiencies, reduction of the deficit training for teachers, enabling of new digital technologies and active

⁵ Argentin G., (2021). *Nostra scuola quotidiana. Il cambiamento necessario*, Bologna, il Mulino.

⁶ Miur, (s.d.). *Piano nazionale scuola digitale*. Available at: <https://www.miur.gov.it/scuola-digitale> [last access 9/1/2023].

methodologies to promote the inclusion of all students (Ferritti, 2020)⁷.

This period has strongly revealed with great force that there are very important global challenges to face: climate change, economic and social inequalities, migrations, ageing of population and a pandemic like this one. Among all these phenomena that have fuelled uncertainty, unpredictability and non-linear changes, the systemic innovation of school has been one of the greatest challenges, as reported by the authors of “The thrust of COVID-19 pandemic to Italian school”. The article describes the challenges of personalised education and systemic innovation (Molina, Michilli, Gaudiello, 2021)⁸. During 2022, the emergency of a close war was added, which joins – with all the problems arising – the challenges set out above.

Distance learning was, in the first two years of pandemic, the most evident systemic educational innovation, with schools remained closed; teachers and students connected to digital platforms such as Zoom, Teams, Skype and this consequently led to a change in approaches, learning environments and management of teaching processes.

The mandatory of DAD was sanctioned with the D.P.C.M. 4 March 2020, implementing the D.L 23 February 2020 n. 6., which provided in art. 1 the following: «[...] *For the entire duration of the suspension of teaching activities in schools, school administrators activate remote teaching methods according to the specific needs of students with disabilities [...]*».

⁷ Ferritti M., (2020). *Scuola chiuse, classi aperte. Il lavoro di insegnanti e docenti al tempo della didattica a distanza*, Sinapsi, X, n. 3, pp. 64-76. DOI: 10.1485/2532-8549-202003-5.

⁸ Molina A., Michilli M., Gaudiello I., (2021). *La spinta della pandemia da Covid-19 alla scuola italiana*. Available at: <https://rivistedigitali.erickson.it/integrazione-scolastica-sociale/it/visualizza/pdf/2119> [last access 9/1/2023].

This D.L. was then repealed by the D.L. 25 March 2020 n. 19, but it has been March 2020 D.P.C.M. that established the requirement of DAD by the school institution. Finally, the D.L. 8 April 2020, art. n. 22, stated: «[...] *In correspondence with the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities following the epidemiological emergency, the teaching staff still ensures the teaching services in remote mode, using IT or technological tools available [...]*». (Barone, 2020)⁹.

Digital has therefore become, in a lacerating historical phase, a lifeline that has allowed didactic continuity at a time when school as a place to study, to live and as a social space no longer existed, causing important changes in the learning approach and in management of teaching processes. Teachers and managers' training took place *in itinere*, with the involvement of students, parents and civil society organisations.

Two other MIUR documents, “School Plan 2020-2021” and “Guidelines for Integrated Digital Education”, have provided support in this situation. The first document introduced the possibility of integrated digital teaching for secondary schools to complement face-to-face activities. The possibility of integrating traditional teaching with the provision of other spaces such as parks, theatres, libraries, archives, cinemas, museums was also noted. Furthermore, the activation of collaborations with various territorial entities that could contribute to the enrichment of the educational offer has been fundamental.

The second document, dedicated to guidelines for integrated teaching, represented, on the other hand, an important

⁹ Barone M., (2020). *Didattica a distanza*, Orizzonte Scuola. Available at: <https://www.orizzontescuola.it/didattica-a-distanza-si-deve-rispettare-il-proprio-orario-possono-impormi-metodologie-didattiche-ce-diritto-a-disconnessione-le-nostre-faq/> [last access 9/1/2023].

intent on stimulating and offering a framework for long-term school innovation (Molina, Michilli, Gaudiello, 2021).

Analysis conducted by Save The Children (Italy), which focuses on eight Italian cities, highlighted the following:

«[...] Male and female students had to attend their schools even for much less than half of the theoretically scheduled days; therefore, the trend of the contagion and the different choices at an administrative level have created this gap between the various Italian cities, underlining the already evident fact of school dropouts present even before the pandemic, as a sign of an expansion of educational inequalities [...].»

«[...] In addition to the obvious loss of learning around the world, not being able to attend school implies even greater risks such as being exposed to early marriage, child labour, forms of abuse and poverty. The Director General of Save the Children Italy, Daniela Fatarella, announced the launch of two important initiatives called “Not alone” and “Rewrite the Future”, thanks to which over 141.000 children, families and teachers have been reached, to provide together with associations and local partners, material support, such as tablets, internet connections and psychosocial support [...]» (Save the Children Italia onlus, 2021) [...]»¹⁰.

The ISS (National Institute of Health) has identified and provided through the document “Operational indications for the management of cases and outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) in schools and early

¹⁰ Save The Children Italia Onlus, (2-3-2021). *Un anno in pandemia: le conseguenze sull'istruzione in Italia e nel mondo*. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.it/blog-notizie/un-anno-pandemia-le-conseguenze-sull-istruzione-italia-e-mondo> [last access 9/1/2023].

childhood education services” a valid scientific support to protect health and safety in schools and childcare services, identifying suspected cases early for the reopening of the school 2020-2021.

Here there are some of the key recommendations:

- monitoring the health status of pupils and school staff;
- families’ involvement in checking body temperature every day before going to school;
- measurement of body temperature as needed by identified school staff through the use of non-contact thermometers;
- adequate communication to pupils and school staff to stay at home in the event of symptoms and/or body temperature exceeding 37.5°C;
- contact of parents/school staff with their paediatrician/doctor for any clinical evaluation and prescription of the nasopharyngeal swab;
- information, training and awareness of school staff regarding the importance of early identification of signs/symptoms in order to promptly communicate them to the school referent for COVID-19;
- identification of one environment dedicated to the reception and isolation of any people who may show similar symptoms with COVID-19;
- provision of an extraordinary sanitization plan for the isolation area and for the places frequented by the symptomatic pupil/school staff (Gruppo di Lavoro ISS, 2020)¹¹.

The document constituted an important piece representing the beginning of a close collaboration between schools and

¹¹ Gruppo di Lavoro ISS, (2020). *Rapporto ISS COVID-19 n. 58/2020*. Available at: https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_2944_allegato.pdf [last access 9/1/2023].

healthcare system, with the support of all institutions involved, which is essential for the recovery of face-to-face activities.

Thanks also to the intense vaccination campaign and the numerous interventions by the Government, as for example the D.L. n. 44/2021 converted in the L. n. 76/2021, Italy was the first European country to introduce the mandatory vaccination for health professions and operational sector of health; the Italian school got ready to start the 2021-2022 year with all staff and students vaccinated.

In fact, the D.L. 6 August 2021 n. 111, called “Urgent measures for the safe exercise of school activities, in the field of universities and transport” had established the mandatory of vaccine certificate for school staff, teaching and non-teaching, and for university staff and students. All school and university staff, as stated in the decree, «[...] *in order to guarantee public health and maintain adequate safety conditions in the provision of the essential education service [...]*», should have exhibited the *Green Pass*. «[...] *Failure to comply with the provisions was considered unjustified absence and, starting from the fifth day of absence, the employment relationship is suspended and no salary or other compensation or emolument is due [...]*» (Dusi, 2021)¹².

In addition, MIUR had signed a memorandum of understanding with various trade union organisations and it had been promulgated the D. Interim 16 August 2021 (Division among state educational institutions of resources to be allocated to expenses for the purchase of goods and services, in relation to the start of the 2021/2022 school year, for purposes related to the

¹² Dusi E., (2021). *Green Pass, nel nuovo Decreto obbligo per il personale scolastico. Niente stipendio dopo 5 giorni di assenza*, La Repubblica. Available at: https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2021/08/05/news/green_pass_il_nuovo_decreto_prevede_l_obbligo_per_i_docenti-313071928/ [last access 9/1/2023].

need to contain the epidemiological risk from COVID-19), in order to start school year safety.

Thanks to this decree, funds had been allocated for: purchase of DPI and equipment for individual hygiene and environments, interventions for students with disabilities, aids to adapt internal and external spaces of institutes to carry out the lessons on safety (Edscuola, 2021)¹³.

General Francesco Paolo Figliuolo, appointed in March 2021 as Extraordinary Commissioner for COVID-19 emergency by the Prime Minister Mario Draghi, received at the end of August 2021 updated data about the progress of the vaccination campaign in the school; according to the weekly report dated 20 August, the school staff not yet vaccinated was equal to 186.571 people, 12.82%, the regions with greater delay were Sicily, Sardinia and Calabria (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2021)¹⁴.

On 1 October 91.20% of school staff had already received both doses or the single dose, while 93.74% had received at least one dose or the single dose. The highest shares of unvaccinated people were found in the provinces of Bolzano (21.10%), Trento (17.68%), and Valle d'Aosta (15.9%) (Orizzonte Scuola, 2021)¹⁵.

¹³ Edscuola, *Risorse avvio A.S. 2021/2022 in sicurezza*. Available at: <https://www.edscuola.eu/wordpress/?p=147373> [last access 9/1/2023].

¹⁴ Il Sole 24 Ore, (2021). *Vaccini, i numeri aggiornati sul personale della scuola: 12,8% ancora zero dosi*. Available at: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/vaccini-numeri-aggiornati-personale-scuola-128percento-ancora-zero-dosi-AEzksvd__ [last access 26/08/2021].

¹⁵ Orizzonte Scuola, (2021). *Report vaccino, il 91% di docenti e Ata è vaccinato. 90mila rimangono senza alcuna dose*. Available at: <https://www.orizzonte scuola.it/report-vaccino-il-91-di-docenti-e-ata-e-vaccinato-90mila-rimangono-senza-alcuna-dose/> [last access 9/1/2023].

2. Researches and analysis on DAD during the pandemic

During this phase of COVID-19 pandemic, several researches and analyses were carried out on the state of the education system and on the hard confrontation with the pandemic, which it has led to redefine paths, roles, activities and tools.

The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) document entitled “Learning remotely when schools close” returns the idea of the digital technology as a lifeline for education in a critical phase such as that of the pandemic, although most education systems across countries have not been ready to accept these digital learning opportunities (OECD, 2020)¹⁶.

Giancola and Piromalli (2020) report that Italy occupies a queue for the diffusion of Internet at school, despite the investment included in the PNSD; the teaching staff is poorly trained to integrate ICT into teaching courses, which remain linked to a frontal and sectoralised transmission approach.

Social differences are overlooked as if the technological revolution was naturally democratic, participatory, and inclusive.

These evidences don't concern just schools, but also universities and post-graduate education/continuing training; there was a massive use of platforms or tools such as synchronous/asynchronous recordings, video conferences, etc., with various uses, but all these ways have caused stress and critical issues for the Italian education system. The main types of detachment and misalignment were (Giancola, Piromalli, 2020):

¹⁶ OECD, (2020). *Learning remotely when schools close*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/learning-remotely-when-schools-close-how-well-are-students-and-schools-prepared-insights-from-pisa-3bfd1f7/#section-d1e168> [last access 13/4/2023].

- tension between top governance (ministerial indications) and professionals, both in the case of schools and universities: in fact, these guidelines proved to be vague and ineffective, since they promoted a general theoretical framework for digitization which was not reflected in real practice, with diversifications, accelerations and slowdowns;
- rifts between the various public and private institutions, especially as regards digital platforms: the uneven ability between institutions, in fact, to control the emergency and activate the online mode often depends on financial, legal and local knowledge constraints;
- incomplete teachers' training, often with little experience and preparation in the field of e-learning; many teachers restrict themselves in transposing transmissive models with the new tools, while for others the educational process is accompanied by a restructuring of practices towards a more student-oriented teaching and therefore more participatory.

The serious problem of those who, due to lack of tools and supportive family environment, failed to maintain continuity of study, shouldn't be underestimated (Giancola & Piromalli, 2020)¹⁷.

The school experience outlined by Ciarnella and Santangelo on "The role of teacher in distance – learning between the COVID-19 emergency, new learning environments and opportunities for educational innovation" (2020), shows the main transformations that have taken place in school premises, in the role of teachers and in communicative/relational processes

¹⁷ Giancola O., Piromalli L., (2020). *Apprendimenti a distanza a più velocità. L'impatto del COVID-19 sul sistema educativo italiano*, Scuola Democratica, Il Mulino. DOI: 10.12828/97097.

following the activation of DAD. With the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities, a series of initiatives aimed at teaching telematically had success in schools of all levels.

The two main stages of DAD, characterised by a progressive evolution of both the actors involved and spaces and means, were initially featured by very limited interactions between teachers and students happened above all by sending information through email or messaging snapshot. In some cases, the student had to produce a paper to be sent to teacher. The relational aspect had been almost completely neglected, or, if present, it had been carried out through brief telephone conversations or messages; in many cases these exchanges were protracted further the normal school hours, throughout the day. In the second phase, however, there was an enhancement of interaction methods between teachers and students, in fact they began to experiment videoconferencing programs and e-learning platforms, so that the interactions took place in real time. In this way the teacher could create a lesson in which the dialogue was more developed; in this phase, therefore, communication was always mediated by telematic way, and the environment was virtually (Ciarnella, Santangelo, 2020)¹⁸.

Monya Ferritti supported what was first described in her paper in which she analysed the analysis carried out by INAPP – National Institute for Public Policy Analysis – through an online questionnaire, that the various participating schools published on their website from 21 May 2020 to 21 June 2021. This survey explored the transition of the teaching staff from a traditional, frontal and synchronous way of working in classroom, to an

¹⁸ Ciarnella M., Santangelo N., (2020). *Il ruolo dell'insegnante nella didattica a distanza, tra emergenza covid-19, nuovi ambienti di apprendimento ed opportunità di innovazione didattica*, QTimes – webmagazine, anno XII, n. 3. Available at: https://uilscuola.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ciarnella-santan_qtimes_lug_2020.pdf [last access 9/1/2023].

online work experience, characterised by many unexpected difficulties and implemented in emergency. In this case, the focus of the study was precisely the profession of teacher/educator, from nursery school to university. In a sample of 548 teachers (age range between 45 and 64 years old), who corresponded to a professional experienced group, the long-distance relationship with minor students in the 0-6 age group was more rarefied and the activities were mainly synchronous. On the other hand, primary/secondary school teachers experienced a greater level of stress due to the students' lower executive autonomy; for this reason, family members (and not only) often attended the lessons according to the learning needs and ability to use telematic devices.

As result, the perception of stress and workload for these teachers increased by 90%. As far as secondary school teachers are concerned, there was a lower perception of stress, although increased.

Secondary school teachers and university professors also showed a high workload, mainly due to the need to ensure privacy, security and suitability of tests. Valuable help in solving critical issues on technological level was offered by the figure of digital tutor/ animator, especially in primary and secondary schools, but there also the help of more skilled colleagues. One factor perceived as limiting by teachers was excessive parental interference. The urgency in the initial phase was to ensure online teaching continuity, even if it would have been necessary to reconfigure new training objectives, offer training about new online teaching/learning methods rather than transferring online teaching simply and redefining new evaluation processes (Ferritti, 2020)¹⁹.

¹⁹ Ferritti M., (2020), *op. cit.*

This fact is linked to what was previously presented in the work of Ciarnella and Santangelo, for which, although times have moved up, promoting the large-scale experimentation of e-learning platforms and videoconferencing programs, some limitations have nevertheless emerged, such as: dependence on the availability of internet connection, the limited possibility of interaction, the dematerialization of learning environment and the difficulty of use for the less experienced (Ciarnella, Santangelo, 2020)²⁰.

Students and teachers' disorientation was testified by Daniela Sarsini, faced with an emergency solution such as DAD, that has emphasised the already existing problems, extended the social gap and excluded the neediest pupils due to cognitive, cultural and linguistic factors, as already indicated by ISTAT data. Below is the author's thought regarding the activation of DAD in a comparison between kindergarten/primary pupils and older students:

«[...] Especially for the little ones, reducing or eliminating contact with senses (touch, sight, perception, smells, motor skills) and drastically limiting the active relationship with learning experience, significantly damages cognitive development. The acquisition of abstraction and reasoning can be achieved with greater difficulty if sensory mediation is skipped. That's because every mental function – remembering, intuition, logical thinking, awareness – is closely linked to the emotional and communicative aspects of learning, which are greatly reduced online [...]» (Sarsini, 2020).

²⁰ Ciarnella M., Santangelo N., (2020). *Il ruolo dell'insegnante nella didattica a distanza, tra emergenza covid-19, nuovi ambienti di apprendimento ed opportunità di innovazione didattica*, QTimes - webmagazine, anno XII, n. 3. Available at: https://uilsuola.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ciarnella-santan_qtimes_lug_2020.pdf [last access 9/1/2023].

Instead:

«[...] For high school students, DAD not only leads to greater cognitive stress and a decrease in receptive skills with regard to disciplinary contents, but also causes a sense of isolation, passivity, dependence, as computer-mediated communication limits the ability to collaborate and active participation in social and collective life. Physical distancing restricts the assiduous exchange with classmates, the collective discussions between teachers and students and erases the experience of the senses which is fundamental for the construction of identity. Self-awareness develops when the subject feels recognized by the other through a gestural and communicative ritual that is based on embodied and non-virtual experiences such as those offered by the computer [...]» (Sarsini, 2020).

However, Sarsini continues, there aren't only negative consequences in this emergency, since the online mode has encouraged the use of multimedia resources, written knowledge and narration through digital storytelling; the experience of the flipped classroom, known as "flipped teaching", was a stimulus to use web consciously and carefully, enhancing school-territory relationship too. DAD has therefore promoted the use of little-known resources, promoting awareness of technologies, to remodel teaching spaces according to everyone's attitudes and chance of making knowledge more interconnected and contextualised (Sarsini, 2020: 9-12)²¹.

Mascheroni *et al.* (2021) have highlighted that MIUR and schools' efforts have been a direct and important response to exploit digital teaching tools to the pandemic. All this shows the

²¹ Sarsini D., (2020). *Alcune riflessioni sulla didattica a distanza*, Studi Sulla Formazione/Open Journal of Education, 23, pp. 9-12. DOI:10.13128/ssf-11826.

importance of exploiting this opportunity to introduce digital technologies as educational tool.

The authors assessed also that investment should be made researching effective and resilient hybrid delivery systems to enable remote learning when schools are forced to close. All this must be implemented at the same time with investments, taking advantage of the already existing use of digital technology, to understand how to adapt and to improve education systems in terms of infrastructure and connectivity. Furthermore, teachers' training must include the development of digital skills, including: ability to promote online lessons, management of virtual classrooms with specific technologies, customization of update sessions with parents and educators. These results will be achievable only after further researches about the optimal use of blended approaches, which combine technology with face-to-face teaching in classroom. In addition to promoting digital learning, common efforts mustn't neglect the enhancement of equity and inclusion of all (Mascheroni *et al.*, 2021)²².

2.1 The survey carried out by INDIRE

The survey carried out by INDIRE (National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research) published on July 2020, had a great relevance; this report "Survey among Italian teachers: teaching practices during the lockdown" outlines a "snapshot" of teaching practices activated by Italian teachers of all school levels during the 2020 lockdown spring (Bertazzi,

²² Mascheroni G., *et al.*, (2021). Unit Office of Research - Innocenti, *La didattica a distanza durante l'emergenza COVID-19: l'esperienza italiana*, Firenze. Available at: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/la-didattica-a-distanza-durante-1%E2%80%99emergenza-COVID-19-l'esperienza-italiana.pdf> [last access 9/1/2023].

2020)²³. This result could be the indication of an innovative boost that won't disappear completely, in fact DAD has managed to consolidate itself as a learning practice, integrated with face-to-face teaching. However, the report highlighted that the two most widespread practices were videoconferencing lessons with allocation of resources to study, and exercises to do on you own, in line with what was presented by Ciarnella and Santangelo in the first period of the pandemic. Subsequently, the third most practiced mode was the external assessment carried out by teacher. A minority of teachers, on the other hand, stated that they had simultaneously carried out research and laboratory activities in a digital environment as well as offline ones. These have made it possible to activate forms of self-assessment by students to encourage the growth of their own self-regulatory processes and the development of forms of peer assessment. In the analysis of perceived quality about DAD, it has been outlined a worsening trend compared to all dimensions, with the only exception of students' autonomy and responsibility, which were improved instead. Specifically, the elements analysed were:

- levels of learning and attention;
- students' autonomy and responsibility;
- quality of interaction and communication between students;
- the educational relationship and peer relation;
- the ability to cooperate and collaborate;
- the levels of motivation and involvement.

²³ Bertazzi F., (29-7-2020). *Indagine Indire sulle pratiche didattiche durante il lockdown: uscito il report preliminare*. Available at: <http://www.indire.it/2020/07/29/indagine-indire-sulle-pratiche-didattiche-durante-il-lockdown-uscito-il-report-preliminare/> [last access 9/1/2023].

Furthermore, the teachers who have activated laboratory practices, have detected a more positive perception of DAD. The survey has pointed out many other aspects, including:

- the time factor which, in DAD was lower than that spent in face-to-face teaching;
- the organisation and leadership adopted in each school;
- the difficulty of establishing collaboration with territory;
- school-family relationships;
- the use of different communication channels (including whatsapp);
- the very important issue of assessment methodology;
- ongoing training and updaters courses for teachers.

From the teachers' opinion, it emerges that the production of papers, the lead of a project works, and laboratories are teaching strategies that are positively evaluated, which will also be exploited by returning face-to-face teaching.

2.2 ISTAT Report and CENSIS Report

Another aspect is what emerged from ISTAT Report on school inclusion in the years 2019-2020 (ISTAT, 2020)²⁴, dated 19 December 2020, which concerns: increase of pupils with disabilities who were unable to participate at DAD lessons, the little number of specialised support teachers, as well as the uneven distribution at national level of assistants for autonomy and communication.

²⁴ ISTAT, (2020). *Statistiche Report - L'inclusione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità*. A.S. 2019-2020. Available at <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/12/Report-alunni-con-disabilit%C3%A0.pdf> [last access 9/1/2023].

As regards the increase in number of pupils with disabilities, the ISTAT Report points out +13.000, or 3.5% of enrolled students; Italian schools weren't probably ready for this increase, considering that the study shows how one school among four doesn't have a computer workstation for pupils with disabilities. The number of disabled pupils who were unable to take part in lessons is therefore considerable (about 70.000). According to ISTAT, the impossibility of disabled pupils to benefit from distance learning is due to several reasons:

- disease severity 27%;
- little or absent cooperation from family members 20%;
- economic and social hardship 17%;
- difficulty of adapting Individualised Educational Plan (PEI) to DAD 6%;
- lack of suitable technological supports and tools 6%;
- lack of specific teaching aids 3%.

Furthermore, ISTAT Annual Report shows that, for almost half of the students, distance learning was an obstacle run, as 45.4% children between the 6 and 17 years old had difficulties practising DAD, above all due to the lack of available in family, or shared IT equipment with brothers and/or parents engaged in smart working. The Report had highlighted that 12% of children don't have access to a PC or tablet, a percentage that rises to 20% in southern Italy (ISTAT, 2020)²⁵.

Instead, according to CENSIS Report "Italy under strain. Transition diary 2020. The school and its excluded", only in 11% of schools all children were involved with DAD. 82% of executives point out that differences in terms of technological equipment, connectivity and familiarity of use, both among teachers and students, are an obstacle to full functioning of distance learning.

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

For 75% DAD has therefore widened the learning gap among students based on availability of IT tools and family's technological skills. If these data are linked to those of school dropout, the school budget during lockdown shows that in 40% of schools, dropout is more than 5% of students, with more critical issues in the South of the country (CENSIS, 2020)²⁶.

Despite the diffusion of projects, teacher training and experimentations of new scholastic models and innovative teaching methodologies, it proceeded in random order, without succeeding to create a system and school in front of emergency found itself culturally unequipped, as confirmed by 61.1% of the executives interviewed. It was therefore an opportunity for real learning and deep reflection on school future in fact 95.9% of interviewees revealed that they agreed very much (60%) or fairly on the fact that the generalized use of DAD allowed to learn useful things and to think about the chances of future teaching in this mode. Furthermore, it was noted that (according to 84.3% of executives) remote learning will probably be used more often in the future, integrated with classroom activities. Some ideas outlined by CENSIS Survey led us to reflect on the following aspects:

- the importance of the relationship with families for a renewed educational agreement;
- the enhancement of innovative teaching elements can be integrated with face-to-face methods in order to reduce the still persistent conditions of educational disadvantage;
- the need to set up, also in the future, as happened on MIUR institutional website, a platform as an institutional reference point to offer guidelines, examples, practical supports and multimedia products;

²⁶ CENSIS, (2020). *Italia sotto sforzo - Diario della transizione*. Available at <https://www.censis.it/sites/default/files/downloads/Diario%20della%20Transizione.pdf>. [ultimo accesso 9/1/2023].

- the identification of figures distinct from teachers or laboratory assistants who have the technical skills to support the digital school;
- the identification of an overall plan for digital education, which in addition to the priority intervention of ensuring connectivity and technological infrastructure to all schools according to minimum standards, it brings in a single vision of harmonious development all the investments destined for innovation (CENSIS, 2020)²⁷.

In a very little time, the Italian school has found itself faced with a remarkable experimentation that must make us reflect on a renewed educational agreement with families; this deal has the purpose of promoting cooperation to reduce the conditions of educational, social and physical disadvantage.

3. Sociological, psychological and communication implications

Three analyses, among the many elaborated ones, are proposed to make it clear how experts about sociology, communication and psychology have assessed the impact of the emergency, which it has profoundly influenced the world of the educational system and the world as a whole.

Stefania Capogna and Maria Chiara De Angelis (2020) highlighted in the article “Survey on Distance learning at the time of Covid-19”, how DAD during the pandemic required a constant commitment for families, both in a positive way as element of novelty, and negatively in case of it was considered extremely burdensome. Despite all the difficulties that have emerged, there is

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

evidence that families have taken immediately action to respond to the various requests from the school, to organise and manage DAD in the family context. In particular, the study shows that in the sample of 31,805 students, 97.53% of the families declared themselves technologically ready to start DAD. The DAD management therefore required families to mobilise material resources such as technologies and spaces, but also intangible resources such as technical skills and flexibility to share new ways of interaction. The role of families has been essential, even if it is necessary to program a strengthening of training actions. Therefore, authors hope for the adoption of an “ecological” relationship between school and family to build an edifying project even remotely for each person involved in the educational process. DAD can represent a stimulating, fun and interesting element, an opportunity that can’t be wasted, to make the new generations evolve in a more competitive way in the world (Capogna, De Angelis, 2020)²⁸.

According to Massimo Recalcati, the pandemic has mainly affected those who are more fragile, weak and with fewer resources. One of the many categories that has been affected by these problems is adolescence, because unlike children, teens find themselves in the position of going beyond the family fence, spending most of their time away from home. However, in this situation the adolescents found themselves having a restriction of their freedom and there was a lack of gain experience in school as a community. However, this doesn’t mean that trauma must be identified with the person who suffered it, as there is a risk of consolidating the position of victim, with consequent removal of responsibility. There is no doubt that there are traumas, however

²⁸ Capogna S., De Angelis M.C., (2020). *Survey on “Distance learning at the time of Covid-19”*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341626476_Survey_on_Distance_learning_at_the_time_of_Covid-19 [last access 9/1/2023].

the presence of institutions is essential, first of all the family, which provides the main support. Isolation, social distancing, distance learning, anxiety and uncertainty linked to fear of illness have created a real escalation of psychological and psychiatric discomfort and new frailties. However, it isn't correct to demonise DAD and we mustn't victimise children and teenagers who have studied in this way.

A very important lesson for adolescents and children concerns vaccination, not only for the purely health aspect, but because it's a gesture of great civil experience, as defined by Anna Spina²⁹.

In the text: "The other virus communication and disinformation at the time of COVID-19", Marianna Sala and Massimo Scaglioni show how in the pandemic period the management of communication has been fundamental, because it's linked to society and its events and it involves sharing, participation and belonging.

The use of technology to communicate has become the only tool for working, socialising and learning. The world of social networks has been the place where information of scientific value has been communicated by industry experts, but also the space where misleading communication strategies have been triggered by ordinary people, who have told their personal experiences and provided judgements/opinions not supported by science, so-called fake news. This contradictory and messy information demonstrate multiple points of view, with a high emotional load of irony, anger, loneliness and a desperate search for sharing and approval. Therefore, alongside the health epidemic, we have often become

²⁹ Spina A., (10-6-2021). *Recalcati: «Il vaccino per gli adolescenti è una grande esperienza civile»*, Vita. Available at: <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2021/06/10/recalcati-il-vaccino-per-gli-adolescenti-e-una-grande-esperienza-civil/159632/> [last access 9/1/2023].

victims of disinformation and this is why there was «infodemic», understood as dissemination of deliberately false news for different purposes. That's why authors therefore intend to underline how important it is to give back professional information in a lucid and detached way, rediscovering the custom of reading and daily updating (Sala, Scaglioni, 2020: 17-29)³⁰.

Researches performed by Di Nunzio, Pedaci, Pirro, Toscano in “Teacher remote work. Reflections from a survey on distance learning during the pandemic” (2021) and “Distance Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: teachers’ work and the diversity of school contexts” (2021) pointed out another much discussed and studied aspect, which explores the impact of work on teacher’s life during DAD. The trauma of pandemic and lockdown have accentuated the already existing critical issues, including the worsening of working relationships and dialogue, the limited participation of workers in decision-making, the worsening quality of life due to the difficulty of reconciling time and activities in own life, poor computer skills.

If internal collaboration and coordination with colleagues have mostly proved to be at a satisfactory level, the application of smart working (already poorly regulated from the point of view of work protection) has highlighted many difficulties in a working context characterised by inadequate equipment of staff, structures, and technologies.

In this “under pressured” context, DAD was characterised by the tendency to transfer teaching routines of the classroom

³⁰ Scaglioni M., (2020). *Il virus sullo schermo, Il “sismografo” televisivo e la mediazione della crisi*, in Scaglioni M., Sala M. (a cura di), *L'altro virus. Comunicazione e disinformazione al tempo del Covid-19*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, pp. 17-29. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/43166070/laltro_virus_comunicazione_e_disinformazione_al_tempo_del_covid_19_a_cura_di_massimo_scaglioni_e_mariana_sala [last access 9/1/2023].

online, neglecting relational, communication and collaboration aspects. We mustn't forget the increased risk of dropping out school caused by the inequalities of family, local, social and economic factors; the greatest difficulty in implementing DAD was highlighted above all in kindergartens and in South of Italy³¹.

4. Reflections through Morin's lesson

Edgar Morin outlines in his book «*Changeons de Voie. Les leçons du coronavirus*» (2020) a widest view of consequences caused by Coronavirus, both in personal and in social life, providing through his attentive and aware look the way out for overcome difficulties of this moment.

The author says:

«[...] Social inequalities and other evils of our society, such as capitalist, industrial, individualistic development, represent the other side of the coin of the well-being we have reached. A too rational life, intoxicated by consumerism and ecological degradation, is causing a worsening of living conditions; therefore, we must aspire to a truer life, which fosters relationships and restores solidarity and altruism [...]».

³¹ Di Nunzio D., Pedaci M., Pirro T., Toscano E., (2021). *La didattica a distanza durante la pandemia di Covid-19: il lavoro dei docenti e la diversità dei contesti scolastici*, Economia e società regionale – XXXIX(1) 2021 – spazi di lavoro dopo l'emergenza Covid-19. DOI:10.3280/ES2021-001008; Di Nunzio D., Pedaci M., Pirro T., Toscano E., (2021). *Il lavoro da "remoto" degli insegnanti. Riflessioni da un'indagine sulla didattica a distanza durante la pandemia*, in *Sociologia del lavoro*, n.160. DOI:10.3280/SL2021-160012.

He hopes, therefore, an awareness at political level, but also personal, for the creation of «*humanisme régénéré*» (Morin e Abouessalam, 2020: 66)³².

Planetary crisis caused by this pandemic, closely connected to the climatic and environmental impacts caused by man, must be perceived as a symptom of the crisis of human thought and action and therefore it must induce a change of course, or a paradigm shift.

In school the «*changement de paradigme*» desired by Morin leads us to believe that an education reform must contemplate a reform of thought and knowledge, without neglecting the fact that we must teach how to live in contemporary historical time. The school and the educating society are the promoters and responsible for this teaching, while the learner is always understood in relation to society; in fact, each represents a small part of it thanks to mutual mirroring. It therefore becomes essential to identify ways of relating between the individual and society, on one hand through democracy and on the other through the full realisation of the individual humanity, who feels he belongs to a universal community.

Morin remembers also that: «[...] *the challenge of digital technology, the use of which has considerably increased during the pandemic, risks, without the adoption of adequate measures, of subjugating humanity to surveillance capitalism and to the even more pervasive control of citizens by States which, as neo-authoritarians, could even become neo-totalitarians [...]*».

The analyses of another Morin's book, through the article of Mariangela Scarpini: "E. Morin, 'Teaching to live. Manifesto for

³² Morin E., Abouessalam S., (2020). *Changeons de Voie. Les leçons du coronavirus*, Paris, Denoël, p. 66.

changing education', Raffaello Cortina, Milano, 2015"³³, shows how the French author wonders about the gaps that education system has shown compared to the ability to know how to prepare for life. He believes it's important to teach as much knowledge as possible; however, he believes that we don't neglect training to face the risk of errors, illusions, and bias. Some very serious errors are precisely those caused by ignorance or dogmas. Morin therefore underlines the need to teach an ethics of dialogue (p. 58), both between students and teachers in order to: «[...] *escape the vicious circle of humiliations, to find out the virtuous circle of mutual recognition* (p. 66), *to implement a true resistance that overcomes the daily, planetary, omnipresent incomprehension, (which) generates misunderstandings, unleashes contempt and hatred, arouses violence and always accompanies wars* (p. 51) [...]».

Conclusions

Thanks to teaching provided by great authors, such as Edgar Morin, it has been possible to continue searching for solutions that could counteract some major problems arose during the pandemic. Problems that have affected children in the construction of their identity and adolescents in a delicate phase of their growth, all in school age. Mental discomfort, depression, eating disorders, lack of relationship between peers, environments where we couldn't respect compliance with anti-COVID standards, these were the most obvious problems that deserve consideration

³³ Scarpini M., (2015). *E. Morin, "Insegnare a vivere. Manifesto per cambiare l'educazione"*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano, 2015, Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica - Journal of Theories, and Research in Education, 10, 2, pp. 195-197. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307689207_E_Morin_Insegnare_a_vivere_Manifesto_per_cambiare_l'educazione_Raffello_Cortina_Milano_2015 [last access 9/1/2023].

and research. Above all because any future and global emergency event can't be avoided.

Thanks to the use of educational technologies, it has been possible to offer study and learning opportunities, despite the closure of schools, establishing e-learning as a methodology that has revolutionised traditional teaching and learning.

This new school image, while accentuating the social, cultural and economic divide, and getting families and teachers in trouble because they aren't prepared for this new school setting, it has undoubtedly allowed a guarantee of right to study for our young people. In fact, this way of communicating has proved to be fundamental in keeping the school world united. Unfortunately, however, there was an increase in school dropout which in some cases will prove to be irreversible.

This new way of "doing school", in its undoubted credit, has caused negative consequences especially on the psychological front. Many young people have experienced, in this historical juncture, an individual dimension of loneliness, suffering and death that they didn't know yet.

Despite the unpreparedness and difficulties, DAD allowed a continuation when the world stopped.

Facing uncertain geopolitical world scenarios, ongoing climate change and challenges of modern society, the hope is that we don't remove past events and what they have taught. The paradigm 'shift' advocated by Morin constitutes the main road to be pursued.

It can therefore be said that dialogue and physical and emotional presence, extremely reduced in these circumstances, produce serious consequences in children and adolescents, limiting the construction of one's personal identity and relationships.

We intend to conclude by reporting the thought of Salvatore Veca, who passed away last year, about education during the pandemic:

«[...] Online teaching and learning are very worthy and useful activities, no doubt. In the circumstances of this terrible pandemic, they become the only way to preserve the continuity of teaching and training. But it is hard not to feel that something is missing from the complex experience of educating people. Because educating is a process that involves interpersonal relationships, calls into question reasons and emotions, minds and bodies, gives rise to the educating community [...]». (Veca, s.d.)

How school will change after COVID-19 is a story yet to be written. All young people, in addition to be strongly affected from a psychological point of view, have carried out a more passive study, with a short permanence of the contents and a learning disturbed by the use of digital technologies.

Therefore, the DAD has brought out aspects already altered before the pandemic, including transmission teaching, the summative and exclusive evaluation of the contents and the deprivation of the psychological dimension.

Thanks to the greater awareness and maturation achieved, not only following the experience of COVID-19, but also following that of war which confronted them with an unprecedented reality, it can be stated that in the near future we will have to achieve the overcoming of the digital divide and inequalities, the structural improvements of school buildings, the wider participation of student and their families in the educational process. Now is therefore the time to rebuild and prepare the school world, also for possible future pandemic emergencies!

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