BODIES AND SPACES IN DIGITAL EDUCATION: WHICH DANCE IN A GAME OF MIRRORS? SUGGESTIONS FOR AN EDUCATIONAL UBIQUITY

CORPI E SPAZI NELLA DIDATTICA DIGITALE: QUALE DANZA IN UN GIOCO DI SPECCHI? SUGGESTIONI PER UNA DIDATTICA DELL'UBIQUITÀ

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Abstract

Building a setting that takes into account the body dimension means observing the space, the learning environment in its physical and architectural dimension and how much it is possible to experience, move, stay together, be alone or in a group. In the current educational context, the theme of educational spaces is central: we are faced with what some call a "*turning point in space*" (Santoianni, 2017). Educating the body to express all its potential means educating to be in contexts in a dynamic and flexible, not lead children to experiences completely unstructured, nor control them in a way too directional, abstractly following a plan centered on the goal to be reached, rather than on the people involved. Knowledge is acquired and developed by the organism as a feeling that is produced by the body-in-action: a feeling of the *body as it acts in the world* (Damasio, 2000). Therefore, it becomes necessary to adapt the teaching methods to a formation that is in line with laboratory pathways for the development of corporeality (Palumbo, 2015), now mortified by the remoteness and rarefied physical contacts. The Dad imposed by the new scenario, therefore, requires that learning practices be modified in such a way that, rather than training, they undergo a transformation, through experiential activities, through the body as an instrument of communication with a world in continuous evolution.

Constructing a setting that takes into account the bodily dimension means observing the space, the learning environment in its physical and architectural dimension and how much it is possible to experience oneself in it, to move, to be together, to be alone or in a group. In the current educational context, the issue of educational spaces is central: we are facing what some call the "spatial turn" (Santoianni, 2017). Educating the body to express its full potential means educating to be in contexts in a dynamic and flexible way, not leading children to completely unstructured experiences, nor controlling them in an overly directive way, abstractly following a planning centered on the goal to be achieved, rather than on the people involved. Knowledge is acquired and developed by the organism as a feeling that is produced by the body-in-action: a feeling of the body as it acts in the world (Damasio, 2000). Therefore, it becomes necessary to adapt the teaching methods to a training that is in line with laboratory paths of development of corporeity (Palumbo, 2015), today mortified by the distances and rarefied physical contacts. The distance learning (DaD) imposed by the new scenario, therefore, requires to modify learning practices so that rather than a training, they implement a transformation, through experiential activities, through the body as a means of communication with a changing world.

Keywords

Ubiquity; distance learning; Corporeality; Dance

Ubiquità; DAD; Corporeità; Danza

Introduction

Derived from the Latin «*ubique*», meaning "*in every place*", the ubiquity, properly, is the omnipresence: the capacity, whether divine or magical, to be at the same time in two or more places, which would properly be called 'bilocation' or 'multilocation'.

Starting from this definition, one could, therefore, argue that in this Universe, objects and living beings cannot present the gift of ubiquity, that is, they cannot be at the same time at different points in space.

As a matter of fact, if we deepen the etymological meaning, «*ubiquitàtem*» is the state of "*what is for everything at the same time*" and therefore it would refer to the Latin locution *hic et nunc*, which, if literally translated, means «here and now». *Hic et nunc* in its common use would indicate, specifically, a fulfillment, a matter whose resolution does not allow for extensions, a commitment which, in its implementation, *cannot be postponed* for any reason, just as it would appear to require the distance learning and, in general, every moment of our current working life which, precisely because it seems at a distance, prevents us from being absent and leads us, instead, to be more and more ubiquitous and present.

It is precisely from the phrase *hic et nunc* of the Latin poet Horace that it is indispensable to start in order to understand its profound meaning, which constitutes **a real poetic**, marked by the immediacy of a singular event, characterized by some fundamental features, which are:

- a spatial element, called ***angulus*** and traceable to the *hic*, or the spatial dimension of the immediacy of the present;
- and a temporal element, called *nunc*, which indicates a protective closing of time (in a proper, inner time) and synchronous time (that is, time as it is commonly understood, which flows in its inexorability and that never returns).

It is thus in existentialist philosophy that the expression *hic et nunc* takes on a new and more meaningful meaning, with Heidegger asserting that man's subjectivity, which is referred to the Being as a metaphysical principle, always concerns *the existence situated in space and time*, or the *hic et nunc* in which man acts.

In the philosophy of the twentieth century the expression *hic et nunc* would also be taken up by Walter Benjamin, who had referred to a text by Paul Valéry which, in turn, claimed that the spread of new media would allow "*to transport or to reconstitute in every place the system of sensations - or more exactly, the system of excitations - provoked in any place by an object or any event*".

And, as a matter of fact, there is a place where the ubiquity that refers to the *hic et nunc*, can be realized: Cyberspace, a virtual environment formed by the Network and Communication Technology.

In Cyberspace and, consequently, in distance learning, Ubiquity is no longer a transcendental and sci-fi phenomenon, but one of the possibilities offered by the virtual environment of synthesis. The opportunity to be in different places, to play different roles and do different things at the same time, becomes the hallmark of this new way of being at school, although the question towards the ability of whether human beings can successfully manage this condition arises.

All this leads us, as Perla said, to consider an inevitable *metamorphosis of the didactic space*, in this background of evident complexity, didactically defined "*Corona teaching*" and, that is, a phenomenon that is imposing a forced destructuring, of the linear models of teaching in all the contexts of the formation and that it has blown the linear and diachronic logics and has completely changed the context of action and relationship of the didactic action.

In the past, spatial-temporal coordinates were defined as immutable and stable elements and, on this basis, the competences related to how these coordinates structured the environment, defining the space of action of agents, were thus transmitted. In this world and in this time, the coordinates have not changed, they simply cannot be more defined as absolutes, and the sense of relativity becomes ubiquity, or – better – sense of the ubiquitous presence.

Who among us has not happened, in the role of teacher or even as a participant in a seminar, a meeting or an interview, to be physically or even virtually present in a room, in a meeting or

in a team, to listen to a person speaking in front of us and, at the same time, to be present in a parallel place, thanks to the relationship made possible by technology?

And we also managed not to get distracted, we may have been asking questions, while, at the same time, we were displaying messages on the phone screen or opening dozens of emails, distributing them in subfolders.

Think, for example, to the so-called "*freeze*", a visual effects of Google Meet, which allows you to "*freeze the image*" in front of the PC camera, to be physically and virtually present in a privileged and exclusive on another screen, but in reality, to be present also elsewhere, in a physical place or on another platform, in a sort of *Amphitruo*, the plautine comedy on the double *par excellence*, as if to see, as Lacan would say (Lacan, 2006 pp. 304-305), *how the ego behaves when it comes into contact with itself, "in the form of the other me",* in a sort of mirror game.

Therefore, the conclusion could be simple and, that is, that technology allows us to be in several places at the same time, to be able to manage relationships, even affective, wanting, while working and studying, without detracting anything to the quality of work. A ubiquity and an omnipresence that have nothing to envy to mythical characters or mythological figures.

But humans are not educated by a multitasking logic, which is that of doing multiple things, with multiple programs, at the same time; the major effort that the individual faces today is to define and implement new constructs that complement the defining grids that they already use, to adapt and interact with the environment in which they live, and that includes the amplification of the environment on multiple levels, produced by technology.

It should also be stressed that as technological levels rise, the distance between real and virtual shortens to zero and relations will continue to evolve on increasingly evolved platforms, but less and less oriented to physical contact causing greater difficulty in self-awareness and less attitude in managing relationships.

What would be lacking in essence is, as Gardner would say, regarding the description of the use of the body as a form of intelligence, the dialogue between bodies, *as a rapid discussion between two sets of intelligences.*

1. Bodies and spaces in Digital Education

At this time in history, society seems to ignore the child's natural need for movement (Dahlgren, & Szczepanski, 1998): we have witnessed a reduction of spaces and their transformation, but spaces are a fundamental component of school activities, as they represent training arrangements which help to define the varied and multidimensional character of educational situations.

The way in which spaces dedicated to education are designed, set up and organized can reveal so much about the expected and underlying educational model. These aspects, as a matter of fact, communicate what and how many are the margins of movement, even in a literal sense, reserved to the protagonists of the educational relationship, what is expected to happen and in what way, what are the main communication channels, tools, techniques and much more.

This also raises a question on the effort that teachers make to know the environment and what are the learning processes that must be implemented, to get hold of the skills necessary to adapt and live the environment, redefined through technology.

If in the school «*space is the architecture of teaching [...] not only topology, but proxemic of the didactic action*» (Damiano 2013, p. 71), paying attention to the learning environment, not as intense as a surface, but as a place full of meanings and significant elements, in order to accustom children to this changed scenario, it is necessary to increase teaching methodologies that guide the discovery of the self, through the sense-motor experience, constantly enhancing the relationship between learning and experience.

Furthermore, it will be useful to observe the surrounding environment that induces the child to interact with what they see: there is no pre-existing reasoning if first the need to touch, grasp, move, make the object or situation its own.

It is, therefore, a matter of trying to overcome the division and dysfunction between a school designed for student learning and the classic configuration of teaching spaces, designed for the

working needs of the teacher, and identified primarily for the transmission of information to a passive user, even behind a computer.

Spaces are a fundamental component of school activities, formative devices that contribute to defining the varied and multidimensional character of educational situations and express what and how many margins of movement, even in a literal sense, are reserved for the protagonists of the educational relationship, what is expected to happen and in what way, what are the main channels of communication. Consequently, it is indispensable to connote educational experiences with specific characteristics that take into account the activation of communicative and cognitive channels linked to corporeality and to the social dimension of learning, from the use of authentic contexts to the possibility of designing educational and evaluative strategies for direct and situated learning experiences.

The methodological-didactic approach should always be based on the potential value of bodily experience in making learning meaningful, as the body constitutes "a spatiality in power" that is able to widen the meanings of spatial concepts by attributing to the forms a dynamic connotation (Sibilio, 2014) and therefore to create as a dance of relationship.

On the other hand, studies on neuroscience recommend the need to encourage active and participatory learning, which encourages exploration, direct action, the manipulation of objects of knowledge and the playful dimension.

Motor skills and corporeity, therefore, by participating in the process of development and maturation of the child must be considered as the leitmotif of all educational-didactic action, as the needs of the child, preparatory to a correct and complete psychophysical development, cannot be exhausted within a transmissive-frontal didactic relationship, to be consumed exclusively in classrooms and even in hetero-conducted physical and motor activities that would "imprison" the subject in new demands and deliveries and that would not leave room for initiative, for divergent, expressive and creative thinking.

«*The ego is primarily and above all a corporeal ego*» (Freud S., 1923), thus the body is the starting condition for teaching in relation, but on the didactic-educational level the experience to be proposed must be that which leads to understanding connections or successions and becomes knowledge because it acquires meaning, because consciousness, as Damasio says, begins at the moment when the brain conquers the ability to tell a story that winds within the confines of the body.

Even Gardner, when referring to the concept of bodily intelligence, means a creative response of the body to a question (motor solution to the problem), in which the individual acts a personal motility, characterized by a singular executive quality.

The bodily experience and the sensory experience associated with it determine the learning in the child and, consequently, movement cannot be decoded as a minimal unit related to the change of position of the body or its individual parts in space, since the gesture, as a matter of fact, is not the nervous reaction to a stimulus action, but the response of the body to a world that engages it (Galimberti, 2002).

Using the body in teaching means using the body as a facilitator of expressiveness, as the living body involves making eye contact, listening to the emotional reactions of other group members, managing one's body and voice in space, and interacting with everyone else.

Body language, if correctly decoded, can be very eloquent since the individual is a unity, and is not divided into mind and body; studying how an individual expresses himself means observing his motility, that is, the expression of emotion. It is therefore from the double verbal-body tension that derives the opportunity to establish a broader and deeper relationship (Lowen, 2016; Palumbo C., 2018).

In this regard, I would add a curiosity to about the lessons of "*princeliness*" given to Diana Spencer by Lady Fermoy before she married Prince Charles. We are already in 1982 and Lady Fermoy in transferring to Diana a lesson handed down by Princess Mary, great-grandmother of Queen Elizabeth, tells her: *Gestures too much and gestures unmask, reveal what we are and what we feel and it is better to avoid, because you should never show your emotions to others,*

and it goes on in the lesson by locking her arms with a lanyard and preventing them from twirling about what she felt.

After all, our cognitive processes are not independent, but closely related to our perceptual, motor, and emotional systems, because it is action, indeed, that determines perception, as Borghi states.

Recently, Donald A. Schön (1993), starting from the concept of thoughtful thought developed by Dewey reworks it, introducing the "*thoughtful act*" and arguing that for professional training is also necessary an artistic skill, since the reflections that are activated in the creation processes must be linked to the skills possessed by the subject, to reach the *reflection-in action*.

Conclusions

The Distance learning imposed by the new scenario, therefore, requires that learning practices to be modified in such a way that, rather than training, they carry out a transformation through the experiential activities of body and movement (Sibilio, 2008) as instruments of communication with a world in continuous evolution.

New didactic and organizational models that can adapt to this historical moment in which education must continue should be implicitly accepted, but respecting at the same time new *modus operandi*, inspired above all by security and forced distance. To adapt the teaching methods, it would be necessary to insert new laboratory pathways for the development of corporeality (Palumbo, 2015), now mortified by the remoteness and rarefied physical contacts. The child must be increasingly aware that one learns by "doing", so that the body becomes the instrument of teaching.

It is essential, therefore, to trace a change in our model of education, in which we give more space to the dimension of the body through movement, so as to facilitate communication at a distance, because «*The corporeal element has a primary role in pedagogical action and can be, if proposed in an appropriate perspective, the engine for achieving results that contribute to the complete perceptive development and therefore to a global formation*» (Benvenuto et al, 2018 p. 102).

The body, which for Valery *is the place of the evidence of life* in dance, for Mallarmé, is transformed into *corporal writing* and space becomes the place in which the *body writes itself.*

Dance, in this regard, can be a key element in distance teaching, because, through it, the body performs a global activity involving both the perceptive-cognitive aspect of movement, and the mental activity occupied in the creation of movement, is an activity of sharing and connecting through a personal aesthetics of the movement able to communicate with other human beings even very far away.

Dance as education is an artistic experience, but above all the union of two operative moments of the person – namely that of thinking and that of doing (Zagatti, 2004) – able to reach "the others" through a practice, expressive and "*exquisitely imperfect*" (Prichard, 2017, pp. 77-81), of the creative body.

Therefore, the new dance that can be conceived as a pedagogical, educational, and social ideal is the free dance, which is not reserved to an elite or to a perfect body, but which can be used to know oneself through one's own movement and who is in front of us.

We must, therefore, consider that presence depends on interaction and not only on the physical place, because one can also be in presence but far away and one can be far away but present, and the hypothesis of a didactic usability of the danced experience appears to be the scientific recognition of the body as a creative signifier, and as an embodiment of action.

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