

Television and Culture. Multimedia Encounters for Improving Distance Learning at High School.

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Abstract

This article is aimed at analyzing recent distance learning praxis linked to the appeal of audiovisual media in education, especially starting by the Covid-19 period, when the educational activities have been remodeled. Through various Rai channels, we were witnessing the airing of a wide range of educational resources collected under the *La scuola non si ferma* TV format where as the cultural sector is rethinking its methods of fruition through the hypothesis of the creation of a "platform of Italian beauty, a Netflix of culture" by using the Minister Franceschini own words. At the same time, various institutions have already made available their consistency in streaming and many publishers are producing multimedia contents for helping teachers to plan their online activities, boosting the conversion to digital in the Italian schools.

In order not to disperse the fielding of all these energies, it would be interesting to gather the whole panorama of experiences and identify the areas that most highlight desires but also disadvantages, offering a "prompt intervention". The quantitative and qualitative investigation, aimed at identifying educational needs in matter of lack of presence learning, and the empirical research to formulate effective measures will be applied.

Keywords: TV Program, Multimedia Documents, Media Education, Cultural Heritage.

Introduction

In the recent lockdown period due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the education and training sector have been remodeled as well, shifting entirely – or predominantly - online and giving rise to various forms of experimentation. In this way, the much desired and never realized conversion to digital in the Italian school had an unexpected boost which is been revealing as useful in the new hybrid form of school life as well.

In the last months, the historical vocation of educating inherent in the television medium has been resurfaced. Through various Rai channels, we were witnessing the airing of a wide range of educational resources (documentary films, lessons, historical documents) collected under the TV format *La scuola non si ferma* which consists in a daily rubric edited by Rai Cultura, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, and also present on Instagram and on other social media with the hashtag #LaScuola Non Si Ferma¹.

In parallel, the cultural heritage sector had to rethink – and reprogram - its manners of fruition through the hypothesis of the creation of a "platform of Italian beauty, a Netflix of culture"² according to an expression minted by Dario Franceschini, Italian Minister of Culture and Tourism (Lo Conte, 2020). Various institutions operating in the audiovisual field, such as

¹ For more information visit <https://www.raicultura.it/articoli/2020/03/La-scuola-non-si-ferma-a51d8ab3-ffd7-4ad0-80cc-46be7c31fdec.html>.

² My translation.

Cineteca di Milano, have already made available in streaming and for free a part, or the entire list, of the titles present in their digital catalogs. Besides, many publishing houses specialized in texts addressed to schools, such as Zanichelli and Mondadori, are producing and making available many multimedia contents for helping teachers to plan their online or blended lessons and activities.

In order that the fielding of all these energies will not be dispersed but, on the contrary, could become a shared and recognized heritage within the school community for subsequent practices of distance learning or digital integrated didactics (DID). In new scenarios, such as the one we are experiencing for the Covid-19 pandemic (Fragonara, 2020) but, more in general, to face the different needs that prevent the presence in the classroom (illness, hospital stay, temporary journey to the country of origin, weather alerts e.g.), it is more important than ever to solicit a didactics that is not limited to the school spaces from which it emanates but that reaches, through technologies, widespread places. Consequently, the possibility of a common comparison and systematization would be appropriate as well as it would be interesting to collect these experiences and these resources. The areas that most highlighted needs and disadvantages should be identified, so that a "prompt intervention" could be offered so as not to make any student – and no family–feel abandoned because not in physical contact with cultural and educational institutions or because inserted in a context where particular familiarity with digital technologies has not yet been acquired.

Materials and methods

The primary role of Rai TV into the educational and cultural scenario is sanctioned by Aldo Grasso with his grateful words on the *Corriere della Sera* first page, on March 8, 2020, a few days later that schools of every order and degree were physically closed on the whole national territory. For the first time in the modern era and without any plausible prediction of what will be happened:

One of the big merits of the Rai of its inceptions is to have promoted a large series of lessons aimed at completing the mandatory cycle of education. This initiative was addressed to students who were living in territory not provided by schools. It was November 25, 1958 and the great TV program was called *Telescuola*³ (Grasso, 2020, p. 1).

In the main scopes of television - information, education, and entertainment – the TV Italian public company embraced the second one as paramount since the beginning of the broadcasts on January 3, 1954. As reminded by Grasso, a few years later, *Telescuola* was being born with the purpose of representing a typical classroom model with teachers and students playing as actors, so that it could be considered “a school shoots by the television”⁴ (Rai Scuola website). The current emergency situation regards the need to fulfill blank times and spaces left by the closure of the school during the lockdown period and by the forced absence or the presence every other week in this new, and so uncertain, school year. In the past, Rai television company, with its feature of mass-medium and of public service at the same time, has faced the severe social matter of analphabetism, overcoming the action of the school in effectively diffuse a common national language⁵, as it was aimed to have a “unified Italian public, [...] big [...] [although] invisible” (Briggs, Burke, 2002, p. 273). With the TV program *Non è mai troppo tardi. Corso di istruzione popolare per il recupero dell'adulto*

³ My translation.

⁴ My translation.

⁵ For more information visit http://www.Rai.it/dl/Rai/text/ContentItem-20844e48-74d8-44fe-a6f4-7c224c96e8e4.html?refresh_ce.

*analfabeta*⁶, on November 15, 1960, a long season of lessons for adults, taught by Alberto Manzi and supported by the Ministry of Education, aimed at reaching the large portion of disadvantaged population who was not able to read nor write has begun.

The Rai Scuola television channel made nowadays available hundreds of lessons and multimedia contents which can be accessed through the scheduled broadcast or via any device connected to the Internet and surfing the Rai Play digital platform at any time of the day. *La Scuola non si ferma* presents an interactive form due to the convergence between social media, TV broadcast and institutions. Indeed, on this portal, students and teachers can post videos which present didactical activities designed and carried out within their school institutions. In this way, those new products can work as models or hints for other students and teachers, feeding a comparison among school communities spread out on the whole Italian territory⁷.

“A cultural platform to spread the great Italian beauty around the world and incentives for tourism enterprises and for families, in view of a summer that will be all Italian: these are the measures the government is thinking of”⁸. With this tweet on the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism Twitter account, Dario Franceschini summarized the idea presented on April 18, 2020 during his participation at the Rai 3 program *Aspettando le parole*. Franceschini pointed out the high increase of online visits related to cultural contents during the lockdown period which deserve to be organized and systematized, in order to be managed and valorized by the institution in charge. This digital platform of Italian culture should contain a wide range of artistic expressions (theatre, opera, visual arts, music etc.) and should last even in the hypothesis of the end of restrictions (Lo Conte, 2020). The tendency to involve a wide range of audience to cultural contents with virtual experiences, in fact, has already begun in recent years through the creation of interactive sections in the museum’s websites or through the projection of live performances and exhibitions in cinemas (Nexo Digital’s “La grande arte al cinema”⁹ e.g.). But the issue, now, is to provide people by an adequate cultural – and educational - offer ready-to-be-accessed virtually when is not possible to join museums, archeological sites, cinemas, theaters or concert halls physically. Recent days’ important discoveries concerning the classic period such as the Thermopolium of the Roman civilization in Pompeii (Conti; Ronchi, 2020) which have been communicated through digital media and Tv news and divulged besides by the documentary *Pompeii latest discovery* (P. Stine, 2020), aired in the prime time on December 27.

The quantitative method will be used during the first phase of detection of training and cultural needs, whereas the qualitative method will be used in the second consultation phase where, with the selected sample, the issue will be deepened. The approach to face the research activity could be referred to the empirical research applied to educational contexts according to the empirical circle proposed by Adriaan de Groot (observation, induction, deduction, testing, and evaluation) in order to formulate effective educational strategies and measures, possibly calibrated on individual cases. Whereas, the examination of documents, films and other kind of didactic materials proceeds according to the content analysis, in order to make a fast selection with subsequent screening of a large corpus of items (Bourdon, 2000, pp. 63-64).

⁶ For more information visit <https://www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/assets/template/us-articolo.html?ssiPath=/articoli/2019/09/Alberto-Manzi-Lattualita-di-un-maestro-ed8ef7e9-ccd8-4f06-9f9a-26497f9c26eb-ssi.html>

⁷ For more information visit https://www.istruzione.it/coronavirus/didattica-a-distanza_lascuolanonsiferma.html and <https://www.raicultura.it/articoli/2020/03/La-scuola-non-si-ferma-a51d8ab3-ffd7-4ad0-80cc-46be7c31fdec.html>

⁸ My translation.

⁹ For more information visit <https://www.nexodigital.it/la-grande-arte-al-cinema-2020-21-parte1/>

Results

On the current phase, this contribution aims to be a project proposal following the analysis of the existing overview not only starting from contents but also on the basis of a theoretical background. If the research activity will be carried out, the results will consist in the measurable improvement of the wellbeing (at home and) at school due to the achieving of learning goals, to fulfill of social divide based on access to culture or education, to the awareness of the own cultural heritage and identity. Finally, but not for importance, to have learnt to stay in contact with beauty.

Discussion

The ease of access the contents entails the risk of the unreliability of sources, of the inability to correctly understand messages or identify the context of origins, e.g., preeminent hints that teachers take in count when choose digital learning sources mostly because, as Calvani reminds, “the idea that intellectual technologies model cognitive and cultural processes is having an increasing value since from McLuhan, Mumford and Postman intuitions, nowadays confirmed”¹⁰ (2013, p. 56). As at the beginning, access the media contents was serialized and synchronic -and the experience was regulated and collective - at the end of the XX Century, due to the large increase of media channels and to the digitization of various materials which compose the cultural products - changing the broadcasting systems – the post medial condition has been determined (Eugeni, 2015, p. 23) where media have hired a “complex and complete integration with the technological and social environments in which we live”¹¹ (Eugeni, 2015, p. 25). As a proposal that school could carry out to mostly involve this generation of pupils in learning process, Eugeni glimpses a “not planned by the system window opening”¹² such as complex narrative forms, ability in design and project, critical overview on post medial condition (2015, pp. 27-29). As “a good classroom management is retraced into the tension [...] between need of control and ask for participation”¹³ (Mameli, Molinari, 2015, p. 15) and according to Henry Jenkins’s concept of “participatory culture” (Ferri, 2011, p. 55), the outputs of learning activities based on those TV and cultural platforms could be new and personalized contents - so that they can be enriched by videos, photos and drawings made by students – gratifying the centrality of student and of his/her communicative protagonism (Ferri, 2011, p. 100).

Education and culture are closely linked because the desire to learn and the orientation to beauty is processes that interest the whole individuals’ pathway of life. The National Plan for the Cultural Heritage Education affirms that “educating to the landscape means strengthening the identity and sense of belonging of the community so that it recognizes the value of the extraordinary collective heritage of our country and actively works for its protection” (2018, p. 7). Stressing on the terms of “awareness” and “involvement”, the Plan elucidates the “collective” dimension of the approach both in sense of belonging and responsibility. If the lockdown, in the sense of closure, prevails on the collective dimension, the concept of identity intended as “terrestrial consciousness”, as one of the seven necessary knowledge for the education of the future, fails. As Morin posits, “we should learn to be there

¹⁰ My translation.

¹¹ My translation.

¹² My translation.

¹³ My translation.

on the planet. Learning to be there means learning to live, to share, to communicate, to be in communion”¹⁴ (2001, p. 77).

Conclusions

After a noticeable decline of the world of the school, researchers, school communities, administrators and a various range of stakeholders should engage to relocate education in the core of the social sphere. Overall, in progress challenges which invest different ambits, such as distance learning, inclusion of special needs students, environmental sustainability, migrations, etc. school should turn to be an alive and pulsating part of the society. In parallel, in young people’s life school should not be replaced by television (Popper cit. in Bourdon, 2000, p. 25) - and, overall, by social media - but all those agencies should be integrated in education and in the growing up of the new citizens. Television palimpsests can offer digital contents, implemented by the online platforms for sharing contents and information (Google Suite, Microsoft 365, Instagram e.g.), working together with school professionals in order to fill up educational needs emerged, in particularly, with the Covid-19 sanitary emergency which has enhanced social divide based on the access to technology. The innovative element is the immediate awareness of an ongoing phenomenon and the identification of lines of intervention that move from a negative experience but lead educational communities into improvement practices.

The opportunity offered by the increase of the whole ambit of virtual experiences (online visits, distance learning etc.), although was born as the only possible way to pursue in a hard context, can be gather as a collective cultural enrichment. Paul Valery in 1923, regarding the three features of the traditional museum, noticed the “abundance of artworks and the difficulty in perceiving and memorizing them all”¹⁵. As supposed by Umberto Eco, this is a point that the modern museum has not been able to overcome (2001, p. 1): maybe, a well-designed digital encounter with museums, exhibitions or archeological sites can make art easy to deal with by low-income or low-education level people as well.

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¹⁴ My translation.

¹⁵ My translation.

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