

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL ASPECTS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

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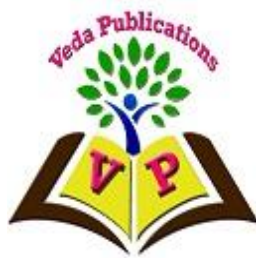
Abstract

Distance Learning is what has characterized our school experience for over a year and this is a valid tool in a health emergency situation such as Covid-19.

Teachers have a difficult task, which is to be able to observe behaviors even without having physical contact with students.

In this paper we will present the validity of the ADB protocol to observe behaviors and responses to environmental stimuli, teachers and peer group.

A fundamental point is the School-Family alliance which, more than ever before, is the basis on which to build a stable relationship in order to offer students an ever greater experience of growth.



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Introduction

The Distance Learning, D.L., launched with the pandemic phase by Covid-19 for the duration of the interruption of teaching activities in schools, is a very useful tool, not only to understand the general *psycho-pedagogical needs*, but also to ensure and implement psycho-educational practices for all, no one excluded.

The Article 3 of the Italian Constitution already ensures formal and substantive equality to all citizens by guaranteeing equal social dignity and equity before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions and so on, by virtue of the fact that everyone has the right to realize individual and social growth experiences.

For these reasons, even in distance learning it is important to design virtual learning environments that allow all students, considering their different social, biological and cultural characteristics, not only to feel an active part of the group they belong to, but also to achieve the highest possible level of learning.

Another form of valuing the variables of education is that recognized by the "pedagogy of control" (Bloom and Carroll, 1974) based on the assumption that most learners can achieve a high level of learning ability provided that teaching is approached systematically and sensitively, that learners are helped when and where they present learning difficulties, that they are given sufficient time to achieve mastery, and that a clear criterion is established as to what mastery is (Bloom, 1974).

It is necessary to design *online learning environments* that take into account the different social, biological and cultural qualities of the student, allowing each and every one to perceive themselves as an active part of the online group and to achieve the highest possible level regarding formal learning.

In order to do this, it is necessary that teachers firmly believe that the virtual classroom is also a *Community of Learners*, as stated by A. Brown and J. Campione, based on the sharing of educational, moral and intellectual resources, on the dialogical and distributed nature of knowledge acquisition and on the respect and promotion of differences in the perspective of inclusiveness, in which everyone shows a positive attitude and works from the beginning on motivation and the need to socialize.

As teaching professions face rapidly changing demands, educators are required to have broader and more sophisticated skills than ever before. In particular, the ubiquity of digital devices and the duty to help students become digitally competent, requires teachers to develop their own digital competence.

Numerous frameworks, self-assessment tools, and training programs have been developed internationally and nationally to describe aspects of digital competence for educators and to help them assess their competence, identify their training needs, and provide targeted training. By analyzing and bringing together these tools, this report presents a common European framework for educators' digital competence (DigCompEdu).

The integration of *technologically-mediated communication* and the learning environment enables learners to increase their computer-technical skills in hardware and software for communication and cooperative work at a distance, as well as skills related to searching for information online on specific topics using technical resources. A virtual learning environment that limits the cognitive clutter of learners and increases the ability to contextualize information to the point of knowing how to navigate the computer network.

D.L. imposes, therefore, a rethinking of instructional management and an explicit design that is accurate, effective, and efficient. The educational path should include small units of study (*microcontents*), small teaching activities (*microactivities*) and reduced portions of time (*microtimes*).

The didactic psycho-educational approach must obviously consider possible variables that are inserted in the teaching-learning process, which can compromise the success of the training path. Every person, and even more so those with special educational needs, cannot be considered as if they were a monad, but within plots, relationships, contexts that allow a permanent unfolding of intersubjective *autonomy/dependence*.

Understanding this means paying attention to and observing the construction of the student's personal history also through family dynamics, living places and their organization, significant figures, communication codes, mediators, human, economic and psychological resources, quality of life, reference values, etc. (Pavone, 2014).

Essential function in Distance Learning becomes the psycho-pedagogical principle of reasonable accommodation, according to which the necessary changes and adaptations should not impose a disproportionate or excessive burden. Rather, we must ensure that people with disabilities enjoy and exercise, on an equal basis with others, all human rights, and fundamental freedoms.

Hence, the need for inclusive personalized psycho-educational interventions, inspired by a valid reasonable accommodation to the learning process, through educational mediation that has now become, in recent years, a central theme of reference in Italian and European pedagogical culture (Formisano, Marzano, 2016).

It should be considered that the mastery of basic cultural tools occurs through an innovative management of spaces, according to the principles of *polyfunctionality* that allow to solicit the participation of even the most unmotivated children (starting from their interests), to feed curiosity, to ensure a process of individual and collective growth, reorganizing spaces (in presence) and times, finalizing them to meaningful learning.

Observing behaviors in Distance Learning

For those who deal with teaching-learning processes, even during Distance Learning activities, observation represents the fundamental tool to detect certain data and to know complex phenomena underlying educational processes. Observation is a form of detection

aimed at exploring a particular phenomenon (Mantovani, 1995), it is configured as a cognitive process because it is not only oriented to the reading of a *phenomenon/situation* but also to its detailed understanding.

It is clear that the observer-observed relationship is a closely related and connected relationship. Fundamental assumption is that what is observed depends on the observer. The purpose of observation is to foster the observer's development, autonomy, personal identity, and self-assessment. Consequently, as Boudon (1970) states, doing observational research means doing a succession of operations to produce answers to questions about reality and to produce new knowledge.

The observer cannot be just anyone; not everyone is a good observer and it is a problem for scientific institutions and societies in general to find ways to train individuals to be good researchers.

During the observational process is appropriate to make a distinction between data and deductions and between watching and observing. Watching refers only to the perceptual process of sight, an active and dynamic organization of reality; observing, on the other hand, presupposes the intentionality and purpose of the action itself that induces the decoding of visual information into content with meaning and significance for the person.

For example, you can look at a painting by perceptually registering the colors and shapes of the image, but only after careful observation is it possible to grasp the nuances of color, the difference between different figures, smaller landscape elements, etc..

The process of observation allows the collection of objective data about an image, an environmental situation, a phenomenon, or a behavior (e.g. the child is sitting, the sky is gray, the boy is laughing). All these elements are data (*objective facts*) that is not subject to interpretation. Instead, the deduction induces to interpret the observed data evaluating them qualitatively and quantitatively with respect to subjective parameters that are proper to the subject. Examples of deductions: Marco is sad, Andrea is angry, Luca is hyperkinetic.

It is essential to break down the observational process: a phase of acquisition of information useful to know the nature of the object to be evaluated; a phase of processing of data collected using criteria or standards of judgment and previously predetermined rigorous; a phase of interpretation consisting in the judgment expressed and evaluation formulated.

The observer must know the critical points of the execution errors to establish the causes and relationships with the effects. This digression, necessary to understand the modalities through which we have come to attribute a central role to the observer, leads us to affirm - with Maturana (2005) - that in postmodern society it is not possible to define an independent objective reality, perceptible in its unity and certainty, but everything that is perceived in the world is observer dependent.

It is essential that this flexibility does not affect the basic principles of the scientific method, those principles, that is, that guarantee validity to research and ensure, therefore, a positive

evolution of science. Observing means *highlighting* some characteristics related to a thing, person, situation putting them in relation with other things, people, situations, within a context, inserted in an environment, in other words "located" in a well-defined space-time dimension.

Observation in the school environment allows to increase the level of knowledge of student's behavior, following precise hypotheses, identifying the meaning of certain behaviors, abandoning randomness and improvisation in favor of a research behavior. It is useful for the teacher to know the student in front of him, his ways of knowing, his cognitive styles, his potential, and any difficulties.

In the case of Distance Learning, we will certainly have the intervention of factors that can make observation more difficult than in the case of *face-to-face* lessons. Just taking part in it from home, rather than from your room, can lead to the camouflage of some attitudes that in the classroom, however, would be much more evident to the careful eye of the teacher.

Another crucial aspect is the cancellation of the interchange that takes place among peers during any school day, both in the moments in which cooperative learning is favored and in the more natural moments of freedom during the succession of lessons, which makes it possible even more to outline the profiles of the students through the analysis of the implementation of the social behavior of each.

If it is true that Distance Learning has overturned some features of the teaching-learning process, it is even more true that knowing how to welcome change, however rapid and unexpected, is an indispensable skill for the teacher who wants to be an essential figure in the school and social life of his students, learning to support them and get to know them even through the virtuality which the school has been subjected in this long period of pandemic.

Therefore, a competent observation that overcomes the subjective naivety of the observer, made of approximation and improvisation, becomes fundamental, since it is a *tool-technique* used in educational processes to know and understand students' behaviors in order to identify both methods and strategies functional to the class, and relationships of pedagogical care.

The ability of teachers to observe is fundamental not only in the first segments of education (preschool and elementary school) but also throughout the educational process, to identify the most appropriate strategies to ensure the educational success of all students. Observation makes it possible to grasp the orderly unfolding of a sequence of movements, the learning processes as they take place, the steps in solving a problem, the acquisition of a method of work or study; it also highlights the characteristics of the different cognitive styles of students and knows the relevant features of their personal development, verifying to what extent the learner is structuring a framework of values for which to live.

Observation should be understood as a selective looking, according to hypotheses, aimed at detecting information in a valid and constant way (Coggi,2009), in order to identify the needs of the learners and to rebalance the educational proposals.

The basic objective of the observation of formative processes is not to label/test the learning achieved by children but to have a real picture of the paths, of the strategies in progress, information that is always modifiable, in full transformation and evolution, points of reference to rebalance the educational proposals by opening or strengthening "roads" towards possible didactic goals.

The "competent" observer has the task of elaborating broad and differentiated pedagogical itineraries, able to give the educational project consistency and appeal through the most significant contributions of contemporary culture (art, history, literature, linguistics, mathematics, science) taking into account the motivational systems at the basis of learning.

In learning contexts, the teacher is often faced with students who exhibit problematic behavior, the effects of which the teacher would like to mitigate in order to manage the *macro-group* with authority.

The A.D.B. protocol (*Analytical Description of Behavior*) is a tool that consists of an accurate description of a student's behavior. Specifically, it evaluates the initial situation that could lead the student to "field" a certain type of behavior within the classroom context. It is a survey grid that considers the conduct enacted by the student, the situation that would determine the conduct, the contextual responses that are given to the behavior enacted by the student and the effects that these contextual responses could have on the student's future behavior.

The A.D.B. protocol was developed keeping in mind the principle of reciprocity between the individual and the environment, analyzing the influence of environmental stimuli on the individual and taking as a reference paradigm the 2016 study by Perlaviciute and Muiños, according to which a solution must be found to the problems that occur in the different environments that negatively affect the well-being and quality of life of people.

The A.D.B. protocol can be used in educational settings and has as its objective the detection of objective data that could determine a behavior. The initial situation could be examined as the cause of the behavior, but to be considered as such it must have the characteristics of repeatability (Formisano, 2020).

The A.D.B. model is applied to a table consisting of four elements: initial situation, behavior, environmental response, and effects of environmental response on behavior (Tab 1).

Tab.1 **A.D.B. PROTOCOL**

| Initial situation | Behavior | Environmental response | Effects of environmental response on behavior |
|-------------------|----------|------------------------|---|
|-------------------|----------|------------------------|---|

Presenting some observations fielded using the A.D.B. protocol:

| ANDREA'S CASE | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| Initial situation | Behavior | Environmental response | Effects of environmental response on behavior |
| Every time the siren sounds | Andrea cries and screams | The teacher calms him down, by speaking softly to him | Andrea calms down |

| LUCA'S CASE | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Initial situation | Behavior | Environmental response | Effects of environmental response on behavior |
| As often as you must wear the mask | Luca makes confusion in class and annoys his classmates | His friend Simone lets him know that it's not okay to laugh. | Luca walks out of the classroom. |

GIULIA'S CASE

| GIULIA'S CASE | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Initial situation | Behavior | Environmental response | Effects of environmental response on behavior |
| Recreation in class 3 elementary school | Giulia takes Sandro's snack | Friends notice Giulia | Giulia returns the snack to Sandro |

Observation makes it possible to identify the needs of the learners and to rebalance the educational proposals, it is an essential tool for verifying the validity and adequacy of the courses. Any observation calls into question theories of learning and evaluation, which is not reduced to the mere measurement of performance but becomes a careful observer of training processes.

Observational practice requires the ability to remain open to doubt, reinterpretation and questioning of our work and what we observe. It is very important to avoid making an assessment based on the observation of a single episode that may not be at all representative of the usual behavior of the observed child (D'Odorico & Cassibba 2001).

It is necessary to consider the breadth of the field of observation because a phenomenon remains unexplained until the field of observation is wide enough to include the context in which the phenomenon occurs (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1971).

How to understand if really the initial situation is the one that determines a certain type of behavior? We consider *frequency* as a statistical indicator, that is how many times certain behaviors occur in a certain type of situation and then we consider the time interval.

The scientific study of Dane and Van Ber Kloot (1964) on the sequences of epigamic behavior in the four-eyed duck (*Bucephalo and Langula*) shows that when the activities of two individuals are not separated by more than five seconds, they are part of a stimulus-response transition.

The "I Message" technique (Gordon) can be a valuable aid in communicating more effectively in any situation.

It becomes particularly effective for handling difficult communications, such as those generated during Distance Learning, or people who are particularly challenging.

The use of this technique does not involve any evaluation of the person performing the action (contrary to the 'you message '), but simply informing them of the effects of their behavior and the feelings, emotions and reactions it provokes in us. The teacher who communicates his own authenticity to the student makes him perceive his own experience without forcing him to adopt defensive attitudes.

At the same time, the message indicates to the student his unacceptable behavior, the problem becomes the student's again, and the teacher can move on to active listening. The educational relationship finds itself being, today as never before, analyzed in all its forms and defined through filters never used up to this point in its history. Inclusive practices are also being reconsidered in a new light that is responsive to the needs and requirements of all learners.

We must not forget that these two components, fundamental in face-to-face teaching, are essential to the proper conduct of lessons in Distance Learning, as they allow the teacher to structure a relationship based on knowledge and the implementation of correct educational practices and allow him to observe the students even in a context different from the "classroom system".

School-Family Alliance

Under the psycho-educational aspect, *school-family co-responsibility* has its focal point in the *right/duty* of the two institutions to undertake a path of synergistic, interactive, and proactive collaboration. The assumption of responsibility by the school and the family implies the recognition of the educational otherness as an identifying space in which each outlines the significant interventions for the development and learning of the students. The educational covenant of responsibility involves two institutions: the school and the family dealing with formal and informal learning.

The term "*formal learning*" refers to learning that takes place in the education and training system and results in the attainment of a degree.

The "*informal learning*" takes place irrespective of intentional choice, in the performance of activities in everyday life situations and in the interactions that take place in it, in the context of work, family and leisure.

The "*non-formal learning*" takes place outside the education system, in any organization that pursues educational and training purposes, including voluntary work, national civil service and private social work, and in businesses.

The school guarantees formal learning and is committed in the educational pact of co-responsibility to provide a qualified cultural and professional training in an environment conducive to the integral growth of the person, ensuring a quality educational service in a serene educational environment, encouraging the training process of each student, respecting his or her pace and time of learning.

The family is committed to establishing a positive climate of dialogue, respecting the shared educational and didactic choices, as well as an attitude of mutual cooperation with the teachers, encouraging an assiduous attendance of their children to classes, actively participating in collegial bodies and checking daily communications from the school. The student becomes aware of his or her rights and duties by respecting the school, committing himself or herself in a responsible way to the execution of the tasks required.

Conclusions

This paper examined the topic of psychoeducational observation of behaviors during Distance Learning to analyze the problems teachers face and the challenges they face:

-*What observation in DL?*

- *What protocols and tools?*

- *At what point in time to observe?*

The solutions identified to answer these questions highlight the advantages of structured protocols that analyze how certain attitudes change because of the teacher's correct response to the student's needs.

The A.D.B. protocol is a very significant example. As in the case of Andrea, Luca and Giulia, of which, in the corresponding tables, the following are described: the initial situation; the behavior; the environmental response and the effects of the environmental response on behavior.

In Andrea's case, for example, every time the siren sounded, Andrea cried and screamed; but if the teacher was able to calm him down by speaking softly, Andrea calmed down.

And so, in Luca's case: Every time a mask had to be worn, Luca created confusion in the classroom and annoyed his classmates. His friend Simone helped him to understand that it was not correct to laugh and Luca went out of the classroom.

And, finally, the case of Giulia, who during Recreation in a third class of the elementary school, took Sandro's snack, until the peer group was to take Giulia who returned the snack to Sandro.

It is clear, therefore, that the observation of the teacher, as well as the relationship with the peer group or a single companion is capable of providing the student the ability to correct their behavior by virtue of the context in which it is found.

This is a path that we have just embarked on and we hope it can contribute to improving observational practices on one hand and, on the other, to offering the school more and more human and professional qualities.

In thanking those who have made this work possible, the hope is that this contribution can be an incentive for widespread professional growth on issues of observational practice in learning contexts.

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