

Digital identity and body identity: the mutation of the university environment in pandemic times

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Abstract

The pandemic period led universities to face new needs and to reinvent and readapt their educational activities in online mode to make them available and continuous. The consideration is about the effects produced in university students by the pandemic conditions and the exclusion of bodily experience in the real world. A study was led on a group of 405 subjects in order to evaluate their emotional, conflictual and social state and the possible emergence of obstructive behaviour in relation to themselves and others. Thanks to this study, it's clear that the bodily experience remains irreplaceable, and in a moment in which we have been deprived of the body and its resources, we need to reconsider the relationship between person and his body, re-evaluating it as a real value and relational foundation, of its innate potential as a means of learning.

Keywords: *Covid-19; corporeality; higher education; idea inventory; body identity; digital identity.*

1. Introduction

In the last three years, the global pandemic situation required the academic sphere to radically and immediately reconsider innovative teaching approaches and tools, in order to ensure the normal continuation of educational activities.

In the academic field, as in schools, there were radical changes and there was a shift from face-to-face teaching to distance teaching. In this period out of the ordinary, there has been a lack of social experiential teaching opportunities, which are fundamental for professional training, as well as experiences of a motor, playful, sporting and emotional nature, which are also to be considered as activities at the basis of personal growth.

In the academic environment, the appreciation of diversity and an inclusive spirit create opportunities for community and cooperation. In pandemic times the bodily identity was put aside (Francesconi, 2015), to leave room for digital identity, which was necessary to take part in a didactic relationship, but the concept of corporeity is not secondary, nor is the promotion of health in universities, which in addition to promoting higher education, should guarantee quality and well-being in relations with teachers and among students. Therefore, a detailed examination of the state of predisposition of students to progressively re-appropriate the potential of the body (Palumbo, 2013), which has been marginalized, is needed. If the educational relationship can be safeguarded through mediatization, it is worth trying to explore the abilities of the body and especially the corporeity, understood as a hub of multiple knowledge (Gamelli, 2011). Consequently, it is the case to introduce a pedagogy of corporeity, which can transfer in the various educational fields those basic principles an education to the motor movement in its different forms, which lead to a body culture conceived as bodily awareness.

It is therefore necessary to reflect on how the university environment has been invested in a pandemic period of change, in which the student has been forced in the confined space of his home and his room to face a new concept of self-perception (Gibson, 1979) and self-efficacy, on how each individual student had to try on his own to take the bodily self, gradually replaced by a digital self (Lo Piccolo, 2019). As a result of this pandemic period, the inevitable repercussions on the increased burden of both emotional and physical stress due to the continuous restrictions caused by the lockdown periods, cannot be ignored. It is therefore increasingly common to experience stress disorders, and university institutions cannot fail to take charge of this, because, from an inclusive perspective it is the task of university institutions to ensure a learning environment that meets both the needs and expectations of each and every individual.

2. Research

2.1. Objective

The study aims to promote mental health and psychophysical well-being in the academic environment by assessing perceived self-efficacy in managing internal and external conflicts, as well as an interpersonal and intrapersonal analysis on a group of subjects attending the University of Salerno.

2.2. Sample

The subjects observed within the framework of the research are students at the University of Salerno, (Southern Italy) who were identified in a convenience sample of 405 students (M=124; F=281) aged between 20 and 25.

2.3. Instrument

The Idea inventory questionnaire by Kassinove et al. (1977) was used as a tool for the evaluation of cognitive and motor dysfunctional aspects. The test consists of 19 items (reduced version), on a Likert scale, with scores from 1 to 4. The student is asked to answer and provide his or her degree of agreement or disagreement with the items indicated.

2.4. Data analysis and results

The Idea Inventory, in this survey, is intended to detect the level of changes implemented at the mental level in response to an adaptation or non-adaptation in one's context, in this specific case the academic context. The data were pre-screened to determine the accuracy of data entry. Valid data were classified into a descriptive statistic (SPSS software) and a frequency calculation was performed. The significant data are shown in the table (fig 1.) Thus, the analysis showed that: in Item 22, 45.7% of the students answered that they are totally agree. This result manifests a lack of resilience to the ability to try again after a failed attempt (Vaccarelli, 2016), and to not finding comfort in the other as well as having to adapt quickly to new situations and put oneself in a position to actively react to the changes; in Item 4, 33.3% of the students answered that they totally agree. For almost two years we have been experiencing a different reality, the result of significant changes that cannot be ignored, of new pedagogical realities that can be tangible and valuable, and think about themes such as intercorporeality (Rinaldi, 2003), taking into account the teacher/learner relationship; this relationship is based on wide aspects concerning eye contact, but also gestures, mindfulness, synchrony, what goes beyond eye contact, voice, gestures, rhythm, aspects that are imperceptible in distance mode; in item 8, 45.9% of the students answered that they totally agree. In this case, the students accumulated more anxiety and less problem solving skills with regard to their lives, all caused by an inability to relate and open up to the world; in item 9, we note the 29.1% of studens are totally agree. This result can be traced back to the lack

of comparison with the other, and the uninterrupted and limiting interface with the only display of the mobile phone and computer; in Item 10, 48.6% of the students answered that they are totally agree; the ability to manage difficulties represents an inherent human skill, but if not properly exercised, it can lose its effectiveness and cause frustration and discomfort. In Item 12, 38.5% of the students answered they totally agree, this result shows the educational emergency that we are going through. Teachers, researchers and the students themselves have a duty to commit themselves to a renewal of teaching actions and to provide tools that guarantee the possibility of a constant relationship between bodies to arrive at a new physical presence as a "still" point in teaching. That is, the presence of a pedagogy that gives space to new, rather than new, rediscovered epistemological tools: corporeity and intercorporeity.

ITEM 1 – It is essential to obtain the esteem and affection of the people who are important to me

	F	%
Totally agree	215	53,1
Quite agree	121	29,9
Quite disagree	26	6,4
completely disagree	43	10,6
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 2 – It's terrible when things don't go as they should.

	F	%
Totally agree	185	45,7
Quite agree	106	26,2
Quite disagree	73	18,0
completely disagree	41	10,1
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 3 - It is easier to avoid responsibilities and commitments than to face them

	F	%
Totally agree	85	21,0
Quite agree	46	11,4
Quite disagree	148	36,5
completely disagree	126	31,1
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 4 - When I'm in a difficult situation, I easily give up if there is no one to help me out

	F	%
Totally agree	135	33,3
Quite agree	51	12,6
Quite disagree	148	36,5
completely disagree	71	17,5
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 5 - I'm afraid I don't know how to deal with people in authority in the best way

	F	%
Totally agree	55	13,6
Quite agree	130	32,1
Quite disagree	148	36,5
completely disagree	72	17,8
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 6 - I take it out if others don't like my appearance or the way I dress

	F	%
Totally agree	42	10,4
Quite agree	77	19,0
Quite disagree	123	30,4
completely disagree	163	40,2
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 7 - A person of value must always be competent and comfortable, whatever he does

	F	%
Totally agree	75	18,5
Quite agree	122	30,1
Quite disagree	143	35,3
completely disagree	65	16,0
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 8 - I get angry if I don't achieve my goals

	F	%
Totally agree	186	45,9
Quite agree	113	27,9
Quite disagree	70	17,3
completely disagree	36	8,9
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 9 - My unhappiness is mainly caused by the events or people I deal with and have no chance to control it

	F	%
Totally agree	118	29,1
Quite agree	42	10,4
Quite disagree	166	41,0
completely disagree	79	19,5
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 10 - We always need to lean on someone stronger than us

	F	%
Totally agree	35	8,6
Quite agree	105	25,9
Quite disagree	164	40,5
completely disagree	101	24,9
Total	405	100,0

ITEM 11 - It is a terrible thing not to be able to find the perfect solution to our problems			ITEM 12 - When I arrive at a party I feel very bad if no one comes to greet me		
	F	%		F	%
Totally agree	197	48,6	Totally agree	50	12,3
Quite agree	69	17,0	Quite agree	119	29,4
Quite disagree	105	25,9	Quite disagree	149	36,8
completely disagree	34	8,4	completely disagree	87	21,5
Total	405	100,0	Total	405	100,0

ITEM 13 - I feel like a worthless person when I do not succeed well in my work or study			ITEM 14 - I get angry if my opinions are not accepted		
	F	%		F	%
Totally agree	156	38,5	Totally agree	37	9,1
Quite agree	91	22,5	Quite agree	123	30,4
Quite disagree	103	25,4	Quite disagree	164	40,5
completely disagree	55	13,6	completely disagree	81	20,0
Total	405	100,0	Total	405	100,0

ITEM 15 - I feel sad and rejected when others neglect me			ITEM 16 - I avoid situations where I have to make choices because it makes me nervous		
	F	%		F	%
Totally agree	75	18,5	Totally agree	68	16,8
Quite agree	163	40,2	Quite agree	44	10,9
Quite disagree	124	30,6	Quite disagree	181	44,7
completely disagree	43	10,6	completely disagree	112	27,7
Total	405	100,0	Total	405	100,0

ITEM 17 - I get nervous and need to be helped when I face difficult commitments and responsibilities			ITEM 18 - It's the past that influences my life and I can't do anything to change it		
	F	%		F	%
Totally agree	38	9,4	Totally agree	38	9,4
Quite agree	83	20,5	Quite agree	75	18,5
Quite disagree	206	50,9	Quite disagree	145	35,8
completely disagree	78	19,3	completely disagree	147	36,3
Total	405	100,0	Total	405	100,0

ITEM 19 - I worry a lot if I can't find the right solution for my commitments		
	F	%
Totally agree	82	20,2
Quite agree	207	51,1
Quite disagree	85	21,0
completely disagree	31	7,7
Total	405	100,0

Figure 1. Results of Idea Inventory Test.

3. Discussion and conclusions

This study aims to understand how the possible onset of dysfunctional attitudes can influence the effective and complete absence of bodily communication. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in the teacher, so that he or she can grow with and through the body, with the implementation of transformative and innovative teaching practices as an opportunity for improvement. Within the university contexts, there is a plurality of epistemologies, and to be able to imagine a confluent path between these systematically means rethinking not didactics itself, but the ways in which the university system considers didactics to be central, and how didactics, as a science of interaction, can be a 'significant opportunity for students. In the light of the latest studies and directions, it is essential to rethink corporeity not as a dissociating, secondary element, separated from the rest of education. On the contrary, the *Pedagogy of the Body* arises, revisiting the current educational contexts, in which corporeity is scarcely involved, and proposes instead a greater interconnection and scientific reflection on the formative and educational value of the body intended as a mediator capable of giving meaning to the educational experience (Sibilio, 2011). The pedagogy of the body is an educational and training approach that aims to enhance and strengthen the role of corporeity in learning contexts. In this perspective, it is necessary to consider a more corporeal scenario, in which posture, eye contact and the correct use of verbal and non-verbal language are used. The body can and must be recognised as the primary articulation of all learning, and to do so it is appropriate to look at corporeity with construction, in order to create a new operational dimension, aimed at reaching significant dimensions involving the emotional and affective life, and to be able to explore the body's potential in training processes. Indeed, it can be stated that «the body plays a crucial role in the development of cognitive abilities» (Kyselo & Di Paolo, 2015 p.520). The profound crisis experienced during the pandemic period seems to have affected the self-perception and selfefficacy sphere (Bandura,1997), leading to continual reflections on the future and eliciting continual questions on how to make up for lacks and absences caused by virtual teaching. The solution might be to be able to conceive of the body in a vision of centrality and not as an orthosis of the mind, so as to be able to understand the real peculiarities of corporeity as a unity and crossroads of multiple learning. Reflecting on the statement *I am my body* (Marcel, 1951), then in a future perspective, teaching strategies should focus on corporeity by moving towards the valorization of educational practices that offer the possibility of discovering the body's potential by means of its expressive resources (Berthoz, 2011). The body has for too long been conceptually kept at the margins of learning processes, and thus needs continuous redemption as part of an entity. Our body, therefore, is much more than a window on the world, it is a reality, a field for receiving data of all kinds that noisily pours in, but it is certain that every single piece of information, therefore, afference will not be lost but somehow somatically incorporated and reused to face new educational and... life challenges.

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