

Analysis of counterproductive measures

Analysis of counterproductive measures in Greece

The widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have drastically increased health, social and economic inequalities. Primary and secondary school students suddenly had to work with various kinds of support, which were usually provided online by their teachers.

Despite the best efforts of educational institutions, parents and teachers to keep all children and students engaged in learning activities, ensuring educational continuity during school closures - difficult for everyone - proved even more difficult for students from families with low economic and educational backgrounds.

It is argued that by making students work primarily through digital resources rather than direct interactions with their teachers, and by making the learning process more family-based than ever teacher-based, school closures exacerbate social class academic inequalities, to the point of talking about the creation of a gap both digital and cultural.

Digital divide- The digital divide is created by 3 causes:

- Absence of technological equipment
- Absence of internet access
- Lack of a suitable workspace for each child of the family
- Unequal knowledge of using digital tools

As an example, we mention that only 24% of Greek students, i.e. one in four, had full access to distance education, according to a new survey by devolo Greece in collaboration with InfoKids.gr. In the same research 56% of respondents stated that the main problem was connecting to the home network, while 20% stated that the second problem was the lack of suitable equipment at home to support online classes for students.

(https://www.alfavita.gr/ekpaideysi/341885_tilekpaideysi-mono-enas-stoys-tesseris-mathites-eihe-pliri-prosbasi)

The “digital divide” remains an obstacle to a future inclusive education model and it is regarded as a major inhibitory factor in several studies (Scully, Lehane, & Scully, 2021).

Cultural divide

Even if all parents are committed to the academic success of their children, working-class parents have fewer chances to provide the help that children need to complete homework, and homework is more beneficial for children from upper-middle class families than for children from working-class families. This is a situation that is observed in ‘normal’ times when schools are open. School closures, by making learning rely more strongly on practices implemented at home (rather than at school), are likely to amplify the impact of these disparities. Therefore, when they are out of school, children from upper/middle-class backgrounds may continue to develop academic skills unlike their working-class counterparts, who may stagnate or even regress. In addition, during school closures, high

self-regulation skills (for example, setting goals, selecting appropriate learning strategies and maintaining motivation) are required to maintain study activities and are likely to be especially useful for using digital resources efficiently. Research has shown that students from working-class backgrounds typically develop their self-regulation skills to a lesser extent than those from upper/middle-class backgrounds.

The fact that working-class children and students are less familiar with the tasks set by teachers, and less well equipped and supported, makes them more likely to experience feelings of incompetence. Working-class parents are also more likely than their upper/middle-class counterparts to feel unable to help their children with schoolwork. Consistent with this, research has shown that both working-class students and parents have lower feelings of academic self-efficacy than their upper/middle-class counterparts. These differences have been documented under 'normal' conditions but are likely to be exacerbated during distance learning.

Thus, the school closures associated with the pandemic amplify economic, digital and cultural divides that in turn affect the psychological functioning of parents, students and teachers in a way that amplifies academic inequalities.

It is therefore important to redefine education, not only to include creative ways of engaging technology, but also ways to empower vulnerable groups in order to close this gap. It is important that the redefinition of education not only to enhance innovation in the classroom and to find creative ways of engaging technology in the learning process, but also to help vulnerable groups close this gap

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01212-7?fbclid=IwAR3GU2pHL7p-0p7y2gEV6z-vw0X2Ny0RZnpCjDCx5mC2q39w6RKxgtuqars>

Finally, we should also refer to the fact that Greek teachers, by a large percentage, were not familiar with distance education and did not have appropriate technological equipment, while the theoretical and financial support from the Ministry of Education came very late. Teachers relied more on their personal study and supported each other through social networking groups. In order to be more ready for the next time, one of the requests is the creation of exemplary material that can be adapted to the particular needs of each school.

Analysis of counterproductive measures in Italy

To describe the panorama of the tools put in place to combat the educational emergency linked to the pandemic, it is necessary to emphasize the double level of actions implemented by educational institutions, of all levels and degrees.

The first consideration to be made is that in the management of the various phases of the emergency, the centralized dimension has come to prevail over the effective autonomy of schools, the territory with its peculiarities has remained in the background of the actions of the central government.

At the central level, the Government has allocated a series of financial resources for the needs of school construction and adaptation of the teaching activity, in view of the restart of the school year 2020-2021 in the necessary safety conditions and for the recruitment of new teachers.

With other measures, the resources for digital innovation and laboratory teaching have increased, with resources destined for the purchase of digital platforms and tools by state schools, for the provision of individual digital devices on loan for use for less well-off students, to staff training. A "Fund for epidemiological emergency from Covid-19" provides for additional economic resources to implement measures to contain the epidemiological risk

The characteristic of these interventions is their occasionality, to give an answer to the emergency, but without a radical background perspective, which leads to the effective rethinking of school space and time, intervening on the profound differences between the various areas of Italy. regarding school buildings and digital equipment.

Didactics for students with disabilities: within the provisions to ensure the resumption of school activity in safe conditions and ensure the carrying out of the school year 2020/2021 in an appropriate manner to the epidemiological situation, resources are allocated to interventions in favor of teaching of students with disabilities, specific learning disabilities and other special educational needs.

Also at a central level for the recovery of learning and relational dimensions as a result of the pandemic: the Ministry of Education has prepared a Summer School Plan for the year 2021, which will be replicated for 2022.

The Ministry of Education has prepared the Summer School Plan 2021 with resources intended for schools to allow female students to recover sociality and strengthen learning, taking advantage of workshops for the enhancement of skills (for example Italian, Mathematics, Languages), of educational activities focused on music, art, sport, digital, paths on legality and sustainability, on environmental protection.

In fact, temporally, three macro-phases can be identified in continuity with each other:

Phase I: Strengthening and strengthening of disciplinary and relational skills - Period: June 2021. The main objective will be to pay attention to the actions for the schools of the first and second cycles of education.

Phase II: Strengthening and strengthening disciplinary and social skills - Period: July-August 2021. It is important to continue the learning enhancement activities which will be accompanied more intensively by aggregation and socialization activities in Campus mode.

Phase III: Strengthening and strengthening disciplinary and relational skills with introduction to the new school year - Period: September 2021. It is important that students are accompanied at the start of the new school year through personal contacts and reflections, encouraged and supported to face the next school experience (for example laboratory activities or moments of listening and psychological support).

The efforts and actions of the Ministry were certainly appreciable, but once again the space left for the autonomy of the individual schools was really reduced, in the management of the Projects and in the proposal of summer activities the formal and bureaucratic aspects prevailed, often leaving untapped opportunities and resources. During the summer it is very difficult to think about the use of the school space, due to the usual problems of school building and for climatic reasons. Surely these interventions, in the context of the medium term and in view of a resumption of normal school activities for the next school years, leave some fundamental questions open:

- The educational gap both between the Italian regions and between social classes, in terms of learning and digital education
- Continuous teacher training, with a view to integrating the various methodological and teaching tools
- School buildings, with a structural reorganization of spaces where possible, with greater involvement of the territory and a relaxation of bureaucratic constraints
- Inclusion for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, the categories that most suffered during the two years of health emergency, especially on the relational and emotional level.

The summer openings, in the intentions of the Ministry, use resources not to fill the training GAPS but divert them mainly towards playful-recreational activities that are not functional for this purpose. Then for the students who have been deprived of the opportunity to meet and socialize for a whole year it was difficult to address with satisfaction such an offer, given that moreover the school real estate does not offer great prospects of spaces and equipment suitable for extra activities. school.

Furthermore, teachers are not trained to be animators and if it is understandable that they are periodically updated to improve their professional performance, it is contradictory that they were for activities that were outside their specific duties.

A further weakness of the Plan is that it is based on voluntary participation by students and families, as well as school staff. The obligation does not exist even if the school, through its collegiate bodies, intends to adhere to the activities of the Summer School Plan.

This is because the activities, even if deliberated, still remain of an extracurricular nature and as such are not included in the ordinary ones, including also the activities functional to teaching for the teaching staff. Therefore, it is the staff who must still join individually and

voluntarily and consequently will be paid with an accessory fee precisely because they are non-ordinary activities. Such personnel may therefore give their refusal to join even before, during or after the deliberations of the collegial bodies.

The Summer School Plan raises some elements for critical reflection. The activities of the Summer Plan should favor very different learning environments than the (climatically hot) classrooms of schools: open spaces, natural places, places of art, urban space, digital space, green and blue. And then certainly also laboratories, ateliers, interior spaces of schools. Spaces that should not, however, obey the logic of the classrooms arranged for the typical frontal lessons. And also in this case the basic question is valid: isn't it that school should always or mainly be like this? And if the answer is yes: what consequences does this reflection have on learning spaces?

By changing the space / time axes, teaching also changes. This is the basic idea of the indications in the Ministry's notes: laboratory teaching methods, peer to peer, blendend, one to one, cooperatives. But why should these modalities be cataloged as summery and not as the daily normality of school? If this were not the case, it means admitting that the real school, the one that runs from 8.00 to 13.00 during the school year (the real one, from mid-September to early June) is made up of frontal lessons. All the rest is for other occasions: for the afternoons of expanding the training offer and therefore also the mega extended summer. Serie B school vs Serie A school. Yet, these two school years have shown us that the school is capable of rethinking, renewing itself, changing, implementing new ways of learning. Why should we stop now that we have started?

The teachers, exhausted by two devastating school years, only minimally carried out the activities of the Summer Plan. But if it is understandable that for this summer there were other subjects who carried out the activities proposed by the school, we can reflect on the fact that the school, as a place for building culture, cannot think of continuing to carry out its task without contribution of the skills, experiences, knowledge of the myriads of people who interact with the school and who bring knowledge and experiences to the school that must be valued and circulated.

These critical issues affect the problem of the organization of work in Italian schools that has been discussed for years. Organization that should be revised starting from a new founding pact. If, think of high school, students' attendance times at school were diversified, if the class group constituted only one of the many types of aggregate to work with, if the school was the space that organizes paths and learning opportunities throughout the calendar year (non-school) why couldn't a teacher distribute their work differently? The 594 hours of didactic activity with pupils (18 hours per week x 33 weeks) that each teacher must carry out according to the current contract, why not distribute them in a more flexible way? With the current contract on the contrary almost no flexibility, as well as no incentives.

Analysis of counterproductive measures in Romania

Challenges principals and teachers have to face in tackling those situations with the appropriate approaches.

Analysis of the challenges in Romania

Analysis of why instruments currently used at school level may be counterproductive.

There was no clear vision for online schooling: students and teachers alike lacked a clear vision and preparation of what the online schooling should look like.

There were national programmes tackling the device availability for students (more than 250,000 students) and teachers (laptops, tablets, mobiles) as well as online crash courses aiming at improving teachers' digital competences but there were also obstacles (equipment, internet connection, training):

- All teachers had smartphones to learn/ teach their classes online but most teachers did not own a laptop or a tablet
- Tablets – problems related to who paid for any problems /internet coverage
- No trained parents in using/ handling devices and the special apps for online education

The hybrid method – without suitable webcams for hybrid education (high-resolution cameras with a presence sensor).

Analysis of counterproductive measures in Spain

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A counterproductive measure was the lack of selection of the most appropriate system and working tools. The inexperience evidenced the absence of an analysis of the working system according to the age of the students. And also the inexperience when analysing what type of devices to use that were suitable for their ages so that they did not use the common ones, such as digital leisure. Despite of the fact that tutorials were provided in order to enable teachers and families to apply tools, which they previously did not know about, that was insufficient. The reason of this was both digital divide and the lack of information on the use and management of these technologies.

The organization of the students. Teachers were not capable of helping their students to self-organize with tips on the workspace at home, on the necessity of creating a daily routine or on establishing procedures to identify the start and end of each activity. Besides, it clashed with the compatibility of family in many homes, since families had to combine online education with teleworking.

Redesign school year. It was very difficult to generate clear sequences of work with a specific duration and for students to perceive the teaching support. They used improvised resources such as start-up video, video conference and messages that bombarded homes and that, in many cases, generated more chaos in families. However, this situation was gradually regularised and permanent spaces of digital communication began to be created (Telegram channel, forum in digital space, Gmail groups...).

Tools were provided in an attempt to create dynamics of active interaction in the virtual environment to keep students connected and motivated. Instead of facilitating collaborative work, these tools generated uncontrollable dependencies and lack of motivation caused by the impossibility of knowing how to use and manage them.

Homework. In many cases, homework was just a selection of activities from their textbooks, as if these activities could become the focus of their learning. Nevertheless, it cannot be this way: the transition from a face-to-face education system to a digital one is not about sending via email the activities planned to be carried out in class, and simply hoping them to be done at home.

In addition to the difficulties already mentioned in this paragraph, there are the collateral effects of online education:

More distractions. In the ICT world, one has such an amount of information and alternatives that it is very easy to get distracted, thus increasing the amount of dispersion.

High levels of addiction. When we previously talked about learning to use ICTs and becoming aware of them, we also included learning to control the level of addiction they create, especially in young people.

Further loss of time. It is closely related to the first point of attention in this list.

Isolation. The abusive use of ICTs reduce physical contact between people, which is a handicap for the growth of the individual. This also leads to not doing other necessary activities, such as sport.

Information filtering. Much of the information one finds in digital media is false or incomplete. It is important to know how to corroborate the content and look for reliable sources of information.

Cyberbullying or bullying through networks. This is certainly a highly topical and controversial issue, and one of the greatest risks posed by ICTs. The lack of physical contact with other people leads to a loss of assertiveness and it can also result in this type of action. Likewise, the possibility of creating fake profiles and hiding the identity on social media may lead to risk situations for people who use these networks.

Lack of privacy. This topic is also closely related to the previous one. We are all highly exposed due to the amount of personal information that we share on social networks, and this can result in us becoming the target of persecution by bullies. Luckily, it is being working on improving the privacy on tools progressively. However, it is undoubtedly essential to make people be aware of the fact that it is not necessary to share certain kind of information through networks; indeed, it may be counterproductive.

The autonomy. Education is in your hands. Unlike face-to-face education, students are responsible for self-management of time. Thus, it is of vital importance to know your own limits and to organise a calendar around the objectives set. A study program helps to plan a strategy: some guidelines that will facilitate measuring progress and having a structure. This structure allows having stability and an action plan to deal with lessons. It is important to plan before getting yourself involved in online formation on your own.

The fundamental horizontal coordination. There is not just one subject in this new “virtual curriculum”, and it is significant to consider not only the quality of the material but also the quantity of work – and time – that each teacher is demanding. Failure to do so, students and their families may soon end up practicing civil disobedience and not doing the work assigned.

Finally, having channels of communication can not only help to send information or answer questions, but also to deal with something far more important at this time: to transmit calm to students, to show them that life continues and to bring a bit of normality in these days of anxiety.

By way of conclusion, it is worth mentioning that education is a way to bring stability and security to children since it helps them to create a daily routine and to use their time productively so that they can face trauma, stress and fear that they may feel because of the pandemic. Therefore, it is essential for children and adolescents to continue studying and learning from home. In very exceptional situations, there are lots of decisions and measures to be promoted. It is certain that not all of them can be right – sometimes they may even be counterproductive. However, as previously presented, the urgency of the situation make them necessary, although indeed improvable.

In summary, technology is having a great impact for the whole society, although there are pros and cons, as detailed above. Undoubtedly, if it is used properly, it will generate more benefits than drawbacks and this is where the emphasis should be: trying to enhance the benefits and to reduce the cons by educating people to use technologies efficiently.