

# Improving educational communication as a way of living in an authentic "polar opposition". A challenge and a task for education

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**Abstract:** The paper aims to deepen, from a pedagogical perspective, the value of educational communication in promoting humanization processes within complex society (Morin, 2007). After a critical immersion into the topic of the information society and its related drifts, we will investigate the concept of polar opposition (Guardini, 2022), in order to know and understand the complexity, and the relational dimension that constitute human existence. The purpose is to recover the relationship with the world of things, people, and values. Without taking sides between 'apocalyptic or integrated' (Eco, 1977), it will be examined in what way the educational discourse could provide transformative learning, to identify concrete ways of human liberation.

**Keywords:** education, information, society, communication, polar opposition

## 1. Progress and the information society

The globalization of the world has coincided with the establishment of a system of planetary communication from the use of fax and telephone, to the widespread of the Internet and the smartphones (Morin, 2020).

The immediacy of communication, the interconnectedness of knowledge, and the interdependence of the planet (Morin, 2011) lead people to deal with certain paradoxes: an abundance of information is available, but it is difficult to evaluate its content with a critical thinking; all kinds of news can be obtained, but it is not certain that they are true (e.g. fake news); there is a wide range of information, but there is no unity of knowledge and in-depth study; it is possible to exchange with people and cultures very far away from each other, but it is difficult to build a "human brotherhood on a planetary scale", and everyone withdraws into themselves and into self-centred ethnic, national, religious visions (Morin, 2020, p. 41, our translation).

As a result, in the information society - where everything is connected and communicating - there are more and more misunderstandings between people, cultures and sometimes even within the same group or family (Ibidem).

Information is therefore not a condition of liberation and regeneration (Eco, 1977). Conversely, it undermines the ability to cultivate one's own being, or as Benasayag would say, one's "estar siendo" (Benasayag & Cohen, 2023), that is, the ability to reclaim one's own being. A similar analysis is proposed by Han: where information abounds or even overflows, there is a risk of falling into "oblivion of being" (Han, 2024).



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Being and information are mutually exclusive. The information society is characterized by a lack of being, an oblivion of being. Information proceeds by addition and accumulation. It does not carry meaning, whereas in history meaning passes through. [...] Today, therefore, we are better informed but completely without guidance. [...] In the tsunami of information, there is a growing need for meaning, identity and orientation, a need to illuminate the dark jungle of information in which we risk getting lost (Han, 2024, p. 10, our translation).

When information "proceeds by addition and accumulation" (Ibidem), the perception of uncertainty and dispersion of the self increases (Benasayag & Cohen, 2023). At the same time, this information "fragments time into a mere sequence of moments" (Han, 2024, p. 10, our translation). The dimension of meaning and the search for continuity in discontinuity is thus lost (Ricoeur, 1988), undermining the need for personal identity and orientation. This implies a condition of "schizochrony" (Pineau, 2000), to refer to "the various forms of temporal divide that are experienced and eventually lead individuals to the feeling of being temporally alienated" (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, p. 134). At the same time, the discontinuities within the life course (Ibidem) involve situations of "épreuves", challenges that the subject is called upon to face and that will constitute primary elements of his/her own history. There is therefore a need for "an organizing process through which one learns to relate what constitutes the fragments and discontinuities of one's own life" (Ibi, p. 136), but also to relate the fragmentations proper of the post-modern society, in order to grasp a possible coherence also within global and glocal trajectories.

As we acclimate to a world where more textual and graphic information is instantly available on a pocket-sized mobile phone than in the sum of our greatest physical libraries across millennia, education needs to move beyond spreading and transmitting knowledge and instead ensure that knowledge empowers learners and that they use that knowledge responsibly. A primary educational challenge is to equip people with tools for making sense of the oceans of information that are just a few swipes or keystrokes away (UNESCO, 2021, p. 36).

Finding one's way in the information society means, on the one hand, a critical reflection on reality, embracing the complexity of which it is composed; and, on the other hand, the recovery of the person, how to be in relation with the world of things, people, and values. We will try to explore these two dimensions; to examine in what way the educational discourse could offer transformative learning.

## 2. Polar opposition to understand complexity

In the information society, the challenge becomes the search for a vision of the whole, a unity that allows the subject to create order and synthesis between multiple variables, aware that reality is made up of multiple factors, among which they are not exclusive. Morin (2014) argues that contradictions are inherent to reality, so the effort is to face them rather than to avoid them, to hold together and overcome alternatives deemed insurmountable.

For Guardini (2022), this vision of the whole is achievable through the idea of polar opposition, because to develop opposition is to conquer the whole. "The whole of human life seems to be dominated by the fact of opposites. [...] They are the basis

of every living reality and perhaps of every concrete reality" (Ibi, p. 29, our translation). In identifying the "fundamental opposites of the living human being" (Ibi, p. 30, our translation), he distinguishes between categorical (intra-empirical and transempirical) and transcendental opposites.

Among the *intra-empirical opposites*, which are within the realm of experience, we find the relationship between *change* and *stability*, in which being is perceived as an act but, at the same time, it is a stable structure; *form* and *fullness*, in which life extends into chaos towards order, but this order seeks the living form; *total* and *particular*, in which life is directed towards the sense of the totality and, at the same time, it is set towards the particular sense.

Among the *transempirical opposites*, that arise from the exchange between the inner and the experienced reality, we note the tension between creative force and ordering principle (*create-organize*); *rule-originality*; *inwardness* and *outwardness* (*inside-outside*). Harmony in life depends on the existence of a centre, a deep interiority, and an equilibrium between discipline and creativity. If people try too much out of themselves, they end up missing themselves; on the contrary, if they lose the relationship with the surrounding world, they sink in themselves.

Among the *transcendental opposites*, we discover the relationship between *affinity* and *particularization*, qualitatively, reality is singular and unique, but at the same time it is imbued with an intimate affinity that makes possible an order and a connection; and the interconnection between *unity* and *totality*, the body is made up of several organs that are connected to each other and are recomposed into unity in the person.

The discussion on polar opposition, briefly introduced, leads us to understand how tension is inherent in what exists and how there is a constant interrelation between these opposites. To understand complexity, it is therefore appropriate to avoid a logic that simplifies and reduces or, on the contrary, that polarizes and emphasises the separation, and to draw attention to the plurality and the dynamism of the reality. In this way, the polar opposition opens the mind to an immense richness (Guardini, 2022).

The dialectic of polar opposition also allows us to examine the existing, in the logic of the process, which unfolds in a temporal and spatial horizon. Deleuze (1984), referring to the concept of paradox, arrives at similar reflections.

Because it avoids the present, becoming does not bear the separation and distinction of before and after, past and future. To go and push in both senses at once in the essence of becoming: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa. Common sense is the statement that there is a determinable sense in everything; but paradox is the affirmation of both senses at the same time (p. 9, our translation).

The paradox "destroys common sense as a one-way street" (Ibi, p. 11, our translation) and opens up the possibility of considering a multifaceted and multidimensional horizon (Morin, 1990), overcoming unilateral visions, that do not allow for dialogical and connective thinking (Morin, 2004).

The connectedness (*Reliance*) here becomes an instrument for establishing interrelations with another person, with a community, with a society, with humanity, in a perspective of solidarity and fraternity (Morin, 2020). It takes the form of a bond of inclusion that the subject experiences within the community, through friendship and love. At the same time, it introduces norms and rules of social origin, that are pre-

scribed in the light of a horizon of solidarity. In this constant intersection between order and disorder, the organizing principle becomes crucial. It is not understood in a static way, but as a search for unity in diversity and continuity in discontinuity (Morin, 2004).

The concept of paradox also "destroys common sense as the assignment of fixed identities" (Deleuze, 1984, p. 11, our translation). It thus allows us to overcome monolithic visions of the self and to turn towards a *unitax multiplex* (Morin, 1990), multiple in its actions, attitudes, aspects. In this respect, we seem to find a link with the concept of *narrative identity* (Ricoeur, 1988). "Narrative identity is not a stable and unbroken identity [...]. Narrative identity is constantly being made and unravelled (Ibi, pp. 378-379, our translation). The person has to deal with his/her "to be situated" (Benasayag, 1998), with living in the here and now, with the concreteness and the criticality of the reality. At the same time, the weave and the warp with which identity is woven allows us to place our own human life in a space-time continuum and to read ourselves into a personal and collective history. In this way, the person reconnects pieces of life and sets in motion processes that, through narrative, help to identify the underlying meaning of events. The concept of narrative identity highlights the need to consider the subject as a relational being.

### 3. The recovery of the person as relational being

At the present time, the person is lived as a "profile" (Benasayag & Cohen, 2023), renouncing all depth, always exposed, and judged by those who observe, always traced in his/her movements and thoughts. This has far-reaching consequences. The internet, the social media, and the virtual reality create a filter through which to see and be seen, a physical separation between bodies that alienates the subject from himself/herself and others. Reality is constructed by choosing what to show, post, and share. It is the *paradox of communication*, where the *informational paradigm* comes to overcome the *relational paradigm* (Pati, 1984; Spina, 2018). A lack of authentic relationships results from this interconnectedness. What remains, in a society that has lost the sense of belonging and of being with others, is an individualism oriented towards hedonism and *divertissement* (Benasayag & Cohen, 2023).

In the information society, the "multiplication of information and interconnections" (Han, 2024, p. 10, our translation) leads to impermanence and transience, also in the interpersonal relationships. The liquidity of the ties prevails over the relationship (Bauman, 2007), which instead requires stability and a different bond other than a simple connection, that can be broken at any time (Bauman, 2003). When humanity is dominated by individuality, the ego sinks into unreality (Buber, 1993). Without relationship, the inner dialogue and deep self-knowledge are impoverished, because interpersonal communication bring the person into contact with his/her most authentic nature, uniqueness, singularity, and unrepeatability. Otherwise, the I-You relationship is a fundamental pedagogical dynamic in the processes of inner evolution and personal emancipation (Ibidem).

In the I-you encounter, an exchange takes place that increases mutual knowledge and it initiates a relational being, in which the subjects are "responsible for the development of the structured bond" (Pati, 1984, p. 87 our translation). It is therefore necessary to look for new ways of listening and speaking, in the perspective of a di-

alogical communication, in which each subject is accepted as a value and it is in the conditions of knowing and acting.

The experiences, emotions and relationships allow the subject to achieve personal authenticity, emancipation and critical awareness (Freire, 1970), arousing "the desire to live according to principles that guide human relations towards integral progress" (Pati, 1984, p. 241, our translation).

Furthermore, interpersonal relationships encourage a process of problematization. The person has the task of examining the context, recognizing the uncertainties and ethical illusions, observing himself/herself, reflecting on possible choices before making decisions (Morin, 2004). This process is "truly reflective" and "involves a permanent act of revealing reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 70, our translation). This process promotes unity between thought and action; theory and practice. It takes the form of "a permanent effort through which men/women critically perceive how they are 'in progress' in the world, with which and in which they live" (Ibi, p. 72, our translation).

Although this horizon is saturated with individualism and relational fragility, "everywhere a need for 'we' and 'you' is born and reborn" (Morin, 2020, p. 39, our translation). It is therefore necessary to reconfigure "new ideals of humanity and training, new systems of values" and to identify "new paths of liberation" (Eco, p. 364, our translation). As the UNESCO Report (2021) points out, "our humanity and planet Earth are under threat. [...] Now urgent action, taken together, is needed to change course and reimagine our futures" (p. 3).

#### 4. Educational pathways in the information society

The challenge is to shed light on reality and to examine it critically (Eco, 1977, p. 364), to understand if there are operational ways that can help man inhabit this time as an authentic person (Rogers, 1951). Education is needed to counteract the massifying and repressive tendencies and to act so that the person may progress in dignity and originality (Pati, 1984).

This framework leads us to reflect, from an educational perspective, on how "reimagining our futures" (UNESCO, 2021) means restoring the centrality to interpersonal relations, to the ability to communicate and to relate to others, to tell meaningful stories, to know oneself, others, and the world. Communication becomes an instrument of encounter and of authentic exchange. It promotes the identification of a continuity in discontinuity and it brings back into unity the fragmentation of existence. It is through communication that the harmony of opposites can be implemented. The oppositions inherent in human reality find in "interpersonal relationships the possibility of being composed and justified in an educational perspective" (Pati, 1984, p. 7).

In the information society, it is essential to start again from education and training. These systems have always been measured against complex, challenging and new problems (Cadei, 2021a). In the direction indicated, pedagogy is configured as a discipline of vigilance towards meaning (Fabre, 2009), at the service of education, in a problematic world (Cadei, 2021a). Educational discourse is therefore called upon to become a "factor of intellectual provocation", to examine the current situation and to search for "alternatives" valid for today (Pati, 1984, p. 6), new ways of liberation, new ideals of humanity and education.



There is an urgent need for an educational support, to promote personal and community development paths, through the refinement of relational and communicative competence. This reminds us of the importance of monitoring one's words and actions from an educational perspective, because "the reality is perceived as a process in constant evolution and therefore thought is never separated from action" (Cadei, 2021b, p. 159, our translation). This implies a reflection on the action, on one's own way of being in relation to others, on one's own communicative competence.

Communication in the pedagogical field cannot be reduced to a simple flow of information: it needs to be imbued with existential meanings, with all-encompassing purposes, with meta-temporal values. It is therefore not one of the many pedagogical subjects but rather the fundamental pedagogical problem" (Pati, 1984, p. 73, our translation).

The performativity of the word therefore requires a hermeneutic of education in order to humanize the human being (Spina, 2018). For this reason, there is an urgent need to be attentive to the communicative dimension, so that it becomes a tool for clarifying situations, critically questioning reality, exploring the underlying meanings and promoting the integral development of the person.

It is therefore a matter of practicing narrative and authentic communication. It is communicative competence that makes it possible to introduce the subject to the possibility of developing personal improvement processes. The person becomes "I in contact with you", in a reciprocal relationship (Buber, 1993).

In this perspective, it is desirable to learn to live with the unmastered dimensions of existence (Benasayag & Cohen, 2023) and to conceive human action and thought as part of the ecosystems that inhabit, feeling in relation with the surrounding world. In the face of crisis and total faith in rationality, in the face of the intrusion of uncertainty, it is essential to question our way of being in the world, in the logic of sustainable development.

We can consider here some of the antinomies in which communication can fall, in order to guard against them.

- *Authenticity and deception* (Pati, 1984). The basis of communication is personal authenticity, against the risk of masking (Goffman, 1959) or instrumentalising dialogue for personal gain.

- *Dialogue-monologue*. Dialogue is based on listening, caring and reciprocity. Monologue, on the other hand, places the ego at the centre, in an egocentric and hierarchical relationship that leaves no room for the expression of the other.

- *Stability-transformation*. The reciprocity of communication, through feedback, makes it possible to understand the messages coming from others and to interact with them, thus promoting transformative processes.

- *Freedom-conditioning*. Communication cannot be understood as an instrument of conditioning (Pati, 1984). When communication aims to subject the other to one's own point of view, it fails to respect the freedom and the uniqueness of the other. Authentic communication is about letting "the other be" and discovering it through the relationship (Buber, 1993).

Mastering the communicative competence becomes the way to inhabit complexity, to stay in the situation assuming the "polar opposition" (Guardini, 2022) that is typical of reality, to understand how to stay in this tension without falling into re-

ductionism or radicalism. In the field of education, it is appropriate to begin processes of analysis based on the ability to remain in the middle, with communicative, relational and dialectical competence, in view of a process that "focused on equipping and encouraging the next generation to exist 'in' and 'with' the world, and do so in their own right" (Biesta, 2022, p. 3). An ethical attitude is therefore necessary to allow others to exist "as human beings [...] 'in' and 'with' the world" (Ibidem), guaranteeing the growth of interiority and concrete possibilities of experience and action. The purpose of education is to provide the equipment for a life that allows one to act freely. This equipment is not dropped from above; it is not the result of experience for its own sake, but is structured in a dialogical relationship in which dialogue becomes the way to access the meanings underlying action. Action is subjected to reflexivity in order to grasp its messages and meanings. It is charged with witness, understood as a form of action in which the words and gestures experienced are in accordance with the values that guide them.

In conclusion, we can see that the future of education and the development of today's world require the promotion of a dialogue between different perspectives, with the aim of integrating knowledge systems. In this regard, the concept of "the common good represents a constructive proposal for shared responsibility" (Cadei, 2021a, our translation), developing "skills to analyze inequalities and nurture critical consciousness is a way to support participatory engagement and, in this respect, human rights education strongly supports education for citizenship" (UNESCO, 2021, p. 80). It is noteworthy how "human rights education can be transformative, offering as it does a shared language and an entry point into a moral universe committed to the recognition and thriving of all" (Ibidem).

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