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THE EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP IN A DIGITALISED WORLD: PARADOXES OF HYPERCONNECTION

La relación educativa en un mundo digitalizado: paradojas de la hiperconexión

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyse the need to reflect on educational relationships in our digitalised world, namely how they are shaped by technological hegemony and the key challenges that arise as a result. The concept of educational relationships is initially examined within the complexities and tensions that define contemporary modes of interaction –both with others and ourselves– under the influence of screens, alongside their pedagogical implications. The study identifies several paradoxes directly associated with hyperconnectivity as a new way of living and communicating: the paradoxes of attention, activity, memory, privacy, and prohibition, all of which

are being redefined by practices and ideas shaped by informational technologies, especially social media and artificial intelligence. These paradoxes enable a critical examination of the reality of these concepts and their implications for relational pedagogy, which are analysed in this study. Finally, the study offers a series of conclusions with a constructive intent, aimed at fostering continued reflection and ensuring that educational relationships remain a key reference point, undiluted by the challenges of datafication and image saturation.

Keywords: educational relationship; theory of education; educational technology; pedagogical relationship; digital education.

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende profundizar en la necesidad de pensar en nuestro mundo digitalizado las relaciones educativas: cómo la hegemonía tecnológica mediatiza las mismas y cuáles pueden ser los principales desafíos que emergen de todo esto. Para ello, en primer lugar, sitúa el concepto de relación educativa en la complejidad existente y las tensiones que dan forma a las nuevas maneras de relacionarnos con los demás y con nosotros mismos con la influencia de las pantallas y las implicaciones pedagógicas derivadas. Posteriomente, se establecen una serie de paradojas vinculadas directamente con la hiperconexión como nueva forma de estar en el mundo y comunicarnos: las paradojas de la atención, la actividad, la memoria y la privacidad y la prohibición, las cuales se están transformando desde concepciones y prácticas derivadas del uso de las tecnologías informacionales, sobre todo las redes sociales y la inteligencia artificial. Estas paradojas permiten problematizar la realidad de estos términos y tiene consecuencias pedagógicas relacionales que son analizadas. Finalmente, se establecen una serie de conclusiones con ánimo propositivo para que nos ayuden a seguir pensando y haciendo de las relaciones educativas un referente que no se diluya entre la datificación y la saturación de imágenes.

Palabras clave: relación educativa; teoría de la educación; tecnología educativa; relación pedagógica; educación digital.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the year 1890, and a woman named Johanna and her husband, Teo, are expecting a child. They are certain about the name they will choose if it is a boy: Vincent, in honour of his uncle, who is currently a patient at Saint-Rémy psychiatric hospital, suffering from one of the many crises he has experienced throughout his life. The news of his nephew's arrival brings him great joy, and so, inspired by a work by Millet, he paints a picture titled First Steps, which is now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 1).

The painting, a gift for his brother and sister-in-law, is imbued with warm colours and an affectionate atmosphere, evoking kindness, dynamism, and vitality,

FIGURE 1
VINCENT VAN GOGH, *FIRST STEPS*, 1890

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436526

with the little one as the central figure, highlighting the parents' eagerness to see their child's first steps. This painting also gives us some insight into how we relate to others from an early age and what can potentially transform those relationships into educational ones. The parents' attitudes reflect an interest in the other (their child), intentionality in what they aim to do (satisfaction, encouraging the child to walk), and an added element of affection (love) for the child's actions and achievements.

This masterful scene can serve as a starting point for reflecting on the coordinates we must follow to navigate the ever-changing and uncertain landscapes of today's world, as well as the role educational relationships should play as a framework for learning to interpret it. All this clashes with a context where digital technology is increasingly dominating and shaping reality, while hyperconnectivity is supplanting traditional forms of experience for a significant number of people. We must not forget that digital technologies are tools that shape and condition our reality and the ways we relate to one another and to ourselves (Floridi, 2014).

Theory of Education plays an important role in these matters, as solid theoretical knowledge holds intrinsic value beyond its practical applications. In this case, reflecting on educational processes and relationships through the lens of the changes and continuities brought about by hyper-digitalisation involves examining, firstly,

how education professionals engage with technology and the way these shapes teaching and learning, and, secondly, the foundations underpinning our pedagogical convictions and decisions (Gil Cantero, 2011). This is more important than ever in the age of big data, generative artificial intelligence, and macrodata, where everything is generated from vast quantities of information, producing correlations that offer snapshots of "what is" but fail to explain "why" or "what for"—questions dismissed as unnecessary by the mercantilist logic that pervades the algorithms governing the digital world. Thus, theory "provides an order of things, relating them to one another to explain why they behave as they do" (Han, 2023, p. 82), enabling us to understand and develop concepts and conceptual associations. Theory is essential in this area if pedagogy is to continue to allow us to *narrate* educational narratives.

Building on all this, our goal is to establish a framework where pedagogical reflections can guide an updated approach to the ontological understanding of the educational relationship, addressing the new demands and challenges posed by emerging digital technologies. The aim is to analyse and re-evaluate the conditions necessary for an appropriate educational relationship as a crucial aspect of the educational act itself, and to consider the conditioning factors and dimensions that need to be addressed in light of the social reality in which we live—a reality that threatens and undermines many forms of pedagogical life (Masschelein, 2024). However, we face many challenges in this regard, as Bauman warned several years ago: "We still need to learn the art of living in a world oversaturated with information; and we also need to learn the even more difficult art of preparing future generations to live in such a world" (Bauman, 2007, p. 46).

2. The educational relationship as a means and an end

We are undoubtedly relational beings, but that does not mean all relationships are positive. Others may appear to us as a mirror, as a source of hope, as a fellow citizen, or even as a threat. In them, we might recognise our own reflection, see future possibilities, or find a sense of identification—or we might feel a sense of threat in their presence. At times, we perceive others through more than one of these lenses, almost simultaneously.

These four perceptions of otherness shape and constrain our relationships with others, and their effects are further amplified by the use of digital technologies in their various forms and manifestations. To address this, we will first define what we mean by educational relationships, drawing particularly on Vila (2019), before evaluating their connection with digital technologies and the phenomenon of hyperconnectivity.

The educational relationship is distinct because, like all education, it has a purpose that is deliberately chosen, focusing on the learner (Esteve, 2009)—an individual who must be seen as a subject with rights deserving of respect. This makes the educational relationship an ongoing source of delicate and continuous balances,

ensuring that aspects such as autonomy, freedom, respect, trust, and responsibility are preserved. The educational relationship must also be understood as one of assistance, inherently asymmetrical (though not unequal), shaped by a context and history that are crucial to its development: a relationship that starts from the other, from mediation and communication between knowledge and emotions (for which there should be no rigid methods or prejudices), always based on listening and dialogue.

This contrasts sharply with a hyperconnected reality where relationships intertwine within the virtual world, spaces dissolve, and the innovative potential of technology in education is often exaggerated, frequently treated as an end rather than a means. However, social media, artificial intelligence, and computerised learning designs are here to stay. It is not about making bold, denialist, or catastrophic claims (though we maintain that human rights must always be a red line in educational approaches), but about understanding through analysis and theorising. We therefore believe that the debate on the use of technology should be subordinated to the aims of education (Gil Cantero, 2022). The focus is not on introducing new digital products into the classroom, but on understanding pedagogical needs and how digital tools can support these objectives. To this end, we must recognise that:

> We are facing a new form of intangible materiality, which, despite its physical nature, redefines how we understand objects, spaces, and bodies, focusing less on their tangibility and more on their ability to shape our ways of being and behaving (Sánchez Rojo, et al., 2024, pp. 38-39).

Additionally, we now find ourselves in what Meirieu (2018) describes as an era of "pedagogical amnesia", reflected in a wide array of issues, including the fact that the rich body of pedagogical knowledge is almost never considered when designing and creating tools, particularly digital ones, for educational purposes. A medical analogy can serve as an illustrative example: it is similar to designing software for a robot to assist in surgical procedures while ignoring the essential medical knowledge required for these operations.

Biesta (2022) stressed that a significant issue in contemporary education is the challenge of discussing it from an educational perspective. This apparent paradox becomes evident when reflecting on digital technologies and hyperconnectivity, where pedagogical concepts are often neglected or distorted in favour of a technocratic language that prioritises instruction over education, individualism over relationality, and utility over transformation. Esteve (1979) warned of this more than forty years ago, pointing out our tendency in pedagogy to indiscriminately absorb terminologies from auxiliary sciences.

For those of us dedicated to Theory of Education, the advancement of knowledge should be of primary interest. In this regard, our field encompasses a robust line of research, both internationally and nationally, on the impact of digital technologies on education (e.g. García del Dujo, et al., 2021; Murciano Hueso, et al.,

2022; Sánchez Rojo, 2017). This is crucial for understanding educational processes rather than merely focusing on technocratic aspects. As Pattier and Reyero suggest:

> The dominance of digital technologies in education places a focus on aspects such as control, efficiency and improvement, while sidelining research into areas like the educational relationship, role-modelling or shared experience. As a result, the educational impact on identity formation is often overlooked, even though these technologies serve not only as means but also as spaces in which we live (2022, p. 227).

We therefore believe it essential to think about and research the educational relationship, as it offers a pedagogical approach that can transform experiences beyond our screens. If educating someone involves the notion of change, then relating to someone educationally means changing them, allowing them to change, and offering them pathways to this end.

3. Paradoxes of hyperconnectivity, networks, and relationships

If communication is a core aspect of the educational sphere (and of the relationships we build within it), then living in a hyperconnected world might appear beneficial; however, it is vital to continue refining our understanding in order to avoid conflating genuine communication and knowledge with mere information and data. In this regard, it is important to consider Han's argument: "with digitalisation, information attains an entirely different status. Reality itself now takes the form of information and data. (…) The informatisation of reality leads to an atrophy of the immediate, in-person experience" (Han, 2023, p. 25).

Conversely, it must be understood that we relate better when we communicate effectively, are in sync, understand each other, contextualise what we say and hear, and empathise. In short, communication is both a fundamental educational task (and arguably a prerequisite for others) and a relational activity essential for forming a pedagogical bond. The question now is whether communication improves educationally with the use of technology and under what conditions. Here, we encounter conflicting viewpoints: while technology eliminates spatial and temporal limitations (although removing distances does not necessarily equate to closer relationships), it also has drawbacks. Its fast-paced, widespread use often impoverishes language and, by extension, communication itself. Furthermore, the relentless need for change and novelty brings a decline in the depth of interactions, encouraging the consumption of information without reflection while making it harder to create lasting connections with memory. We must therefore be clear that "knowledge is required both to seek knowledge and to judge the value of the knowledge found" (Luri, 2022, p. 37).

For all these reasons, it is crucial to consider how technology is used in education, its limitations and potential, its impact and influence; we must differentiate between learning *with* technology and learning *as* technology (the digital as an

environment), bearing in mind that "there is no educational development without discourse, an approach, problematisation, or pedagogical knowledge" (Suárez et al., 2024, p. 159). Pedagogy must recognise the ideas underlying digital technologies rather than focusing solely on their applicability in education; otherwise, we risk merely scratching the surface by evaluating digital tools and environments through a predominantly instrumental lens, or at best, a formative one, rather than an educational one.

All of this should prompt in-depth reflection on how relationships are being shaped in a hyperconnected world, and how this impacts the potential to develop them educationally. To explore this, we will identify a series of elements in the form of paradoxes that allow us to reflect socially and pedagogically on this crucial issue.

3.1. *The Paradox of Attention*

Capturing attention is one thing; maintaining it is another; and using it as a necessary process to develop activities that are intellectually, emotionally, and relationally stimulating is yet another. Technologies, social media, and the Internet of Things may serve as an effective way to "capture attention", but they are also becoming a factor that erodes the ability to sustain it. For example, videos (one of the most commonly used resources in education) need to be increasingly shorter, more direct, and more attention-grabbing. Indeed, statistics show that lengthy videos are watched less frequently. We live in a society dominated by novelty and a fixation on the new, yet we are losing both our capacity to concentrate and our sense of wonder—qualities essential for acquiring knowledge. If everything on the Internet is *ever-new* and events are constantly seen as *iconic*, then ultimately, nothing truly is; instead, it becomes a continuous present with a flow of information that exists solely for consumption.

As Alba Rico (2023) aptly stated: the value of objects and bodies depends on attention itself, as we give value to what we observe at length and to that for which we wait. In the commodified world of screens, attention and patience are not valued dimensions; instead, the ethical way of seeing is distorted, and we end up being just as affected by a real death on a screen as by a film, or by the horrors of war or hunger as by advertisements. This is why it is important to embody relationships and infuse them with educational elements—relationships that require time, cultivation, and nurturing, that demand something from us and connect us to one another.

Spending long hours on the Internet does not necessarily mean we are improving our ability to concentrate; rather, it often means being seduced by audiovisual stimuli. Nor does it mean we are developing critical thinking, as we often remain passive consumers of these stimuli, which can even become addictive. Hyperstimulating our sense of wonder can lead to a somewhat conflicted relationship with the world, which negatively impacts the ability to establish educational criteria as

the foundation for relationships in classrooms or any other pedagogical setting. Furthermore, a lack of attentiveness affects how we remember experiences, which in turn limits our ability to generate original, creative ideas. When answers are instantly accessible without effort, memory becomes inhibited and no longer feels the need to retain information. All of this contributes to academic failure and social isolation. As Sánchez Rojo (2019) argues, we believe attention should be seen as an end in itself (from a philosophical perspective) rather than merely a means (as suggested by a psychological view). This implies rejecting an uncritical, overly accommodating approach to the use of technology, as attention is crucial in shaping our personality and moral subjectivity, both of which come into play in educational relationships. To achieve this, we must break away from the *imposed* need for children and young people to be constantly distracted or occupied. Today, it seems more important than ever to focus on creating those empty moments that once existed but have now been filled by screens, as such moments are essential for fostering the development of a unique personality. "Times and spaces of disconnection are the conditions that make this possible, positioning it as a fundamental educational imperative in this context" (Sánchez Rojo, 2019, p. 434).

Children and teenagers are developing their attentional networks through constant interaction with technological devices, often hundreds of times a day. Young people appear to have a constant need for changing stimuli, and find it challenging to analyse complex information for extended periods. Reading on a screen diminishes concentration and increases the likelihood of distraction. This will have consequences if it is the only way we read. It also prompts us to question whether we should continue along this path or work to counteract it. Education should broaden horizons, not reinforce students' initial constraints. It must be both conservative and disruptive and also able to discern appropriate moments and topics, as authenticity –grounded in pedagogical and ethical intentionality– constitutes another condition in establishing educational relationships. The means and instruments must not outweigh the goals of education, and the educational relationship must serve these goals. Moreover, certain higher cognitive processes cannot develop properly without attention and concentration. In short, in the future, who will carry out the tasks in professions that require them?

We must commit to cultivating mindful, pedagogical attention, understood as learning to be fully present, to savour experiences, to focus on living rather than showcasing it, and to appreciate what others bring to our lives. To achieve this, we must continue to prioritise fostering attentiveness in education and ensuring individuals feel attended to and compelled to care for others, while creating spaces and environments of trust and respect where they can see for themselves all that technology cannot offer. The role of educators –teachers– remains fundamental in this endeavour and should prompt us to reflect. Losing this reference point will only impoverish us personally and socially.

3.2. *The Paradox of Activity*

We spend much of our time in the virtual world, letting screens set the fast pace of our lives, and this is happening at increasingly younger ages. It is no coincidence that baby carriers now include mobile phone adapters (Couso, 2024), nor that young children are increasingly glued to screens while their families or friends dine at restaurants or gather socially. Screens have become distractions and a means to detach from reality –a "do not disturb" mechanism–, isolating children from their surroundings and the outside world.

Let us consider how mobile phones are being used less for making calls (now perceived as counterproductive, outdated, and even stressful) and more for sending audio messages, which offer greater control and don't demand immediate responses, while nomophobia continues to cause significant anxiety among the young and not-so-young alike. Similarly important is the rise of *phubbing* (i.e. neglecting someone in an in-person conversation by focusing on one's phone), especially among young people (Cebollero et al., 2022). It is common to see young people together, not engaging directly with each another but instead communicating through their devices (both with each other and with others), which they favour over face-to-face conversation and analogue dialogue (Bernal et al., 2023).

Screens can be useful educational tools, but they should not be used indiscriminately or for every purpose. Their effectiveness depends on how they are used: the age at which they are introduced, the timing and length of use, the educational goals they serve, and the kinds of interactions they promote. This is a topic that deserves more thoughtful consideration, as we often fail to critically evaluate how we use our time and space, instead falling into patterns that lead to oversaturation (Garcés, 2017).

Additionally, activity cannot be solely governed by what it achieves (a *like*, or the number of followers on YouTube), especially in the pedagogical realm; It must focus on educational purposes, how it impacts teaching and learning, and how it fosters interactions with others. Thought cannot develop in the same way when we delegate information processing to technology and rely on automation. Processes like reading or driving often become automated, freeing up cognitive resources for other tasks. However, extending this automation and bypassing the learning of processes (such as using maps for spatial orientation or acquiring languages) comes at a cost to cognitive development and critical thinking. As Pattier and Reyero (2022) point out, it is important to use pedagogical judgement to evaluate what type of cognitive load we wish to spare ourselves through the use of technology, as simplifying learning or reducing effort does not always lead to better outcomes. This is central to understanding the relationship that should exist between technology and education. Fostering educational relationships is essential for addressing this connection, as it allows individuals to develop critical thinking freely in a hyperconnected world.

Engaging in activities devoid of pedagogical purpose and ethical criteria is merely a way of passing time, which, when mediated by screens, turns into the consumption of images and data controlled by external algorithms.

In this regard, we have normalised spending hours looking at mobile phones, young children being absorbed in tablets while adults talk or perform other tasks, and adolescents living in worlds deeply entwined with and shaped by technology—often without adults setting an example, considering the long-term repercussions, or addressing the relational, isolation, and emotional problems it entails. This is why we insist that it is more necessary than ever to place relationships at the centre of education.

3.3. *The Paradox of Memory*

We now use screens, especially mobile phones, for nearly everything, eliminating the need to retain, recognise, or orient ourselves, resulting in what has been called *digital amnesia* (Hernández, 2016). We no longer memorise important information, relying instead on instant retrieval in the digital world; similarly, we have abandoned diaries (both physical and virtual) and embraced the notion that memorisation is unnecessary—an idea encouraged by some approaches lacking in sound pedagogical principles. Our searches are conducted in hyperconnected ways, limiting social interactions. We no longer ask for directions on the street or seek recipes from our grandmothers, and we now look to Google's top search results for advice on health matters (often without understanding the reliability or criteria behind the information). We trust the results provided by AI more than we trust a fellow human being or a book. From a pedagogical perspective, this leads to consequences such as the erosion of critical analysis skills, which are undermined by blind trust in the Internet. Relying exclusively on technology makes us mechanical and predictable, preventing us from enjoying the journey, discovering other things along the way, exploring, and experiencing the human element of the search itself. It also affects our decision-making abilities since, if we become accustomed to delegating tasks, certain cognitive and emotional processes are hindered or do not develop as they should. One way to disengage is also to delegate and abandon our own narratives, leaving them without memory:

> Human memory is selective. That is where it differs from a database. Human memory is narrative, whereas digital memory works by adding and accumulating. Narration is based on selecting and linking events. It proceeds selectively. The narrative path is narrow. Only selected events are included. A narrated or remembered life inevitably has gaps. Digital platforms, meanwhile, look to structure life without leaving any such blanks (Han, 2023, p. 44).

Unlike digital natives, today's adults remember life before the Internet. While the digital world can distract us all and diminish certain abilities through lack of

use, digital immigrants are better equipped to address these effects than digital natives, who have never experienced alternative ways of processing, visualising, memorising, managing, or planning—skills now taken for granted. This "delegation of memory", combined with the growing reliance on obtaining information almost exclusively from social media or AI, has already led organisations like UNESCO to issue reports such as AI and the Holocaust. *Rewriting history? The impact of artificial intelligence on understanding the Holocaust* (2024). The report warns that generative AI is putting memory of the Holocaust at risk, not only by allowing bad actors to disseminate misinformation and hate speech, but also by generating false, distorted, or misleading content. Instances of false testimonies, manipulated historical documents, and fake images and audio have all been identified. Additionally, it has been shown that generative AI models are prone to "inventing" events, characters, and even historical occurrences when they lack sufficient information or rely on faulty data. The spread of this content over social media makes young people particularly vulnerable in terms of basic ethical principles and human rights. It is therefore crucial to heed Luri's warning and stop assuming that knowledge can simply be found online without any further effort or even the guidance of a teacher, dismissing the importance of relationships and ignoring the fact that, without prior knowledge and a framework to organise new ideas, information merely accumulates without reshaping our thinking, much like Vygotsky suggested. In summary: "Information may disappear from the cloud, but knowledge endures; knowledge is information that has been processed, reflected on, and stored in long-term memory" (Luri, 2022, p.37).

In short, the relentless flow of current events and fleeting narratives isolates us from history, stripping us of a sense of historicity and leaving us in a perpetual present of consumption and sensory overstimulation where contemplation, reflection, and meaningful connections are increasingly difficult. Preserving and emphasising memory and promoting an education that encourages connection (where educators embrace their role in helping us manage the overwhelming data we encounter) is therefore crucial, as interpreting this information demands educational effort to prevent us from drifting and losing our critical capacity in the relentless tide of technology.

3.4. *The Paradox of Privacy and Prohibition*

Privacy has become a commodity, transformed by the compulsion to share our every action—an activity that, for many, now outweighs the significance of the experience itself. And all this is shaped by a superficial understanding of virtual relationships, where *likes* and friend requests are amassed like commodities, fostering a false sense of popularity that can impact mental health. Social media influencers, online anonymity, and the prevalence of bots have fuelled the rise of hate speech, creating an environment conducive to online abuse and harassment, often resulting in severe psychological consequences, particularly for adolescents

and young people, and increasingly for children. Indeed, many young people now keep their mobile phones constantly at hand, even while sleeping, ready to use at all hours of the night. Meanwhile, the consequences of sharing or surrendering private information through every app we use, thereby enriching a few while depriving the majority of their time and distorting the very concept of leisure, are becoming increasingly apparent.

This phenomenon is profoundly influencing the construction of new forms of intimacy and "extimacy", altering perceptions of what is private and, therefore, what may constitute potential violations of rights for others (Vila, 2019). This is an issue that calls for a more in-depth educational analysis, as intimacy and freedom are two closely linked aspects that reflect the delicate balance between public and private life today (Tello, 2013). Examining how intimacy transforms into extimacy in many aspects of daily life is a crucial factor to consider in educational relationships.

We must also stress that digital activity is governed by algorithms. From social media to search engines, everything is designed around commercial interests and filter bubbles (the information we receive is shaped by our consumption habits and search patterns). The same is true for AI, which reflects the biases of its programmers, who embed their prejudices into the decision-making processes of these systems. Current generative AI depends on machine learning, which requires vast amounts of data (and energy resources, an often-overlooked ecological cost of hyperconnectivity) that extend far beyond the original purposes (e.g. digital translators). A significant part of this is personal data, jeopardising the privacy of many individuals; after all, privacy is power (Véliz, 2021). This issue increasingly concerns governments and international organisations (for example, the European Union is pioneering legislation in this area, and the Spanish government has developed a Digital Rights Charter). Here, our first reflection is the need to break away from viewing technology and its development as inevitable, acknowledging instead that it ultimately depends on humans—its creators and programmers. If technology is designed without consideration for the common good and ethical criteria, the issues that arise are due to this lack of foresight rather than the technology itself. Regulations and limits are therefore necessary, albeit these should not be confused with restrictions on freedom. As Reyero and Gil Cantero (2019) aptly noted: the education that limits is the one that liberates. This perspective is particularly relevant to debates around banning mobile phones in schools. Two key issues must be distinguished in this context: firstly, pedagogical judgement should be the main criterion for making such decisions, rather than trends or the false sense of urgency often generated by social media; secondly, we must always distinguish between prohibition and repression, just as we differentiate between authority and authoritarianism—two essential concepts for constructing educational relationships.

We can therefore say that there are healthy, reasonable, liberating prohibitions that should not be questioned, just as there are things that are not explicitly prohibited

because they are socially understood to be unacceptable or to violate fundamental rights (although this does not mean they cannot be legally sanctioned). In contrast, freedom of expression or the right to protest are repressed when prohibited. As Alba Rico (2024) argues, the absence of freedom is not caused by prohibiting too many things, but rather by failing to prohibit enough; for instance, profiting financially from housing or healthcare is not prohibited.

Ignoring the presence of mobile phones and technological devices is no longer feasible; while it is important to consider the negative effects these devices can have on children and young people, outright prohibition may not be the best approach. Instead, delaying their use or imposing restrictions, much like how we limit minors' access to harmful substances, could be a viable strategy. In such cases, decisions about access and limitations should be guided by pedagogical judgement. We therefore believe, as Sánchez Rojo (2017) argues, that protecting privacy should involve more than teaching the ethical use of technology; it is equally important to educate about the value of disconnecting from devices, framing this as a positive choice rather than a punishment. Achieving this requires creating private spaces, fostering intimacy, enriching our inner lives, and recognising that it is not necessary to be permanently connected to find meaning in who we are and what we do.

Efforts are underway to emphasise the benefits of these processes, including their potential for research and dissemination, while other perspectives focus on the relational dimension of technologies, describing what is known as the RICT (Relational, Information, and Communication Technologies) era, which advocates for interactivity and for fostering a more active and participatory role in communication and technological networks, transitioning from passive consumers to prosumers (Gil Quintana, 2023). The aim is to make screen-mediated processes feel more human by focusing on the relational aspects of all human experiences, including those facilitated through technology (Gabelas and Marta, 2020).

In this regard, we should advocate for education where activity and knowledge do not rely on technology (except when pedagogically appropriate), where interactions with others are not mediated by technology, where privacy is valued rather than commodified, and where educational relationships take precedence. Empathy, welcoming, genuine communication, and human contact are irreplaceable; if educators relinquish or deny their authority, freedom is undermined, as "truly democratic pedagogical authority never curtails the student's freedom, and understands real discipline not as the silence of the silenced but as the stir of the restless, in the doubt it provokes, in the hope it awakens" (Freire, 1997, p. 90).

The integration of digital technologies in education has become nearly indispensable (or at least perceived as such) due to the influence of numerous technology gurus, companies, multinationals, publishers, and platforms with vested interests, leading to its perception as a (false) prerequisite for discussing educational innovation. Moreover, by using these tools, we hand vast amounts of data over to educational platforms and apps, further compromising privacy—a breach we accept without

question. This process has consumed, or at least curtailed, the potential to explore alternative educational approaches or move away from practices that have played a key role in the history of education, while also shaping and conditioning how relationships develop in the classroom.

Meanwhile, we face a somewhat schizoid reality. In one sense, we continue to take pride in what we are and what we can accomplish (even with technological assistance), as demonstrated in sports, despite knowing that machines can perform the same tasks more efficiently and quickly. By contrast, we are increasingly distancing ourselves from what is human and the anthropological dimension of education, as evinced by the rise of transhumanist and posthumanist movements.

In this regard, we find the pitfalls of these approaches, as applied to the pedagogical sphere and outlined by Gil Cantero (2022), particularly compelling. The concept of human development is diminished and distorted when reduced to a project of technological dominance, focused on highly individualistic strategies for self-improvement, designed primarily to eliminate effort, with the cognitive and relational consequences this brings. Yet, at the same time, we are very eager for AI to generate novels and create artwork, raising questions about the very boundaries of art. In short, instead of using AI to handle routine tasks and allow us more time for creativity, we often ask it to "be creative" itself (even though its output is essentially just imitations with varying degrees of sophistication) or to constantly provide us with fictional or alternative realities, frequently producing images or videos for misleading or unethical purposes. Here the boundaries are uncertain, and the technical possibilities are becoming ever more sophisticated. For that very reason, ethics must be increasingly present, with education serving as a reference point; indeed how we navigate relationships in this context will also define our capacity for discernment, critical thinking, autonomy, and creativity.

In a world where "knowledge" (and *likes*) is just a click away, these apparent contradictions lead us back to fundamental questions: why should we learn content, and why is it important to learn how to relate to others in education? One approach might be to maximise the relational possibilities of technology by incorporating interactive and relational elements into its use in education, which can be highly beneficial. Another approach is to use technology to tackle the very challenges it creates: issues with attention, memory, critical thinking, questioning of knowledge, emotional regulation, and the complexity of relationships. And yet there is a more radical and necessary alternative: to educate without technology, to create moments for relationships free from technological mediation.

4. Conclusion

In our intricate, technology-driven society, education should not be subservient to technological change; instead, technology should complement educational

processes grounded in pedagogical expertise and human rights, addressing their inherent challenges.

Biesta (2022) argues that being in the world as an adult entails accepting that things and the world are not as we wish them to be. In this sense, the way algorithms shape the world to fit our desires may hinder the growth of maturity that comes from genuine experiences, rather than those designed to avoid discomfort or challenge. This results in paradoxes akin to those previously discussed and exacerbates issues with emotional regulation, contributing to the emergence of violent behaviours driven by inadequate resources for managing frustration or adversity, a phenomenon linked to increasingly dichotomous, binary, and superficial thinking. Algorithms mirror our preferences, presenting perspectives that reinforce our existing views. This diminishes dissent and restricts exposure to alternative perspectives, perpetuating a cycle of self-referentiality. In this sense,

> we must move beyond an education centred on recommendations for using social media, and instead focus on one that addresses affective, relational, communicational, and informational processes: an education aimed at managing exposure on social media and fostering self-regulation, helping learners understand that the boundary between online and offline is increasingly blurred (Murciano et al., 2022, p. 11).

As discussed throughout, fostering educational relationships therefore offers the opportunity to broaden and diversify experiences, knowledge, and values. Our relationships with others –relationships that require forms of presence and time, trust and authority, respect and freedom– are more essential than ever. That is why we must advocate for a pedagogy that resists immediacy, safeguards spaces for reflecting on ideas and emotions, and prioritises empathy—an increasingly challenging quality to nurture in a screen-dominated world. Faced with virtual objects that control and monitor reality (from health and consumption to education and leisure), we must advocate for educational relationships in which we mutually see and recognise each other as human beings, respecting our physical presence, because we are embodied beings who must value and care for our bodies. This is one way to escape the homogenisation inherent in the digital world. Even within the digital realm, there is a relational need that must be nurtured without excluding physical connections, as the

> digital human needs others to confirm their presence and existence online, to reaffirm their true identity, to accept themselves, and to understand what is happening to them, what they do, and what they feel. The network not only enables individuals to be heard and feel accompanied, but also reshapes how individuals are and exist within a group, since technology, when understood as culture, is fundamentally social (García del Dujo et al., 2021, pp. 15-16).

Drawing on these reference points, we would like to emphasise that, from a pedagogical perspective, it is crucial to resist the tyranny of the "permanent present"

(Meirieu, 2018) and the notion of immediacy as the sole existing reality; this involves adopting a conservative stance in anthropological terms (Alba Rico, 2023) and focusing, beyond the ideas already presented, on three emerging issues arising from this work, which are essential for reflection and action: ensure that relationships in both the physical and virtual spheres can be considered educational relationships (Vila, 2019); educationally address how hyperconnected identities must not be diluted by moral and cultural relativism, establishing ways to rethink emerging realities from the perspective of interculturality; and value education not merely as an instructive or formative adjunct subsumed by technology, but as a guiding reference that illuminates our path toward the future.

Finally, we would like to end with a quotation written directly in the digital world, which underscores the need for philosophy (and theory of education) to nurture educational relationships. These words were written by José Saramago (2010) and posted to his blog on the very day of his passing:

> I believe that, in today's society, we lack philosophy. Philosophy as a space, a place, a method of reflection, which may have no concrete objective, unlike science, which advances to meet objectives. We lack reflection, thought; we need the work of thinking, and it seems to me that, without ideas, we are going nowhere.

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