

**EPISTEMOLOGY AND EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS FOR A DIGITAL HUMANISM**

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***EPISTEMOLOGÍA Y EDUCACIÓN: REFLEXIONES PARA UN HUMANISMO DIGITAL***



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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to present the concept of Digital Humanism, through the emerging need for an epistemological sense for educational practices in the context of multiple human relationships that have experiences with digital technologies. The proposal deepens the sense of a Digital Humanism, through the understanding of a new humanism, cyberculture and the complexity of educational practices in the relationship between the physical and the digital, in the teaching and learning process. The work has a qualitative and hermeneutical character, with a dialectical understanding. The research paths dialogue, initially on the meaning of philosophical gnoseology demonstrated by theories of knowledge over time, with an emphasis on modernity. Subsequently, the understanding of the conception of a new contemporary humanism in social relations, in particular, in pedagogical work in the face of cyberculture and complexity.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Humanism. Epistemology. Cyberculture.

**RESUMO:** Este estudo tem por objetivo apresentar o conceito de Humanismo Digital, mediante a necessidade emergente de um sentido epistemológico para as práticas educativas no contexto das múltiplas relações humanas que possuem vivências com as tecnologias digitais. A proposta aprofunda o sentido de um Humanismo Digital, por meio da compreensão de um novo humanismo, da cibercultura e da complexidade das práticas educativas na relação entre o físico e o digital, no processo de ensino e de aprendizagem. O trabalho tem caráter qualitativo e hermenêutico, com uma compreensão dialética. Os caminhos da pesquisa dialogam, inicialmente, sobre o sentido da gnosiologia filosófica demonstrado pelas teorias do conhecimento ao longo do tempo, com ênfase da modernidade. Posteriormente, o entendimento da concepção de um novo humanismo contemporâneo nas relações sociais, em especial, no fazer pedagógico diante da cibercultura e da complexidade.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Humanismo Digital. Epistemologia. Cibercultura.

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar el concepto de Humanismo Digital, a través de la necesidad emergente de un sentido epistemológico para las prácticas educativas en el contexto de múltiples relaciones humanas que tienen experiencias con las tecnologías digitales. La propuesta profundiza el sentido de un Humanismo Digital, a través de la comprensión de un nuevo humanismo, la cibercultura y la complejidad de las prácticas educativas en la relación entre lo físico y lo digital, en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje. El trabajo tiene un carácter cualitativo y hermenéutico, con una comprensión dialéctica. Los caminos de investigación dialogan, inicialmente, sobre el sentido de la gnosiología filosófica demostrado por las teorías del conocimiento a lo largo del tiempo, con énfasis en la modernidad. Posteriormente, la comprensión de la concepción de un nuevo humanismo contemporáneo en las relaciones sociales, en particular, en el trabajo pedagógico frente a la cibercultura y la complejidad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Humanismo Digital. Epistemologia. Cibercultura.

## Introduction

The present study presents the concept of “Digital Humanism”, based on an epistemological sense in contemporary educational practices. The intention of this study involves teacher training and the use of TDIC (Digital Information and Communication Technologies) in the context of cyberculture. Initially, the question is: what is the meaning of this so-called Digital Humanism in the contemporary teaching and learning process? Will such questions be part of teaching practice given the complexity of these human relationships in education?

It is known that the changes present in the contemporary educational scenario, at its different levels, have been remarkable with the relationship between technologies and the educational environment experienced by the community in the different teaching segments. Thus, it is necessary to observe new times and spaces of learning as an essential characteristic of different contemporary pedagogical contexts, with a redefinition of spaces in the construction of knowledge and the organization of the means and ends of the cognitive act immersed in the sociocultural context that permeates education.

The possibilities of this analysis are based on assumptions that contextualize pedagogical practice in the teacher's daily life and in their different pedagogical actions. Freire (1996) already encouraged reflection on thinking about education in the process of training “being a teacher” so that it is not an activity of mere transmission of knowledge but, rather, the creation of possibilities for its own production or construction.

From this analysis of the sociocultural context, seeking to reflect on human relationships, an agreed conception of what we consider to be “Digital Humanism” emerges. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the founding elements of the philosophical meaning of an epistemology that is presented for teaching in the context of cyberculture and Digital Humanism that has been evident.

Expand the dialogue on perspectives in the conceptions of education based on cyberculture, cyberspace and Collective Intelligence, guided by Pierre Levy (1999), mirror the relationship of human pedagogical “doing” and dialogue with the context of teacher training in the face of the complex transformations experienced by students is what drives this study.

As research presented, our study follows a bibliographic methodology, with a qualitative focus, of a hermeneutic and dialectical nature. It essentially discusses the concept of “Digital Humanism” from the educational perspective inherent to pedagogical practice.

We understand that, faced with a context in which the times and spaces for the construction of learning are demarcated by the constant presence of the digital in a hybrid world, in which a pedagogical practice is inseparable in a fragmented way of the real and the virtual, it is essential to deepen “Digital Humanism” from the perspective of understanding its epistemological foundations.

### **Epistemology and Education: a necessary philosophical rescue**

Changes in the technological context directly affect the educational community. This is an indisputable fact and, therefore, it is necessary to rethink educational processes. As Morin (2002) states, when rethinking the teaching process, relearning how to teach, how to be with students, how to guide activities, how to define what is “worth” doing to learn, together or separately, is a permanent challenge to the teacher.

Such changes are part of a reconstruction of human experiences and what we can present as a characteristic of what we call “Digital Humanism” in education. In the search for a deeper understanding of this understanding, it is necessary to philosophically revisit the bases of theories of knowledge.

Evidently, this form of understanding, based on the concept of “Digital Humanism”, involves a more complex analysis, within the scope of a philosophical understanding of the epistemological elements to be addressed when we look at educational action in contemporary times. In an attempt to create a coherent study path for the challenge presented, we chose to bring the epistemological and philosophical elements that emerged in the gnosiology of philosophical eras. Our mission would be almost impossible if the attempt were to bring together all the philosophical elements that make up gnosiology. Therefore, we chose to present a dialogue with some of the exponents of theories of philosophical knowledge, with an emphasis on Modernity.

Since the Renaissance, which marked a paradigmatic change in the way of conceiving and understanding the world, in what we call Modern Philosophy, the anthropocentric perspective and the development of a modern epistemology were milestones in the educational process that will follow in subsequent centuries.

The reflections of Modernity brought to Philosophy an anthropocentric humanitarian character, in which the understanding of the modern world was remarkable, based on scientific advancement and the development of capitalism. In this sense, Philosophy had its gnosiological

perspective highlighted in the attempt to understand the human. Modern conceptions developed rationalist, empiricist and critical ideals, and promoted a debate around the issue of human knowledge (REALE, 2003).

The rationalist perspective affirms the construction of knowledge through reason, which is to guide a methodology for analyzing theories of knowledge that should be detached from the relationship between knowledge and the senses. That is, it was necessary to trace a path in which knowledge would be organized from the perspective of rational abstraction, with the predominance of the faculties of the human mind to provide this knowledge. At this point, it is the human mind, through reason, that knows, and experience is not a support point for the promotion of knowledge as it is flawed and misleading, according to rationalists.

Descartes plays an essential role in the construction of man and it is only through the rational method, through methodical doubt, that it becomes possible to achieve and substantiate knowledge. Descartes, in his work *Rules for the Direction of the Spirit* (2003, p. 31), argues about the importance of the mental constitution and its inference in the construction of knowledge: “The whole method consists of the order and arrangement of the objects to which it is necessary to direct the penetration of the mind, in order to discover some truth.” In other words, through the rational method, with the presence of Cartesian doubt, knowledge occurs, with the meanings and empirical perspective being false and misleading.

As an epistemological construction of understanding this digital humanism that makes up educational analysis, the humanist conception also permeates the modern bias of rationality, in which anthropocentric foundations from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment will make up the humanitarian reflexive matrices. The human being is, from this modern perspective, placed at the center of philosophical reflections. Such approaches permeate the understanding of human relationships thought of from the perspective of the person as a subject of action and transformation.

It is worth noting that modern humanitarian understanding is also a point of criticism regarding school educational practices when they determine an extremely rationalist and traditional epistemological character in pedagogical action.

In Contemporary Philosophy, debates around theories of knowledge are expanding, in which contemporary thinkers awaken to a series of philosophical trends aligned with reflections on the development of modern sciences and also their impacts on contemporary times. The look at the human permeates this entire context which, in the 20th century, will have a special demarcation, due to the global reflection of major conflicts and social systems (REALE, 2003).

In terms of the attempt to understand humanism in this philosophical context, the existentialist perspective will work on the human bias of human formation, in which existence is the basis of essence. With the maxim that “existence precedes essence”, Sartre (1987) presents us with human understanding.

In line with educational reflections, contemporary times show us a gnosiological understanding with an emphasis on the study of the subject in the learning process. In an attempt to understand such propositions, we will analyze the relationship between Philosophy and Education, with the possibility of thinking about what represents the transition from a tendency to look at the process of knowledge more as a more traditional format to an epistemology that considers the subject active in this teaching and learning process.

### **Philosophy and Education: the conversion to an epistemology of the active subject**

The dimension of humanism permeates in the future the creation of habits of reflection and self-reflection linked to personal reference which, in our study, is linked to an educational context of cyberculture, in which digital humanism will conceive the meaning of educational practice in the face of the complexity of hybrid relationship between the real world and the digital world.

From the constitution of knowledge based on the action of the educational subject, it is important to highlight learning theories in which the educational subject plays an essential role in the construction of knowledge. One of these theories is part of the New School or new school movement, which emerged at the end of the 19th century, with the aim of proposing new paths for education. For Aranha (1997), this new trend came to represent the effort to overcome the Pedagogy of essence by the Pedagogy of existence. This is aimed at the unique, differentiated individual, who lives and interacts in a dynamic world.

On the basis of understanding, from the active subject, the student is the center of the teaching and learning process, with the child's learning conditions being prioritized. The teacher strives to promote the student's attention and curiosity, without taking away their spontaneity. The focus is not on transmitting content vertically, but on building knowledge from the student's perspective, seeing them as subjects in the learning process.

In view of this approach to teaching trends, the pedagogical revolution is explicit with the shift of the teacher as the center in the teaching process to the student taking on the main role. This change in assumptions with the transition from a teacher-centered view to a view

based on the student's conditions, the latter as an agent in the learning process and a direct participant in the construction of the pedagogical act, gives rise to a revolution in teaching methods.

In this sense, given the complex environment experienced in contemporary society, which involves educational concerns so that teachers and others involved in this environment seek new ways, new methods of teaching, some questions emerge: what is the importance and contribution of autonomy to learning? How to develop student autonomy?

Regarding the need for methodological change in teaching, Dalbosco (2011, p. 108, our translation), states that we live in a “[...] era driven by enlightenment and could no longer accept that children were treated as miniature adults, as, on the contrary, they should be educated to overcome the condition of minority.”

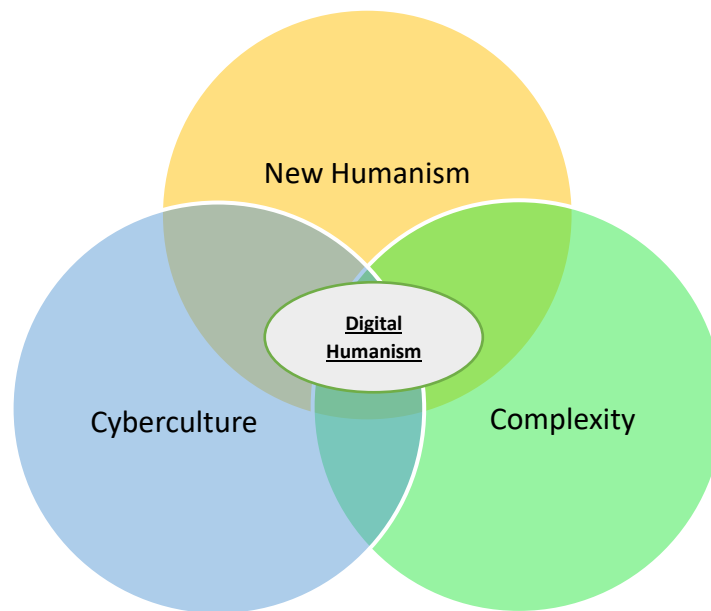
Faced with this complex environment that involves an educational concern, making teachers and everyone involved in this environment look for new ways, new methods of how to teach certain concerns, all with the aim of enabling new approaches to educational policies and teacher training. Such propositions, in the contemporary context, need to be thought of from a Digital Humanism.

### **Cyberculture context: a Digital Humanism in education?**

The reflections surrounding the presentation of the concept of Digital Humanism in education are linked to the dynamic context that education experiences and in which the use of digital technologies is present in the daily life of the educational community.

This initial observation returns to a sense of a Digital Humanism that occurs as a result of this entire process, but which, unlike the conception, the result of a result, is seen as a continuous process. Initially, to understand the bases of Digital Humanism, we will look for the sources of this humanism based on the “new Humanism”, the constructions of cyberculture and the experience of complexity in the context of a digital world, as shown in figure 1:

**Figure 1 – Digital Humanism**



Source: Prepared by the authors

Therefore, as a process of humanization, to better understand the proposal of this new concept (Digital Humanism) it will be necessary to understand the relationships of the “new humanism”. Tapio Varis and Pérez Tornero (2012), bring us the idea of new humanism in education based on the creation of a more inclusive society, in which it is sought that all human beings have the opportunity to acquire knowledge through an education of quality.

The bases of the conception of New Humanism presented by Tapio Varis and Pérez Tornero (2012) are in global society, in which it is necessary to give priority and respect to cultural multiplicity and diversity, supporting universal dialogue based on a culture of peace.

In understanding the meaning of a New Humanism, they expand the debate around the meaning of media literacy, which, to be achieved, is based on the full individual development of the human being to develop and have autonomy in the contemporary media context. Tapio Varis and Pérez Tornero (2012, p. 20, our translation): “[...] *this will only be achieved based on a philosophy and an axiological framework that places the human person – and its achievement – at the center of the technological, communicative, social and cultural system. It is this philosophy that we call new humanism*”.

In the understanding of New Humanism in view of the philosophical conceptions already presented throughout this essay, the search for reflection around the values and principles of philosophy and morals, which have historically been adapted and presented



reflections around the sense of humanity and human dignity: “ We call *humanism*, because it recognises, it is essential, the values and principles of a philosophical and moral current” (VARIS; TORNERO, 2012, p. 20, our translation).

This conception goes beyond the Renaissance vision, as it situates contemporary values with the sense of humanity. In the words of Tapio Varis and Pérez Tornero (2012, p. 21, our translation): “[...] *new because it is about going further from the memory to a past and from a Renaissance metaphor. What we pursue is to situate the values of human dignity in the current context of that society*”.

As presented, the conception of New Humanism takes up an essential meaning of Philosophy, which is the problematization based on the context in which we are inserted. How is this new humanism reflected in education? Is it possible to say that this New Humanism would no longer be being experienced and/or transformed from a Digital Humanism?

Tapio Varis and Tornero (2012) present us with the need to rethink this New Humanism also from a perspective that starts from the analysis of the need to place the human person at the center of media civilization, in the face of the multiple technical and artificial changes in which we live. The aforementioned authors affirm the need to understand the critical meaning of technological innovation, as well as the search for critical autonomy in the context of globalization. “Así pues, a lucid media conscience and a new humanism are, today for today, inseparable questions” (VARIS; TORNERO, 2012, p. 48, our translation). Given the context of this New Humanism presented by Varis and Tornero (2012), it refers to new sociocultural competencies and consequences, in the communicative context, which is essential for us to design a sphere of Digital Humanism. We observed that the information society has, among its elements, as a sociocultural consequence, the predominance of technology in the organization of society.

Given this location of the New Humanism, and therefore, as a sphere of Digital Humanism, the educational process also enters a new dynamic. It reads:

[...] y, por tanto, el nuevo currículo de alfabetización mediática que contiene— debe procurar acomodar *el entorno tecnológico* (Sur) a la *persona* y a sus *facultades propias* (Norte), dándole al ser humano la prioridad que se merece. Y, al mismo tiempo, debe situar a esta persona, este ser humano, entre *la exigencia de universalidad* —que se desprende de la *globalización* (Este)— y *la exigencia de diversidad* —que depende de las *comunidades de base* y de la *idiosincrasia personal* (Oeste)—. En estos ejes cardinales debe basarse el nuevo humanismo de nuestro siglo que la alfabetización mediática debe impulsar (VARIS; TORNERO, 2012, p. 122, our translation).

In addition to this process in the way of understanding the curriculum, it is essential to understand such transformations in the guidelines that involve teacher training. In this sense, the teacher, according to Varis and Tornero (2012), will maintain the essential functions that he has always performed, and will acquire others, among which continued training, knowledge of digital technologies, sharing of knowledge with colleagues can be highlighted and the relationship with students in digital skills.

The second conception that gives meaning to Digital Humanism must also be studied from the cybercultural experience. Lévy (1999) presents us with a dynamic of meanings and understanding of the sociocultural relationship that we experience in contemporary education and that will support Digital Humanism here.

Based on this understanding, we cannot fail to discuss technological transformations in education with society. In a world of interconnections, between the physical and the digital, the thesis that we live in Digital Humanism is our proposal to rethink the processes of contemporary education as well.

The learning moment needs to consider a student who experiences Digital Humanity. This way of living constitutes digital humanism in pedagogical practice. Anyone who disregards this sociocultural and cybercultural fact is disregarding the form of education in the context of the 21st century. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the proposed understanding of what we call Digital Humanism, in the humanistic sense of teaching practice, and its teaching and learning relationship with the student who is immersed in this cyberculture scenario.

Initially, Lévy (1999) presents us with a neologism called “Cyberculture”. Linked to the social educational context, cyberculture, then, provokes us to experience new human relationships that are “inter” and “intra” related to educational processes that go beyond the physical exclusivity of the classroom.

In this recovery of the meaning of the expression cyberculture, Lévy (1999) specifies the set of techniques (material and immaterial), practices, attitudes, ways of thinking and values that develop together with the growth of cyberspace. Would it, then, be possible to rethink school organization based on this context of cyberculture, in which pedagogical learning relationships are immersed, and it is no longer permitted to imagine a decoupling of this social dynamic in educational action, in which the meaning of teaching is given new meaning?

When analyzing this social meaning of cyberculture, it is possible to affirm that the origin of cyberculture is linked by a convergence between the social and the technological.

Lemos (2020, p. 92, our translation) states: “Cyberculture is not a cybernetization of society, but the tribalization of cybernetics”.

Also revisiting Lévy, we learn about the idea of cyberspace and its relationship with cyberculture. In the words of Lévy (1999, p. 17, our translation): “cyberspace (which I will also call a network) is the new means of communication that arises from the global interconnection of computers”.

When thinking about this projection of the study of teacher training in the cyberculture environment, the understanding of cyberspace awakens the educational dynamics in the exercise of different elements that surround their daily activities, in which the technological environment generates new spaces for building relationships and experiences.

In this way, we can also observe the cultural influences that these changes would bring to the teaching identity and pedagogical practice. Establishing such relationships in the construction and definitions between cyberculture and cyberspace and their pedagogical relationships, we can also question ourselves about the meaning that pedagogical action will gain and its new directions in relation to Digital Humanism, both due to the “disruptive” processes in human experience guided by numerous transformations of digital technologies such as that experienced by the COVID 19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>.

Through the recurring and consequent transformations of a reconfiguration of what we call Digital Humanism in human relations, we have effects resulting from this cyberculture movement, combined with what Lemos (2020) presents to us as digital interactivity. For the author, this form of interactivity is a type of technosocial relationship and, in this sense, can influence and trigger a change in user behavior.

Lemos (2020), also, highlights the physical barriers, which are already being overcome with the idea of virtual interlocutors and a relationship that is no longer passive or representative, but rather active through the principle of simulation.

We can then ask ourselves: Is Digital Humanism not presenting itself here based on this change in the form of human relations? And in education, won't this Digital Humanism bring about strong transformations in the way we understand teaching and learning processes?

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<sup>3</sup> “COVID-19 is a disease caused by the coronavirus, called SARS-CoV-2, which presents a clinical spectrum ranging from asymptomatic infections to severe conditions. According to the World Health Organization, the majority (around 80%) of patients with COVID-19 may be asymptomatic or oligosymptomatic (few symptoms), and approximately 20% of detected cases require hospital care due to respiratory distress, of which approximately 5% may require ventilatory support” (MINAS GERAIS, 2020, our translation).

In an attempt to broaden the meaning of the implications of Digital Humanism in education, it is important to deepen the meaning of this context of Levy's cyberculture. As he states: "It is impossible to separate the human from the material world, as well as from the signs and images through which he attributes meaning to life and the world" (LÉVY, 1999, p. 22, our translation).

Cyberculture brings elements that give new meaning to the humanitarian meaning of human relationships in their different presentations, times and levels of coverage. Feeding this reflection allows us to think pedagogically about educational experiences at different levels and contexts of construction of the dimensions of this Digital Humanism.

Given the reflections, seeking to give meaning to the understanding of Digital Humanism, it is up to us to understand this proposition, also, from the meaning of the human complexity of relationships, in which the thinker Edgar Morin (2001) presents us with an understanding of the complexity of human relationships in the contemporary world.

Digital Humanism, in the process of its constitution and existence, is present in a third bias, which involves complexity. The humanitarian elements of this conception are presented by the complexity theory proposed by Edgar Morin (2001).

The human being as a human being is a rational being, but it is not limited to this rationality, having to be seen in its complexity, with the experiential practice in which the individual is inserted being of fundamental importance. In other words, it is necessary to be able to position oneself in the face of reality.

This perspective of reflection also transposes the perspectives of uncertainty and curiosity, as well as the visualization of the human being in its complexity. The contextualization of knowledge and the multidimensional character of human action make it possible to visualize learning from experience in the world, which, according to Freire (1996), is based on the use of students' knowledge and experiences.

In his theory, Morin (2011) identifies the importance of rethinking the construction of knowledge with reference to the global and complex context to mobilize what knowledgeable man knows about the world. To this end, Digital Humanism reinvents itself in complex cybercultural relationships.

Being understood in complexity, we will be able to understand the student who experiences different processes of time and space of learning, behavior and attitudes. It is not possible to disregard the human complexity that permeates the student's life world, as part of this Digital Humanism.

What is necessary to understand in the educational process is that the existence of this Digital Humanism in contemporary education cannot be denied. On the contrary, it is necessary to understand it and understand it more and more, so that the meaning of pedagogical practice is established in connection with the student's reality as an element of transformation and change. Educating in the 21st century means educating from Digital Humanism, a space in which networks dialogue and subjects interact and learn.

### **Final remarks**

Education that seeks to humanize subjects must turn its attention to the importance of the dialogical relationship, that is, a construction in the learning process guided by the appreciation of the construction that the student has throughout his life.

Our proposal was that this educational construction occurs based on the understanding of Digital Humanism. A look at human experience, which can be understood from the intersection of three fundamental concepts: New Humanism, Cyberculture and Complexity. Digital Humanism, as a form of sociocultural experience, when understood will awaken a different look at the teacher training process, in which teaching and learning encourage the development of skills and abilities so that they respond to new human experiences, in the context of a world hybrid (physical and digital).

Educating is asking yourself questions about the goals you seek, the value of events and the possibilities of action. Therefore, the understanding of Digital Humanism provokes the awakening of those who provide epistemological support to the process of human formation. Discernment about the possibilities of Digital Humanism in the contemporary educational context has its meaning based on philosophical foundations, regarding the pedagogically active subject. The understanding of Digital Humanism is based on the new humanism, the context of cyberculture and human complexity.

Digital Humanism will enable a reconstruction of the educational training process, a continuous improvement of pedagogical praxis and the necessary intellectual enrichment of the educational process. Based on theory and practice, the foundations of Digital Humanism interpose the conception of the student's comprehensive training, demonstrating the ways for them to know themselves and experience the cybercultural world in their sociocultural surroundings.

Starting from the conceptions of Varis and Tornero (2012), the meaning of a New Humanism is contextualized and leads to rethinking the teaching training meaning towards the new student, but which is the result of a context of intense disruptions of the global and connected society. The New Humanism requires a professional who guides their teaching practices, not leaving behind the experiences already consolidated throughout their training, but who understands the dynamics that new times challenge in the act of educating in the contemporary context.

The perspective of the media literacy process considered by Varis and Tornero (2012) refers to an entire restructuring in the way of understanding contemporary education and provides the basis for what we call here Digital Humanism.

We understand that this educational process is not simple or fragmented and, therefore, needs to be understood in complexity. The third interface of Digital Humanism is understood by Edgar Morin's complexity theory (2001), in which the human being is seen in its entirety and education needs to dialogue with the world of relationships that is human existence.

Therefore, it can be said that the study presented on Digital Humanism seeks to expand the possibilities of understanding an epistemological sense for educational practices in the context of multiple human relationships with digital technologies.

We seek to deepen the meaning of Digital Humanism, through the understanding of a new humanism, cyberculture and the complexity of educational practices. From the complex cybercultural space, the educational experiences of teachers and students coexist with Digital Humanism. In short, educating in contemporary times is educating based on an understanding of Digital Humanism.

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