Un Piano Dalton virtuale per l'italiano LS: scongiurare la distopia attraverso percorsi individuali, collaborazione e responsabilità sociale nell'apprendimento online

A Dissertation Defense by

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As demonstrated by recent advances in the field of education, machines and the internet are growing ever more prominent and central in most learning contexts. Thus, although enrollment in certain foreign language classes has gradually declined over the last decade, machine and internet usage (namely, the usage of online courses) are rapidly growing in American higher education. At the same time, hybrid and distance learning bring with them many changes to pre-digital learning regimes that carry both advantages and disadvantages.

This dissertation presents a framework for an online asynchronous platform for Italian language learning that aims to prevent the potential dehumanization caused by computerized learning. The platform seeks to avoid some of the primary disadvantages that have been identified in studies evaluating both the formats of learning courses and the tools for foreign language acquisition currently available online.

The structure of the proposed platform is based on the model of Helen Parkhurst's Dalton Plan model. The Dalton Plan is a progressivist school system created and tested between 1910 and 1920 in Dalton, Massachusetts. It was considered by intellectuals to be one of the most successful attempts at individualized learning in the field of mass education at that time. The Dalton Plan primarily reflects the tenets of social constructivist theories, which place students' motivation and collaboration at the center of learning. It also combines other fundamental elements from contemporary educational theories, such as Gardner's multiple intelligences, digital literacies, memory studies, and the prominent twenty-first century notion of social responsibility, to create an efficient virtual environment for Italian language learning. This dissertation contends that such a combination of ingredients could contribute to a both philosophy and a modality of online learning that is more personalized, more communitarian, and more in line with the contemporary educational tendencies than current systems allow.