AFFECTIVE EDUCATION AND THE PEDAGOGY OF DESIRE FOR TEACHER TRAINING IN THE DIGITAL AFFECTIVE ERA

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ABSTRACT
In the era of global neoliberalism, education is called upon to confront a profound transformation: on one hand, the logic of performance, efficiency and self-promotion pervades existence, generating—as Byung-Chul Han observes—a digitally mediated economy of hyper-exposure; on the other hand, a widespread anorexia of desire affects educational institutions, families, relationships: our society is "without" desire. This crisis is also a pedagogical issue: the school, as a symbolic space for encounter and emotional mediation, is called upon to rethink the ways knowledge is transmitted; perhaps, shifting toward a *Pedagogy of Desire* could enable individuals to escape the neoliberal reduction of existence to mere functionality, mediated, if not replaced, by a digital algorithm. Let us ask ourselves if is it truly possible for human beings and educators to be replaced by AI in the emotional and educational spheres? What is the human trait that cannot be replaced by any algorithm? Educating affectivity and desire means being able to recover the transcendent and relational dimension of being human, feeling, orienting one's ideals. These characteristics are, perhaps, still *"human, all too human*."

KEYWORDS
Pedagogy of desire, affective education, relationality, digital era.

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1. Introduction

E. Morin (2001), with regard to this issue and to affective education for contemporary teacher training, through his reflections on the future of education, appears to offer a significant point of reference upon which to weave a possible new pedagogical-didactic perspective.

We call it *a "pro-blem,"* emphasizing its Greek etymology—*pro-ballo*, meaning "to throw in one's face"—precisely because this topic seems to evoke something that demands attention, that powerfully resonates within those involved in education: on the one hand, affectivity as a field of study and a cultural subject is today regaining significant pedagogical value for the contemporary school system; on the other hand, it seems equally challenging—and undoubtedly interesting—to engage in a thorough reflection dedicated to teacher education.

One might well ask, then, what kind of pedagogy and teacher training are needed for an education of and in affectivity in the contemporary era, given this dual nature?

Certainly, one could begin by first clarifying the "terminology" (Perla, 2025, p.9) of emotions and the affective dimension in the field of pedagogy—that is, the terms that still lend themselves today, despite current research (especially in the field of emotional intelligence, as will be seen later), to confusion and misunderstandings: *"the vocabulary used to describe emotions is one of the most controversial and debated topics in research in this field*"(ibi, p.23) .

The starting point will undoubtedly be to clarify the position of this issue within the current interpretive landscape of the pedagogical field, which involves teachers on one side and students on the other: the underlying reason for this educational crisis

lies precisely in the fact that education in emotions *"currently seems to be framed not so much in terms of a presumed or actual conflict between reason and emotion, but rather in terms of a widespread 'decline in desire' among the younger generations, which—within the context of a 'mucilaginous' society incapable of integrating its components—drives them toward processes of* desublimation"(ibi, p.8) .

The issue, then, seems to be twofold, thus providing two reasons for the need to address the topic of emotional education: on the one hand, we are witnessing phenomena of senseless violence and rampant vulgarity—a trend that has even seeped into song lyrics—and we continue to see *"institutions being mocked (think of the countless incidents of bullying, including against teachers, which have been videotaped in classrooms and uploaded to the web)*"(ibi) ; on the other hand, we can equally and widely observe an opposite trend: a loss of vital meaning, a sort of spiritual anorexia of desire (Savino, 2026) —that is, of the force that moves everything and drives us toward the good, in the moral sense; Naturally, the weakening of the desire for knowledge among the youngest—the epistemic desire that drives the pursuit of knowledge about cultural objects—and the waning of the love for study could be considered, among other things, an epiphenomenon of this clear contemporary educational crisis.

Still in the wake of this thinning of affectivity, let us also consider the emotional aridity pervading relationships—both within families and across generations: it seems to be a process that escapes *"the awareness of the adult world, which is now struggling to provide a 'sentimental education'—that sentimental education recognized in the courts as the great absentee in relationships between minors and adults and among peers* themselves"(Perla, 2025, p.8) .

In this study, we will therefore attempt to address these issues—which cannot fail to be perceived as urgent by those involved in education and who experience school life firsthand—by considering them within a framework that takes into account the pervasiveness of digital technology even in the emotional sphere (B. Chul-Han, 2015).

The research question—the cornerstone of the entire approach we propose here—will underlie all our reflections; let us ask ourselves, then: Is it truly possible for human beings and educators to be replaced or supplanted by AI in the affective and educational spheres? What is the human characteristic that cannot be replaced by any digital algorithm?

From a multidimensional perspective, we would like to structure our discussion by drawing, so to speak, on certain major sources of inspiration, cornerstones, and conceptual paradigms, as well as legal documents that, on the one hand, can serve as inspiration and, on the other, help us rigorously explore possible pathways for training teachers and educators of our time in emotional intelligence: we will examine the teaching *of Civic Education* and the policy document on *Citizenship & Constitution* (MIUR, 2009) in Italy as a multidimensional and cross-disciplinary framework that must incorporate the concept and dimension of affectivity—understood as an innate capacity for relationships and participation—which is fundamental, a precursor to, and preparatory for the development of citizenship competencies themselves, as we will argue.

A clarification of the terms and concepts used to describe emotions is certainly a preliminary step, since they guide us toward understanding further reflections by authors who address this topic; indeed, Cambi[2] will outline—drawing on MacLean's studies, which Morin also references—the nature of emotions, and along these

lines we can ask: what do we mean by emotion, affect, passion, mood, feeling, and empathy*?*(F. Cambi, 1996).

D. Ianes (ibi, p. 57) further elaborates on these dimensions by proposing a model of affective-emotional competencies in relation to cognitive and value-based competencies, with a view to providing possible support for teachers in understanding and embodying them.

Having made this introductory clarification, the framework of phenomenological neo-personalism will guide us in the next steps for structuring this journey.

Referring to a story by Chekhov (ibi, p. 94), the author emphasizes how the lack of listening—whether in the family, at school, or among friends—today plunges so many of our adolescents into the abyss of loneliness and asks, *"But where to begin?" (…) "While a drive pushes toward its object and the motive is need, in the case of feelings the motive is desire: we are drawn to an object or a person because we perceive its intrinsic* value"(ibi, p.95).

Certain tenets of Gino Corallo's thought (G. Corallo, 2010) will intersect with our discussion when we seek to clarify in which type of education—among the five macro-areas outlined by the author—affective formation can be applied and how it relates to formation in the moral Good; the final section of our discussion will be devoted to the theoretical and practical elaboration of a possible path of affective formation for teachers, grounded in what we outline as the Pedagogy of Desire (Savino, 2026): the conceptualization of Desire is interpreted and explored by considering four possible dimensions for its education (as a phenomenon, faculty, function, and competence), understood first and foremost, as will be seen, as *Mittlestellung*—that is, as the "middle faculty," a link between the various dimensional spheres of the person, which, by its very nature, serves as a bridge between the cognitive, emotional, affective, and ethical-relational orders.

1. Possible Reference Paradigms for Contemporary Affective Education.

There are several main vectors that form the cornerstones of *complex thought*, which we take here as the starting point and paradigmatic framework for our discussion, as identified by E. Morin: consideration of *context* (relationality), the *global* (relationality between the whole and the parts), and the *multidimensional* (complex units made up of different coexisting parts) take on not only an educational form that responds to the challenges and needs of the contemporary world— ly addressing the teacher's pedagogical intentions toward their students— but also equip learners with the skills they develop in the classroom and through classroom interactions.

It is in the work (E. Morin, 2001) written by the French philosopher at the suggestion of Gustavo López Ospina, director of the transdisciplinary project *"Educating for a Livable* Future" (ibi,p.8), that we find, in our opinion, important insights for responding in particular to the needs and challenges of our contemporary era.

The great author outlines his proposals regarding what seems to be essential in teaching and in the lessons to be conveyed and passed on to our young people, speaking, in fact, of *seven forms of knowledge* that, in the author's view, are meant to be more comprehensive than the fields or aspects of knowledge in general and should not, therefore, be understood as strictly connected to academic disciplines in the technical sense: for Morin, first and foremost, it is surprising that education, on a global scale, lacks a thorough reflection precisely on the functions, characteristics, processes, and modes of the "mental" dispositions; thus, the first

form of knowledge that must be incorporated into teaching is understood as follows:

1. *The Blind Spots of Knowledge: Error and Illusion:*

"knowledge of knowledge must be seen as a primary necessity aimed at preparing for and addressing the constant risks of error and illusion, which never cease to plague the human mind"(ibi) .

It is necessary, the author observes, to strengthen in teaching the study of the cerebral, mental, and cultural characteristics of human knowledge—its processes and modalities—as well as the psychological and cultural dispositions that can lead it into error or create illusions.

We could summarize this approach (to understanding knowledge) as, precisely, the need for metacognition and self-reflection on the part of educators, who serve as role models for young people: it is, in fact, a matter of *"arming every mind for the vital struggle for* clarity" (ibi) , and it is well known that the implicit aspects of both parties in the educational relationship—students and teachers—must emerge and be guided toward engaging in this self-reflection: it leads to clarity regarding the Self and the Other, as well as regarding the processes and methods of knowledge, work, and how to approach classroom work.

It is clear that self-reflection on one's own affective processes is fundamental and fully reflects the intent of Morin's admonition.

Second, the author suggests promoting

2. *the principles of relevant knowledge*—that is, "relational" knowledge, capable of *"grasping global and fundamental problems in order to situate partial and local knowledge within* them"(ibi,p.12) :

in fact, it is only by connecting the individual parts to the whole that one can truly grasp the meaning of things, and it is more urgent than ever to educate students in this regard and develop this connective-relational capacity.

The author, in fact, insists on the need to *"develop the human mind's ability to situate all information within a context and as part of a whole. It is necessary to teach methods that allow one to grasp the mutual relationships and reciprocal influences between the parts and the whole in a complex* world" (ibi) .

Here we can clearly see how the very ontological nature of the affective dimension contains within itself a powerful relational and systemic dimension, which we will discuss further below.

Third, we must teach 3. *The human condition*, as Morin observes:

"The human being is at once physical, biological, psychological, cultural, social, and historical"(ibi) , and this complex, interrelated reality is completely fragmented and disintegrated by disciplinary divisions and contemporary teaching: there is a clear need to view and approach the human condition holistically, as a "whole" comprising various dimensions that are all interrelated, in a systemic sense that must emerge from disciplinary knowledge. We will see how contextualizing affective education within the paradigm of citizenship competencies effectively conveys this holistic perspective on the human being.

Fourth, we discuss 4. *Common Destiny*:

"The now-global destiny of humankind is another fundamental reality ignored by education. Knowledge of developments in the planetary era and the recognition of our Earthly identity must become one of the main focuses of education" (ibi,p.13) :

With these words, the author draws attention to a pedagogical and didactic emergency that every educator involved in teaching the younger generations must

take seriously. We should always keep our terrestrial identity in mind in every form of teaching, as marked by a shared destiny—a sign of which are the various changes and upheavals (pandemics, etc.), including climate-related ones, that we are witnessing, which certainly make us reflect on how our entire planet is marked by a shared destiny linked precisely to what Morin calls *a common terrestrial identity*. This identity "passes" through physicality and is mediated and nurtured by civil coexistence in the classroom: one can clearly see, then, the educational significance of emotional education in this regard, precisely because of the capacity of emotion to act as a catalyst for various concerns.

Furthermore, as the fifth pillar of the knowledge necessary for building the future in an educational sense, Morin discusses 5. *Dealing with uncertainties*:

"*we should teach strategic principles that enable us to face risks, the unexpected, and the uncertain, and to alter their course based on information acquired in the course of action*," and he iconically states: *"We must learn to navigate an ocean of uncertainties through archipelagos of* certainties" (ibi,p.14) .

Through a powerfully evocative image, Morin invites us to systematically structure, in a sense, those strategies that—through the teacher's instruction and guidance—enable us to navigate the uncertain and the unexpected by virtue of "outposts of certainty"; Building certainties—this is the teacher's task—and, ultimately, what might be defined as moral certainty, a secure base-recalling Bowlby's attachment theory (J. Bowlby, 1988)-from which we can always set out to explore on the one hand and build on the other.

More than any other symbol, certainty is both emblematic of and a result of affectivity: it is entrusted to people and their own morality, and this is what should constitute the "implicit-explicit" aspect of all teaching, embodied by adult role models.

In Chapter 6, Morin discusses 6. *Teaching Understanding*:

it is *"both the means and the end of human* communication" (E. Morin, 2001, p. 14-15) .

Through simple and effective reasoning, the author invites us to reflect on an alarming state of affairs: there is no true "education in understanding," which could be described as the heart of affectivity.

We need to explore the vital importance of understanding and the urgency of structuring it pedagogically: we all need human understanding—everyone, without exception; precisely because of its incredible absence, it requires *"a reform of* mentality" (ibi) .

We must seek to understand the roots of misunderstanding in order to grasp its manifestations and effects as well: racism, every form of bullying, contempt, and violence stem from misunderstanding. This is why education in mutual understanding among men and women of all ages and from every corner of the globe is more urgent than ever: a well-reasoned and well-argued emotional education could immediately serve as an absolutely effective tool for fostering understanding, inclusion, and mutual appreciation; it could constitute one of the most solid and secure pedagogical foundations for building a shared peace.

The seventh area of knowledge to be cultivated must be 7. the *Ethics of Humanity*:

the focus of this final area of knowledge—which is perhaps the most important, because it is the most comprehensive, likely synthesizing and encompassing all the previous ones, and necessary for the human construction of the future—is precisely a clear identification of what constitutes *the "human" in humanity"* (ibi, p.52); every human being is at once fully biological and fully cultural.

Humanity has developed—as Morin observes—both egocentric and altruistic qualities in a manner that is at once exemplary and exaggerated: in its hypervitality, it is simultaneously capable of being fully human and fully inhuman!

Let us continue, then, by asking ourselves: What, then, does a human being need in order to understand themselves and affirm their full humanity in the service of humanity? Can "emotional formation" truly serve as a sort of catalyst— —that critically bridges all these dimensions? And what might such teacher training entail in today's context?

2. The Triads of the Human Being.

Morin's insights are both fascinating and rigorously grounded: there exists a triad of *brain-mind-culture* that mirrors another triad *of reason-affection-drive*. What is surprising lies precisely in the acute interrelationship of the individual aspects and dimensions, along with their interconnectivity; in fact:

"there is no culture without the human brain (a biological apparatus capable of acting, perceiving, knowing, and learning), but there is no mind (esprit)—that is, the capacity for consciousness and thought—without culture."(ibi). The human mind, then, arises and is realized in its relationship with culture, and vice versa; reciprocally, the mind intervenes in the brain's functioning and exerts a retroactive influence on it: the discoveries of cerebral neuroplasticity in neuroscience (J. Panksepp and L. Biven, 2014) have shown us this surprising ability of the mind to shape and mold the brain, thereby influencing and altering its very functioning.

Every human being, then, is composed of a triad of *brain-culture-mind,* where *"each term is necessary to each of the* others" (E. Morin, 2001, p. 53) : in fact, humans

realize themselves only through *culture,* and culture cannot exist without *the* human *brain*—understood as a biological system capable of various functions such as thought, action, perception, emotion, and learning; Similarly, there is no *mind* without culture, since the mind embodies that activity of the spirit which, precisely, is expressed in and through culture; the mind is thus brought about by the brain-culture relationship, which would not exist without the brain. This first triad, which expresses the essence of humanity, can be represented by the following diagram:

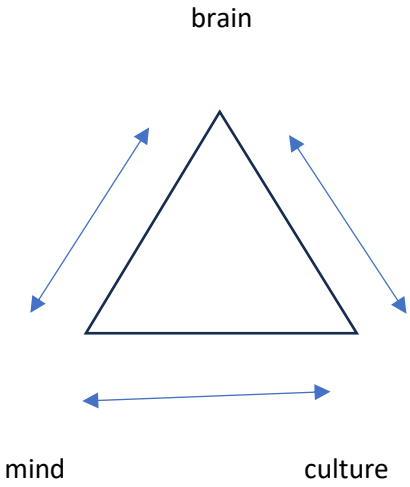


Figure 1: The brain-mind-culture loop. (adapted from E. Morin, p. 53)

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, another bioanthropological triad discussed by MacLean in his *Theory of the triune brain* (ibi, p.54) allows us to better understand the complexity of the human relational condition: *"The human brain integrates within itself a) the paleocerebrum, a legacy of the reptilian brain, the source of aggression, sexual drive, and primary instincts; b) the mesencephalon, a legacy of*

the brains of ancient mammals, in which the hippocampus appears to link the development of affectivity to that of long-term memory; c) the cortex, which is already highly developed in mammals to the point of enveloping all the brain's structures and forming the two cerebral hemispheres, becomes hypertrophied in humans" (ibi, p. 54) to the point of forming the neocortex, the seat of logical-analytical and strategic-decision-making abilities.

The relationships, therefore, between these three levels—which expand and simultaneously clarify, on a neurobiological basis, the complexity of the very relational nature, so to speak, of the human existential condition—are, on the one hand, complementary and, on the other, antagonistic: it is likely that the complexity of the human being in general lies precisely here.

Furthermore, Morin points out that there is a "rotational" relationship among these three aspects; that is, they do not follow a logical or hierarchical order, and there is no consequential link between:



Therefore, it can rightly be asserted that rationality does not hold a position of supremacy over the others: rather, it is *"a concurrent and antagonistic instance within an inseparable triad, and it is fragile; it can be dominated, submerged, or even subjugated by affectivity or drive"* (ibi).

In Morin's discourse, the triad *of reason-affect-drive*, in turn, reflects and evokes another triadic relationship—that between *the individual*, *society, and the species* (ibi, p.55):

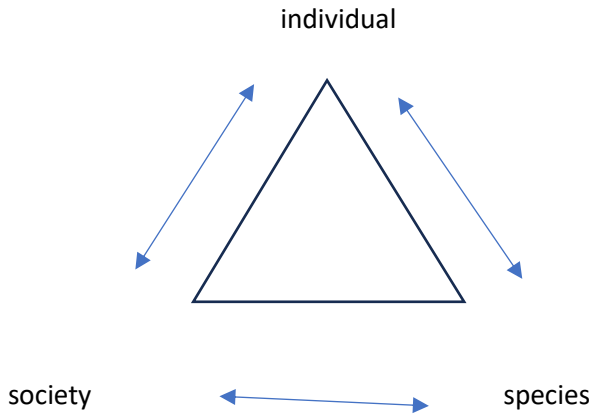


Figure 2: The individual-society-species loop **(**adapted from Morin, p. 55)

"Interactions among individuals give rise to society, and society—the locus of the emergence of culture—in turn exerts a retroactive influence on individuals," therefore, one cannot absolutize the individual by making it the ultimate end of this loop, nor is it possible to focus all of humanity's supreme ends on the species or society; in fact*, "at the anthropological level, society exists for the individual, who exists for society; society and the individual exist for the species, which exists for the individual and society"* (ibi) .

In this way, once again, all these terms are interrelated in a systemic and interdependent bond, in which each is simultaneously both a means and an end: *"It is culture and society that enable the fulfillment of individuals, and it is the interactions among individuals that enable the perpetuation of culture and the self-organization of society"*(ibi) .

It is clear, then, that thanks to an understanding of the *triune* brain and the articulation of the triads that exemplify knowledge of the biological and cultural

levels of the human being—the so-called *"uniduality*"—an affective formation can truly be a kind of *iconic knowledge* capable of enhancing and elevating the profoundly human and civic competencies outlined by the authors we have taken as paradigmatic points, which are necessary for contemporary educational imperatives: as well as inviting a comprehensive metacognitive assessment of both poles of the educational relationship—educator and learner—in any human context, be it the family, school, or civil society organizations in general—these suggestions also help us articulate our reflections more fully, revealing even more clearly the valuable perspective that such an education—first and foremost for teachers—can open up.

3. Citizenship, Personalism, Affective Education.

Affective-relational training could be conceived, understood, and situated within the Italian context by considering the *Guidelines for the Teaching of Civic Education* contained in *Annex A* and referenced in Law 92/2019. Here, it is emphasized that the fundamental objective is to promote, in schools, the proper implementation of curricular integration required by the new regulatory provisions, based on the Constitution as a foundation that is not only legal but also cultural and pedagogical: it defines rights, duties, and responsibilities, guiding personal development and citizens' participation in the political, economic, and social life of the country.

Within this theoretical framework, let us now examine the current state of affairs regarding how affective-relational education can be conceived, understood, and situated in Italy; *Annex A* of *the Guidelines for the Teaching of Civic Education* refers to the regulatory framework that includes these very Guidelines, adopted in accordance with Law No. 92 of August 20, 2019, entitled *"Introduction of Civic Education in Schools"*(MIUR, 2019). It states that these Guidelines *"are intended to*

facilitate, on the part of educational institutions, the proper implementation of the regulatory reform, which, pursuant to Article 3, entails a revision of school curricula to bring them into line with the new provisions." By establishing knowledge of the Italian Constitution as the foundation of civic education, the Law recognizes it not only as the cornerstone of our legal system but also as a criterion for identifying rights, duties, responsibilities, and personal and institutional behaviors, all aimed at promoting the full development of the individual and the participation of all citizens in the country's political, economic, and social organization.

"The Constitution is, in essence, a clear and comprehensive code of cultural and pedagogical significance, capable of providing meaning and guidance, particularly to those within the school community and to the disciplines and activities that take place there" (ibi,p.1-Annex A).

The Constitution itself, understood as an ethical and pedagogical code, gives meaning to school practices and the disciplines involved. The connection between Morin's thought and the reflections presented so far could therefore be significant: the paradigms outlined could offer a clear framework for understanding and developing affective capacity—a foundational element of social and civic competencies—and for concretely aligning these objectives with the provisions of the 2019 law.

In fact, Article 7 states the need for educational institutions to strengthen their collaboration with families in order to promote behaviors rooted in informed citizenship, specifically referencing the *"challenges of the present and the immediate future, including by integrating the Educational Pact of Shared Responsibility"*; on the other hand, the provision refers to *"the principle of cross-curricular integration in the new curriculum, given the diversity of learning objectives and expected competencies, which cannot be attributed to a single*

subject nor are they exclusively subject-specific," thereby embodying the fundamental guiding principle of Morin's thought, which emphasizes the holistic and interrelated multidimensionality of disciplines that should be reflected in the new knowledge necessary for the education of the future, as we have seen.

The Law's guidelines are therefore directed toward dialogue with educational institutions, which *"are thus called upon to update their school curricula and instructional planning in the first and second cycles of education, in order to develop 'knowledge and understanding of the social, economic, legal, civic, and environmental structures and profiles of society' (Article 2, paragraph 1 of the Law*)" (MIUR, 2019) .

The call to educational institutions at all levels is to create, through instruction and educational activities, the conditions necessary to establish *"a practical setting for developing 'the ability to act as responsible citizens and to participate fully and consciously in the civic, cultural, and social life of* the community'" (Article 1, paragraph 1 of the Law).

Specifically, we find a reference to the topics we are addressing in the European Council Recommendation of May 22, 2018, which discusses the transversal competencies that intersect with and deepen, within the framework of key competencies, the specific competency of citizenship, as set forth in that same Recommendation (Di Nocera, A. M. , Pepe, I., 2020, p.157); in Decree No. 139 of August 22, 2007 (*Regulation containing provisions regarding compliance with compulsory education*) (ibi,p.246) , which outlines the eight key competencies : the very close connections between the teaching of civic education and the development of the affective-relational dimension are immediately apparent: this dimension constitutes an ontological condition that, as mentioned, precedes citizenship competencies and becomes of central importance.

Certainly, with regard to the documents cited here—even though briefly—it is necessary to highlight the need for ongoing professional development for teachers and all adults involved in education, one that considers knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a non-hierarchical manner by virtue of a sort of structural pairing between affective capacity—which corresponds to and matures into civic capacity: a new horizon of meaning seems to be emerging here .

4. The *Pedagogy of Desire* as a "Non-Synthetic" Affective Training Path

Let us then try to imagine a framework for affective training programs for teachers of our time in which the teacher can develop full affective competence to the point of distinguishing themselves from digital technology and AI, highlighting their ontological and qualitative difference for the benefit of their students, and offering resources and qualities of support that AI cannot provide; let us first clarify how we "conceive" the teacher.

Baldacci observes: *"It may be useful to think of the teacher not as a single profession but as many different professions combined, since the role integrates cultural, relational, and helping competencies, as well as human relations, organizational*, and methodological *skills*." Indeed, it is no coincidence that *"we like to characterize the teacher as a professional in the formation of* the mind" (Baldacci, 2013, pp. 176–177) since they work with students' minds.

But perhaps it is precisely here that the gap between mind and heart originates—what we call "*Descartes' error*," citing Damasio's (1994) famous study—according to which "*today the teacher is called upon, as an expert in the processes of invention*

and cultural mediation, to provide educational services to both the minds and hearts of people" (Baldacci, 2010, p. 176).

Thus, at the center of our discussion as an educational priority is, on the one hand, cultural mediation through the educational relationship infused with affectivity, and on the other hand, teacher training in this regard so that teachers, in turn, can nurture both the minds and hearts of their students.

In light of the reflections carried out—within the European context—the professional teacher seems to take on a holistic profile; we might say: it is necessary to integrate multiple dimensions into the teacher's profile, and it is precisely the relational-social dimension that serves as the conceptual focus for exploring affective education in teacher training. This approach is embedded within and at the origin of those citizenship competencies, demonstrating how they arise and can develop within them. Goleman's (2019) entire discourse on *Emotional Intelligence* also hinges on the concept that the origin of emotions is social.

We have noted how Morin (2001) introduced us to the level at which affectivity—that "*overlooked"* affectivity—must be addressed in education, and how the author described it as knowledge necessary for building the world's future; likewise, we have seen how affective capacity is equivalent to social capacity, since the former is a prerequisite for the latter.

Affective education could therefore be effectively integrated, on the one hand for the benefit of students, into civic and citizenship education programs; and on the other hand for the benefit of teachers as a foundation for developing relational and social skills within the educator-student relationship.

Here we are at the crossroads of a discourse on emotions and relationships—the turning point, the key point: for affectivity, the driving force is Desire, a sort of inner compass that allows us to perceive the intrinsic value of someone or something.

A “Pedagogy of Desire” could serve as the central theme for the discussion we are pursuing here.

First of all, a preliminary note is in order: we will not dwell here on the analysis of the traditional—philosophical and psychoanalytic—literature on the subject (Freud, 2004; Lacan, 2016), which offers a view of desire rooted in the paradigm of the unconscious; we will defer a more in-depth examination of that topic. Let us then move from an interpretation of Desire as a human, unconscious, and irrational phenomenon toward a sort of “change of course”, which could be summarized as a relational shift; at the same time, we will cast a careful eye on contemporary society (Savino, 2026, pp. 31–47)

Alongside classical hermeneutics, the theme of Desire can be interpreted—through an interdisciplinary and multifaceted approach—from another perspective, one that is parallel to and complementary with the traditional view, by examining the person in their concrete existential condition and within their relationships. Referring to the analyses in the CENSIS Reports (2010, 2021), the IARD Youth Reports of the Toniolo Institute (2020) from recent years, we can in fact observe:

“an unprecedented and profound 'crisis of desire' which, on closer inspection, 'seemed to have permeated and flooded the social fabric long before the onset of the pandemic: against this backdrop, as in families so too in school classrooms—and thus in society as a whole—an unknown and confused force began to make itself 'present,' paradoxically 'depriving' human beings of a fundamental essence and vital energhèia. To speak of family, parents, and children, as well as of school—

and thus of teachers and students—means, for pedagogical analysis, to speak of the Educational Relationship ". (Savino, 2026, p.10)

This is, therefore, a topic that is both controversial on one hand and slippery on the other, since clearly defining this human phenomenology is by no means simple; yet it must be addressed due to its evident impact on everyone's life.

While always keeping in mind the interpretive paradigm of relationality that underlies this hermeneutic's renewed focus, let us first analyze Desire as a phenomenon of the unconscious, as presented to us by traditional scholarly literature, thus understanding it in an irrational and anoetic sense, belonging to the realm of the unconscious and the drive, with its metonymic nature and status as a symptom—drawing on the concepts of Lacan (2016) and Freud (2004)—and then moving on to an attempt to ground Desire in an ontological structure of a different kind.

Let us consider Kant's transcendental structures (Kant, 2019), thinking of the foundation of an "architectonics of Desire", understood as a true transcendental faculty—and thus belonging to the order of reason. Seeking to free it from a sort of resigned, instinctual dimension—while preserving all of its evident drive-like nature—we can propose an "intermediate" interpretation: Desire could be understood as a faculty; it could be structurally grounded within the realm of the faculties of reason, but in a very particular way, by virtue of its powerful imaginative-emotional character:

"The attempt is precisely to 'venture' a transcendental foundation of the faculty of desiring, starting from Kantian assumptions but going beyond Kant, engaging with the paradigm of phenomenology and its method of investigating and analyzing conscious experiences—Erlebnis—: tracing, on the one hand, a creative and gnoseological power, a cognitive dimension of desiring, and on the other, its

instinctual-drive-based force; through the faculty of Imagination as presented by Kant, we attempt to determine whether it is possible to find in the act of human desire—on par with the other faculties of reason in the Kantian structure—those "a priori" elements that can confer upon it the 'dignity' of a transcendental faculty;" (Savino, 2026, p.11).

We therefore propose a theoretical framework in which Kant's *Bildungskraft* of productive imagination presents itself as a "bridge faculty": capable of receiving external sensory data and, at the same time, of effecting a transcendental and critical synthesis that projects the thought-image into desire, thereby transforming emotional energy into the direction and content of thought.

This representation of desire can, therefore, connect the cognitive and emotional aspects in an original way, highlighting how productive imagination is capable of producing inner effects that guide both reason and emotions.

Continuing the discussion of the transcendental foundation of Desire, we are confronted with a dialectic: that between representation and desire itself, which links Kantian theory with Attachment Theory (Bowlby,1988). It is here, we believe, that a uniquely and profoundly human characteristic resides—one that cannot be replicated by any algorithm. It is here that we can propose a relational model of the developing mind (Siegel, 1999), in which attachment relationships and internal working models shape representations of the self and the world, suggesting that desire is intrinsically linked to the primary relationship with the attachment figure.

We believe that the emotional, affective, and relational bond formed with the primary caregiver during childhood cannot be replicated or replaced by digital technology: the capacity to emotionally navigate affective interactions resides and develops within the context of the primary educational relationship and,

subsequently, through human interaction with other significant others, such as teachers—who cannot be replaced by any digital systems.

We believe this is the unique and irreplaceable educational foundation on which we must focus—specifically by more effectively training the adults who serve as role models—in order to strengthen it for the benefit of the students.

It is therefore necessary for us to reflect on how to cultivate authentic relationships within hybrid environments. If algorithms support or replace certain functions—such as assessment, explanation, or even initial psychological support through chatbots—the space that remains for educators could be the realm of embodied affective and emotional capabilities that only humans—let's say, good humans—can provide.

Desire and an education on Desire can be the key to education for contemporary educators.

First, understand and become aware of all the elements that make up the faculty of human desire, as we have said, and then deepen that understanding through a sort of “training”, as follows: contemporary man takes on the traits of a *homo digitalis* who has lost the meaning, purpose, and beauty of his own actions—what Guardini (1950) calls "*moral creation*"—since "*the homo digitalis does not act; he plays with his fingers*" (Chul-Han, 2015, p. 23) in front of the digital screen.

Every otherness one encounters, being a counterpart, presupposes and demands action—an encounter with that which is other than oneself that gives rise to vision and action: where vision is deprived of an ideal, resulting in a *Weltanschauung* that is, so to speak, impoverished and devoid of vigor, so too will action be.

And while the digital eliminates all resistance, while the weight of the corporeal, of matter, vanishes, every difference also evaporates: the “loss of difference” seems

to be the overarching interpretive theme of the contemporary paradigm that we have outlined here in its relative characteristics—characteristics fraught with consequences for humanity's capacity for representation and, ultimately, for anthropology, for relationality, and for identity (Chul-Han, 2015).

It seems we can say that every desire is a sort of ontological difference between what one is now and what one would like to be, between what one has/is and what one desires.

Consequently, based on the analysis we have conducted so far, it would be plausible to suggest that, in the field of education, the impoverishment of the educational relationship and of the adult role models of our time can be traced precisely to this acknowledged loss of difference, which is responsible for the decline in young people's capacity for desire.

Loss of difference: in this regard, a phenomenon typical of our time comes to mind—the NEETs (*Not in Education, Employment, or Training*, Eurofound, 2012), particularly prevalent in southern Italy, the “lazy ones”, our adolescents and young people identified as such, who are far from being driven by a turbulent and restless force.

The last two surveys -conducted by the IARD Youth Report, Toniolo Institute (cited in: Bellingreri., 2014)- on the condition of youth in Italy at the beginning of the new century allow us to analyze the defining tendencies of these young people:

"(…) they perceive themselves, first and foremost, as immersed in the present. Almost as if it were the sole ecstasy of time and according to a mode of consciousness that we would define as punctual." (Bellingreri., 2014, p. 12)

This passage brings us back to the altered space-time dimension: how can one grasp the depth of the movements of consciousness solely within the realm of the present?

Fear and distrust of the future and a distancing from the past, life lived solely within the temporal dimension of the instant: with goals that are constantly renegotiable in which the principle of reversibility seems to prevail (Bauman, 2000, cited in Bellingreri, A.,2014): this is how the concept-dimension of liquidity arises.

The 2010 CENSIS report, which analyzes the work *L'uomo senza inconscio* (Recalcati, 2010), discusses this new ailment of the West: the decline of desire. The capitalist West is emerging into a new form of slavery: its desire has been transformed into a form of pleasure reduced to the compulsive consumption of objects, a desire that remains perpetually unsatisfied.

The hyperhedonism of our time contains a drive that seems infinite, unstoppable, free, and unbound by any law: yet this freedom is incapable of generating any satisfaction; it is an empty, sad, unhappy, and apathetic freedom. Capitalist discourse, in its promise to liberate desire from material necessities, ends up proclaiming its own demise. Recalcati (2010) warns:

"The transmission of desire can only take place through an encounter—that is, through an event characterized by surprise, the unexpected, and the unplanned. It is never the effect of a structured pedagogy, the result of technical training, nor is it ever the outcome of discipline". (Ibi, p. 12*)*

He continues: "*The yeast of desire is sown only through contagion, through infection, through the winding and unpredictable path of testimony*" (Ibi, p. 13).

Drawing on Lacan (2016), he speaks of his mentor as the embodiment of this possibility:

*"…to open and shake minds, to suspend certainties, to break every pre-established form of knowledge, to restart the search, to produce the singular event of the question, to keep alive the tension toward the not-yet-said, the not-yet-seen, the not-yet-known, to reveal the generative impulse at work… My encounter with Lacan was first and foremost an encounter with my own desire". (*Recalcati, 2010, pp. 14–15)

Is this not precisely the nature of the Educational Relationship, of the teacher-learner relationship? Is this not the "place" where that fateful encounter takes place—the one in which a pedagogical structuring must be attempted?

Beyond any narcissistic dialectic that traps the learner in self-emulation based on the arid repetition of sameness, we believe it is possible to intentionally "construct" an education in and of desire, returning to the act of desiring. And by teaching how to desire, by addressing the ways in which contemporary social order interferes with Desire in the school setting, by reclaiming an authentic Desire, and by understanding its ontological premises (Otherness–Space–Time–Relation–Negativity, Dialectic–Difference)—even as they have been altered and dismantled by postmodern neoliberalism (Chul-Han, 2015; Lyotard, 2014).

We therefore view such a pedagogy as a "preparatory course" for teacher training and as a tool for dialogue and reflection for families and schools, integrating four conceptual focal points:

1. the development of metacognition within the inner space;
2. an understanding of the faculty of representation and internal working models;
3. the centrality of the educational relationship;

4. an understanding of the fundamental integrated emotional systems of a cognitive-emotional-affective nature.

It is within this last perspective, in fact, that affective neuroscience finds its place—as already seen in the research of Panksepp (2014) and Immordino-Yang (2016)—which identifies in the "Desire" system—*Seeking*—a fundamental emotional dynamic of exploration that organizes the entire motivational system.

The conclusion of the analysis and hermeneutics conducted in this study, then, lies precisely in the fact that the Pedagogy of Desire could consist of an *Education in the System of Evidences*: drawing on Giussani (1988), the author argues that each person's "heart" should be understood as a sort of unity of reason and feeling, and thus endowed with primary evidences—criteria of judgment—on the basis of which it is simple to compare any kind of lived experience with the elementary demands of happiness, goodness, justice, truth, and love. What are these primary evidences, ontologically speaking? What is their relationship to Desire?

They "*are implicit insofar as they correspond to a constitutive need of our being*" (Borghesi, 2015, p. 56); yet the context in which we grow up—society as a whole, but first and foremost the bond of attachment, when it takes on an "abusive" character—can embody a sort of power and settle "*on top of our original needs, forming a sort of thick encrustation that alters the evidence of those primary meanings*" (Ibi,p. 55).

The Pedagogy of Desire, then, as an educational approach aimed at both parents and teachers in the contemporary era, is structured as a proposal capable of fostering an education about the *System of Primary Evidences*: understanding and recognizing the nature of one's own desires in order to counter alienating temptations and promote critical thinking, relational ethics, affection, and

emotional intelligence—all skills that cannot be reduced to simple formulas and on which we should, perhaps, focus for future education in hybrid contexts.

Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to offer some reflections on the issue of affectivity in our contemporary era and on a possible pedagogy for addressing it, beginning, first and foremost, with teacher training.

The goal was certainly to "equip" teachers with robust metacognitive competence regarding their own affective-relational competence, by exploring what we believe to be the driving force of affectivity—which we have identified, in a privileged sense, as the faculty of Desire: to be applied in all dimensions of educational life, with particular attention to the evidence of the original affective needs of human beings and to the ability to discern between external influences and authentic desires, thereby hoping to contribute to the realization of the inspirations called for by Morin for the education of the future.

As we have seen, the author calls for an understanding of the human being structured around two fundamental triads: brain-mind-culture and reason-affection-drive, which reflect one another without rigid hierarchies. Culture would not exist without the brain, and, conversely, the mind arises and manifests itself precisely in its relationship with culture, in turn influencing the brain through the mechanisms of neuroplasticity. Alongside this dimension, Morin refers to the biological-cognitive triad, as presented by MacLean, which identifies the paleocerebrum, mesencephalon, and cortex as the sources of primary drives, affect, and memory, leading up to the emergence of the neocortex and logical-analytical abilities. The authors caution us that the interaction among these triads is quite complex: they are complementary but can also be in conflict, and rationality

does not occupy a position of absolute supremacy; conversely, it can be dominated by affect or by drives. It is precisely this dynamic that has significant educational implications, especially regarding the management of the relationship between reason, emotion, and instinct in young people, who seem to lack adequate emotional mediation. Understanding the triune brain and these triads thus offers us a powerful interpretive framework on the one hand and a pedagogical tool on the other, which—for the purpose of this study—serves as the driving force behind an educational proposal in two areas: for teachers, and through them, for the students of our contemporary society.

For an ethical education focused on metacognitive development and affective competence that fosters the kind of informed citizenship that only human beings can offer to future generations; for a humanity that is resilient, aspirational, and grounded in the cultivated ability of future generations to "know how to navigate": so that our teachers may increasingly understand, in a "human" way, how to help their students *"navigate an ocean of uncertainties through archipelagos of* certainties" (Morin, 2001 , p.14).

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