

EMOTIONS AS RESOURCES IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHERS' EDUCATION

LE EMOZIONI COME RISORSE NEL PROCESSO DI INSEGNAMENTO- APPRENDIMENTO. IMPLICAZIONI PER LA FORMAZIONE DEGLI INSEGNANTI

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Abstract

The system of relationships and emotions that develop in the teaching-learning process define the complexity of teachers' education and pose the challenge of bringing out the emotional and affective culture that guides school life. Several studies on teaching practices highlight the tendency to refer to technical aspects as a key dimension of professionalism, rather than on emotional dimensions that can promote the relationship with student. In recent decades, the role played by emotions in the school context has become the object of pedagogical research, which highlights the need to rethink teachers' education, in order to integrate it with targeted work on emotions.

The paper presents an exploratory research carried out with 250 teachers with the aim of understanding which emotions qualify teaching practices, the sense of perceived self-efficacy and the main educational needs. The instruments used are the Questionnaire on emotions (EMOT), the Questionnaire on the self-efficacy (SELFEFF) of the MESI Battery (Moè, Pazzaglia & Friso, 2010) and the narration of one's own educational needs. The results of the research show clear indications to be declined in the field of teachers' education.

Il sistema di relazioni ed emozioni che si sviluppano attraverso il processo di insegnamento-apprendimento definisce la complessità della formazione degli insegnanti e pone la sfida di far emergere la cultura emotiva ed affettiva che guida la vita scolastica. Molti studi sulle pratiche di insegnamento hanno evidenziato la tendenza a identificare la dimensione chiave della professionalità docente negli aspetti tecnici, lasciando in subordine le dimensioni emotive che possono, invece, sostenere la qualità della relazione con gli studenti. Negli ultimi decenni, il ruolo svolto dalle emozioni nel contesto scolastico è divenuto oggetto della ricerca pedagogica, che ha evidenziato la necessità di ripensare la formazione degli insegnanti al fine di integrarla con un lavoro mirato sulle emozioni.

L'articolo presenta uno studio esplorativo realizzato con 250 insegnanti con lo scopo di comprendere quali emozioni qualificano le pratiche di insegnamento, il senso di autoefficacia percepita e i principali bisogni formativi. Gli strumenti utilizzati sono il Questionario sulle emozioni (EMOZ), il Questionario sull'autoefficacia (AUTOEFF) ricavati dalla Batteria MESI (Moè, Pazzaglia & Friso, 2010) e la narrazione dei propri bisogni formativi. I risultati dello studio mostrano chiare implicazioni che possono essere declinate nell'ambito della formazione degli insegnanti.

Keywords:

Teachers' Education; Emotions; Teaching-Learning process; Educational Relationship.

Formazione degli Insegnanti; Emozioni; Processo di Insegnamento-Apprendimento; Relazione Educativa.

1. Teaching as an emotional attempt

The teaching is configured as an intersubjective construction of educational stories and is based on a relational interchange in which the cognitive component, more often considered the focus of the process, is mediated by the emotional one. The latter has the function of qualifying the experience in a positive or negative sense, facilitating or hindering the learning processes (Blandino & Granieri, 2002). In fact, emotions can become resources, if they are recognized and used with purposeful and constructive goals, but also represent an obstacle if denied or even simply underestimated with respect to their impact on learning, on the climate, on motivations. It refers to the pleasure or fear of learning which in turn nourishes the ability to lifelong learning, determining the development of the individual and his or her human capital in terms of capability/opportunity (Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 2000). Emotions are, therefore, to be considered an essential element of the educational experience and also a predictor of learning success and effectiveness (Bruner, 1994).

You learn through relationships and teaching is primarily the management of the educational relationship; for this reason, the attention that teachers devote to taking care of the emotional-relational aspects is strictly connected to the school's ability to keep its promises and pursue its intentions. The value and influence that the internal world of who teach and who learn has on different aspects of school life is undeniable; the class, in fact, can be conceived as a living space, in the meaning proposed by Lewin (1965), that is, in its subjective dimension, as a psychological place made up of individuals and relationships. However, it must be recognized that in the school context, emotions have long been limited to something to be controlled, managed and curbed, as they are conceived as opposed to rational dimensions. According to this conception, the basis of knowledge would reside in rational thinking, a type of thinking that would not allow itself to be permeated by emotional dimensions. The historic split between emotional and intellectual culture has made it difficult to identify a clear emotional space in school and determine the value of the emotional resources of teachers and students. Both in the field of neuroscience and in the philosophical reflection, this perspective has been overcome and there are many studies that have shown that thought has emotional roots and that it is precisely these that make it rich (Damasio, 1994; 2003). The ancient dichotomy has therefore been supplanted by a conception according to which emotions pervade thought, indeed they are thought (Nussbaum, 2004).

An unavoidable step of the discourse concerns placing emotions as a constitutive part of the experience: one cannot not feel emotions, but the way in which one does it and the relationship that is built with individual experiences depends strongly on how one is educated, by the freedoms granted and by the restrictions/prohibitions established. The emotional life of the human being depends on how much and how the experience of emotions qualifies his developmental process.

The pedagogical implications that derive from these assumptions concern the overcoming of educational positions that place the two dimensions in contrast and the promotion, in a perspective of integration, of "a reasonable emotionality and a passionate reason" (Baldacci, 2008, p. 9).

In recent decades, the role played by emotions in the school context has become the object of pedagogical research, starting from the assumption that every educational process is identifiable with an empathic process of emotional tuning and the ability to feel the other. The most recent research focuses, in fact, on how emotions can be used in an adequate way to support the construction of effective educational relationships, on how to organize the school setting and on the role played by teachers. Bringing out the "affective culture" that guides school life (Lancini, 2015, p. 151) represents an indispensable challenge; the aim is to learn to

live educational relationships as a space of possibility to try to be fully oneself. In fact, making the other grow on a cultural level presupposes making him grow on an emotional level, and all this presumes the emotional maturity of those who take care of this process. Those who teach, those who educate have the task of taking care of the terms that circumscribe the emotional dynamics and the meaning that it can take on in interaction with the other. The teaching processes feed on and regulate themselves through the experiences and beliefs of those who teach, which however often remain latent and little investigated material. The complex emotional implications that characterize the teacher-student relationship need to be recognized and transformed into sources of learning. The management of these aspects calls into question the "relational professionalism" of the teacher (Blandino, Granieri, 2002), that is, knowing how to read the interaction, knowing how to intervene on the emotional tones of the relationship, knowing how to name emotions and contextualize them. The work on emotions requires, as a preliminary step, listening, recognition and management of the teacher's emotional experience, which can only subsequently become available to the emotional world of students.

For a long time, the investigation of teaching practices has highlighted its cold and rational component (Chen, 2016), inherent, for example, the knowledge and techniques used by teachers, and has kept in transparency and in the background one of the central aspects of the educational professions, namely emotions (Anttila, Pyhältö, Pietarinen, 2016; Bruzzone, 2016; Gomez, Allen & Clinton, 2004; Hargreaves, 1998; Iori, 2016). In fact, many studies over the years have shown that the conception that teachers have of their professional role is still very focused on operating methods already acquired and linked to a transmissive model of knowledge, rather than on relational dimensions that can favor the relationship with students. (Cunti, 2014; Geerink, Masschelein & Simons, 2010; Gonçalves, Azevedo & Alves 2013). As also stated by Bruner (2002, p. 99) "the almost exclusive interest in performance and evaluation has often led to the neglect of the processes by which teachers and pupils do their job in the real class, how teachers and pupils learn".

Although the importance of relationships is not excluded, the tendency is to insert them in a linear process or to manage them according to simplified resolution methods that are based on the separation of relationships and emotional issues from the didactic process or on attributing to factors external to the school certain qualities of interaction with students (Cunti & Priore, 2019a). In this interpretative framework, it happens that the emotional components are experienced as an obstacle to the development of ordinary teaching and that the attempts made are aimed to return a "relational normality" which allows you to focus on disciplinary contents, obviously thought of as impermeable from an emotional point of view.

The lack of scientific interest in the analysis of emotions experienced by teachers in recent decades is now contrasted by a proliferation of studies that lead to conceiving the class as an emotional arena (Cross & Hong, 2012) in which what teachers feel affects the emotional state of students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyer & Turner, 2002) and the general classroom climate (Yan, Evans & Harvey, 2011; Richards, 2022). Studies have shown that teachers' negative emotions not only contribute to arousing negative emotions in students, but also have an impact on the cognitive choices students make in solving tasks (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002), on motivational aspects (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002) and on the perception of efficacy (Kaplan, Gheen & Midgley, 2002).

In particular, the studies that have focused on teachers' emotions have highlighted the important influence they exert on various aspects that regulate school life, among which there is the construction of learning setting and the involvement of students (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt & Oort, 2011), the definition of teachers' professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Lohbeck & Frenzel, 2022), their ability to manage uncertainty and change in working practices (Kelchtermans, Ballet & Piot, 2009), teaching methods and the objectives of education

(Frenzel, Götz & Pekrun 2008; Sutton, 2004; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie & Minor, 2001). With regard to this last aspect, a recent study (Chen, 2019) has shown that didactic choices can be the consequence of the emotional experience of teachers, or that negative emotions would lead the teacher to choose a didactic that puts himself at the center, while positive emotions would induce the teacher to develop student-centered teaching.

It is possible that concentration on academic achievement and learning objectives has contributed to denying and minimizing the role played by emotions (Fitzsimmons & Lanphar, 2011; Smith, Davidson, Cameron & Bondi, 2009), especially if in the representations of teachers these are configured as obstacles or distractors in school activities.

The discourse falls on the conception of the cultural profile of the teachers that we intend to build and put into practice and on the weight that we want to assign in it to the knowledge, knowing how to do and knowing how to be. When the approach taken is multi-perspective and critical, all the aforementioned components are involved and the learning and professional development focuses on the challenge of pre-established structures and on the constant transformation of educational and didactic action.

In the current scenario, teaching is conceived according to a complex, articulated and systemic perspective and the validity of a model of teaching professionalism more centered on research and reflective style is widely recognized (Baldacci, 2021; Fabbri, Striano & Melacarne, 2008; Mortari, 2009). The vast system of relationships and emotions that develop in the teaching-learning process contributes to this complexity (Baldacci, 2008; Cunti & Priore, 2019b; Dato, 2017; Priore, 2020; Riva, 2004; 2015), that it is essential that they become an integral part of the teachers' education; the core concerns the emergence of latent interpretations and the acquisition of greater awareness that should guide professional practices.

Ultimately, the results achieved by a significant part of international research on the subject underline the need to rethink teachers' education, in order to integrate it with forms of support for the development of positive relationships with students through targeted work on emotions (Newberry, 2010).

2. The exploratory study on emotions, self-efficacy and educational needs of in service-teachers

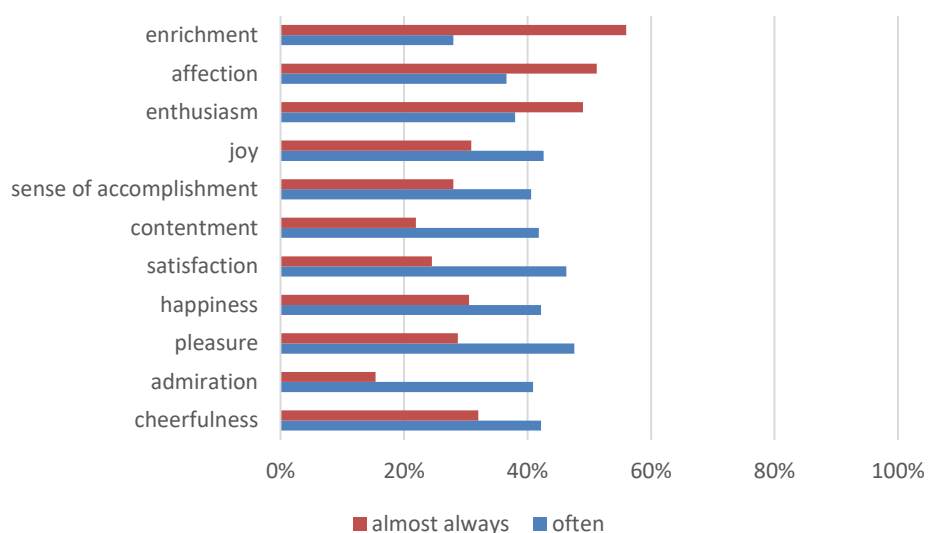
The theoretical framework outlined has solicited some research questions that form the basis of an exploratory study carried out with 250 in service-teachers at schools of all levels in Calabria. Participants are 89.9% of cases of female gender, have an average age of 42.2 years and have been in service for an average of about 7 years (range 1-21 years).

The study was carried out with the aim of exploring the emotions that teachers feel when they teach and when they think about the professional role, the sense of self-efficacy in a series of teaching situations and the perception of their own educational needs.

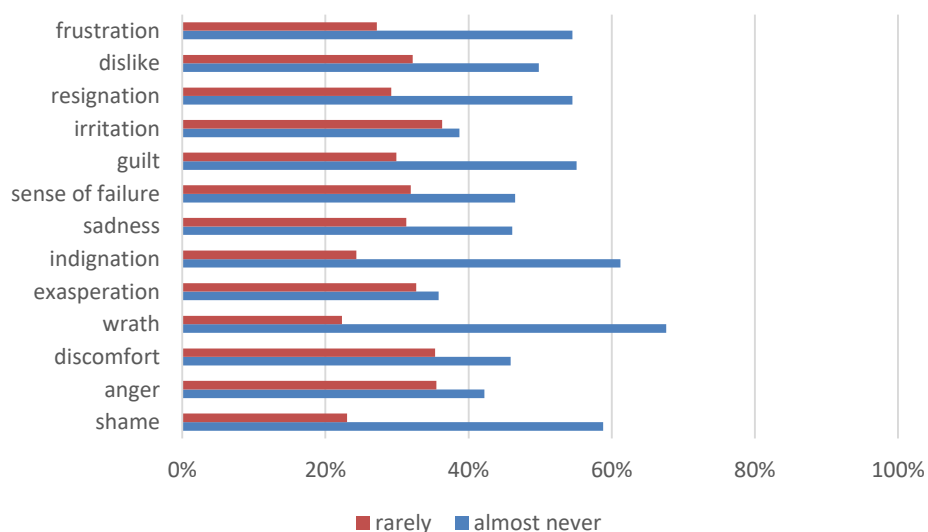
To investigate the emotional experience of teachers and their sense of self-efficacy, 2 questionnaires taken from the MESI Battery - *Motivations, Emotions, Strategies and Teaching - were used. Metacognitive questionnaires for teachers* (Moè, Pazzaglia & Friso, 2010): the Questionnaire on emotions in teaching (EMOZ) and the Questionnaire of self-efficacy in teaching (AUTOEFF). The questionnaire on emotions in teaching consists of 30 items, each of which consists of a specific emotion, positive or negative, and for each one is required to indicate the degree of frequency with which it is experienced on a 5-point scale (Likert scale: *almost never, rarely, sometimes, often, almost always*).

The self-efficacy questionnaire consists of 24 items and requires the teacher to indicate how much he thinks he can do in some teaching situations presented on a 9-point scale (from *not at all* to *very much* with 7 intermediate grades). Finally, to identify the participants' educational needs an open question of a narrative nature was given: “*What education do I need?*”.

The statistical analyzes conducted on the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires show that the emotional experience of teaching is characterized by a significantly positive value; the emotions almost always felt by at least 50% of the participants are enrichment, affection and enthusiasm; those often experienced by at least 40% of the participants are joy, a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment, satisfaction, happiness (graph 1). The emotions rarely or almost never experienced by at least 40% of the participants are all negative, such as anger, indignation, shame, frustration, resignation and guilt (graph 2).



Graph. 1 Percentage data related to the emotions most often felt by teachers



Graph. 2 Percentage data related to the emotions felt less by the teachers

In relation to the sense of self-efficacy, the data show that the situations in which teachers think they can do a great deal are limited. Only 41.10% of participants believe, for example, that they can act in an important way to encourage students' creativity, 38% that they can lead students to believe that they can do school work well. In the other situations presented through the questionnaire, the self-efficacy percentages decrease considerably: only 20.60% of teachers believe they can do a lot to assist families in order to help their children do well in school, 18% to contain disturbing behavior in the classroom, 12.10% to establish constant procedures in order to support the various school activities without problems (Tab. 1).

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DO FOR	<i>A great deal</i>
	Percentage of participants
Encourage students' creativity	41,10%
Lead students to believe they can do school work well	38%
Helping students value learning	34,80%
Motivate students who show little interest in school work	33,60%
Making the most of difficult students	31,30%
Assist families in helping their children to do well in school	20,60%
Calm down a noisy, destructive student	18,90%
Contain disruptive behavior in the classroom	18%
Interacting with problematic pupils	16,90%
Put into practice a management system of the different groups in which the class is divided	15,40%
Answering difficult questions from students	14,90%
Respond effectively to students who have an insolent attitude	13,10%
Establish constant procedures in order to support various school activities without problems	12,10%

Tab. 1 Percentage data relating to teaching situations in which the participants believe they can do "a great deal".

From the analysis of the content of the textual corpus obtained from the teachers' narratives on educational needs, a branched categorical system emerged with a corecategory at the center, *pedagogical education*, which refers to the need of the participants to acquire skills in the field of educational sciences. In particular, the teachers who participated in the study ask to be better trained in the following areas of professional competence:

- relationship with students
- handling difficult students

- classroom management
- emotional dynamics
- development of the professional Self
- cooperation with colleagues
- communication with families.

Two other categories, certainly less saturated, revolve around this central nucleus, which refer on the one hand to the need for technological education, which concerns the knowledge and mastery of ICT and innovative methodologies; on the other hand, to specific disciplinary contents, which express specific needs related to limited areas of knowledge: school legislation, elements of law and linguistics.

3. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the first analyzes of the data are articulated on 3 levels. The first concerns the emotional experience of teaching: teachers report that they experience positive emotions more frequently, showing a willingness, albeit not aware, to hide any emotional cost of teaching or to give an image desirable of themselves and of their job.

The second level concerns the sense of self-efficacy: the aspects that would seem to make teachers more difficult concern precisely those with a strong emotional and relational connotation, such as classroom management, "difficult" students and the construction of an educational alliance with families.

The last aspect, which refers to the educational needs expressed by the participants, is in line with what emerged from the last TALIS survey (OECD, 2019): the needs fall within the scope of transversal skills and concern the management of oneself, of other, of the educational relationship and of the emotional dimensions that qualify school life.

The results of the research and the reference scientific literature show clear indications to decline in the field of teachers' education. A first significant element concerns the importance of focusing the reflective training of teachers on three main objects: meanings, emotions and relationships (Bruzzone, 2018; Contini, 1992; Fabbri, Striano & Melacarne, 2008); on them it is necessary to activate a hypothetical thought that can feed processes of construction and subjective deconstruction of the profession and its development. The formative potential of a reflective work on emotional contents is inscribed in the transformative transition from the merely emotional dimension, relating to living the experience, to a meta-emotional that concerns, instead, knowing how to think about emotions. Grasping with greater awareness the cognitive dimension that is intertwined with the way of feeling and acting of an emotional nature represents one of the main objectives of the training. In the classroom, there would thus be the possibility, for all the protagonists of the educational relationship, to participate in a mentalized emotional climate, an aspect that would also seem to have positive repercussions on the relationship between peers (Caputi, Lecce, Pagnin & Banerjee, 2012), on reduction of aggression (Twemlow *et al.*, 2001) and on the effectiveness of teaching (Jenkins & Astington, 2000; Razza, Blair & 2009). These arguments underpin the importance of reasoning in terms of reflexive competences, where the ability to recognize and experience one's emotions with greater awareness, as well as to observe and understand those of others and above all direct them towards greater well-being, requires the development of hypothetical and situational thinking. A second aspect to focus on concerns the use of self-narration as a reflective device. It gives a precise direction to the training course to be carried out with the teachers, that is to offer a reflective space aimed at identifying the personal intertwining between emotions, thoughts and actions. A possible narrative itinerary to propose to teachers could focus on the three main levels of emotional experience defined by Fried, Mansfield and Dobozy (2015):

influences (the factors that determine how individuals feel and interpret experiences), functions (internal and external roles played by emotions) and complexity (broad vision that allows us to frame emotions in the complex system that sees the individual interact with the other, in contexts and in the concatenation of systems).

In conclusion, if teaching is intended as an "emotional attempt" (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino & Knight, 2009), teachers' education cannot be separated from a targeted work on emotions that can transform the professional identity of teachers in the direction of the problematic nature and complexity of the experience.

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