



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI BARI
ALDO MORO



DIPARTIMENTO JONICO IN SISTEMI
GIURIDICI ED ECONOMICI DEL MEDITERRANEO
SOCIETÀ, AMBIENTE, CULTURE
IONIAN DEPARTMENT OF LAW, ECONOMICS
AND ENVIRONMENT

13
2020

QUADERNI DEL DIPARTIMENTO JONICO

ESTRATTO da

IDENTITÀ, PLURALITÀ, DIVERSITÀ.
IL RICONOSCIMENTO, OVVERO L'ESSERE PER L'ALTRO
a cura di
Riccardo Pagano e Adriana Schiedi

IVAN FORTUNATO, LUANA MONTEIRO

Depictions of affectivity: a look at the perspective of
philosophy, psychology and teaching practice



ISBN: 978-88-945030-0-5

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Redazione a cura di Patrizia Montefusco



Il presente volume è stato chiuso per la pubblicazione in data
30 giugno 2020
dall'editore "Dipartimento Jonico in Sistemi
giuridici ed economici del Mediterraneo: società, ambiente, culture"
dell'Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro
e messo in linea sul sito [https://www.uniba.it/ricerca/dipartimenti/sistemi-
giuridici-ed-economici/edizioni-digitali](https://www.uniba.it/ricerca/dipartimenti/sistemi-giuridici-ed-economici/edizioni-digitali)
ed è composto di 384 pagine.

ISBN 978-88-945030-0-5

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IN SISTEMI GIURIDICI ED ECONOMICI DEL MEDITERRANEO:
SOCIETÀ, AMBIENTE, CULTURE – EDJSGE

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INDICE

AUTORI	12
RICCARDO PAGANO <i>Prefazione</i>	16
GABRIELLA CAPOZZA <i>Soggetto e società nella commedia L'abito nuovo di Pirandello ed Eduardo</i>	18
ALESSIO CARACCILO <i>Il lavoro dello straniero tra diritti di cittadinanza ed inclusione sociale</i>	30
VALERIA CASTELLI <i>L'analisi interpretativa delle norme come strumento di tutela e riconoscimento di fattispecie giuridiche minori</i>	42
PAOLO CIOCIA <i>Diritti e responsabilità della persona verso l'altro: le nuove dimensioni del legame solidaristico nella legislazione "promozionale" ambientale</i>	48
MASSIMILIANO COCOLA <i>L'informazione societaria tra riconoscimento formale e morale dell'individuo</i>	58
CLAUDIO D'ALONZO <i>La posizione dei soci nell'organizzazione della società</i>	66
BARBARA DE SERIO <i>Un viaggio nell'infanzia per riconoscere il valore della relazione</i>	76
MARCO DEL VECCHIO <i>Identico a chi? Breve excursus nel dualismo identitario</i>	86
GABRIELE DELL'ATTI <i>Il criterio di ragionevolezza nella legislazione emergenziale in materia di riunioni assembleari come viatico per il riconoscimento reciproco: primi spunti di riflessione</i>	98
IVAN FORTUNATO, LUANA MONTEIRO <i>Depictions of affectivity: a look at the perspective of philosophy, psychology and teaching practice</i>	106

MINO IANNE <i>«Gli uomini eccellenti sono amici fra loro»: il bíos pitagorico come essere per l'altro</i>	118
MICHELE INDELLICATO <i>Paul Ricoeur: l'alterità nel cuore della persona</i>	136
ROSA INDELLICATO <i>Identità e diversità: il problema del riconoscimento della persona portatrice dell'universale</i>	148
IGNAZIO LAGROTTA <i>La responsabilità costituzionale intergenerazionale come dovere e limite all'azione delle generazioni presenti sotto il profilo della gestione delle risorse economico-finanziarie</i>	166
CLAUDIA ILARIA SOFIA LOVASCIO <i>Giovani in cerca di riconoscimento: principio di uguaglianza e politiche fiscali per la redistribuzione generazionale</i>	178
PAOLA MARTINO <i>Il duello e la gratitudine. Ripensare la relazione educativa attraverso l'ermeneutica del sé e il parcours del riconoscimento di Paul Ricœur</i>	186
PATRIZIA MONTEFUSCO <i>Clarorum virorum laudes atque virtutes: dalla nascita dell'epica a Virgilio</i>	196
FEDERICA MONTELEONE <i>"Diversi" eppure "uguali". Identità, diversità e riconoscimento alle origini dell'Europa</i>	210
RICCARDO PAGANO, ADRIANA SCHIEDI <i>Formazione e sviluppo dell'identità. Per una competenza pedagogica dell'insegnante</i>	228
GIUSEPPE RUGGIERO PARENTE <i>Mutilazioni genitali e dinamiche medico-legali</i>	246
SALVATORE ANTONELLO PARENTE <i>Strumenti di fiscalità ambientale e solidarietà intergenerazionale</i>	254
FRANCESCO PERCHINUNNO <i>Principio di solidarietà e tutela della salute nell'era Covid-19</i>	278
FILOMENA PISCONTI <i>Emergenza, diritti e soccorso in mare nella dialettica tra autorità e libertà</i>	290
ANDREA PORCARELLI <i>Religioni in dialogo per una paideia del "saper vivere insieme"</i>	300
ANGELICA RICCARDI <i>Disabilità e non discriminazione. L'evoluzione della regolazione dell'unione</i>	312

MARIA BENEDETTA SAPONARO <i>Identità e sviluppo morale</i>	320
MAURIZIO SOZIO <i>Il lato oscuro dell'infosfera identità e comunicazione digitale</i>	334
MARIA LAURA SPADA <i>L'inclusione e la tutela dei minori stranieri non accompagnati</i>	344
PIERLUCA TURNONE <i>Identità e alterità nella prospettiva heideggeriana. Un contributo per la pedagogia ermeneutica</i>	358
ANTONIO ZINGARELLI <i>Riconoscimento, linguaggio, democrazia</i>	372
ADRIANA SCHIEDI <i>Postfazione</i>	382

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DEPICTIONS OF AFFECTIVITY: A LOOK AT THE PERSPECTIVE OF
PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY AND TEACHING PRACTICE*

ABSTRACT	
Proponiamo una comprensione dell'affettività, una dimensione presente nella relazione insegnante-studente e le sue rappresentazioni in diversi settori, come la filosofia e la psicologia. L'obiettivo centrale è capire come le rappresentazioni dell'affetto sono articolate in diverse aree. Con questo movimento, speriamo di indurre i lettori a comprendere queste diverse concezioni e come contribuiscono a pensare all'affettività nell'educazione.	We propose an understanding of affectivity, an aspect present in the teacher-student relationship and its representations in different sectors, such as philosophy and psychology. The main purpose is to understand how the representations of affection are divided into different areas. Thanks to this movement, we hope to induce the readers to understand these different conceptions and how they contribute to think about affectivity in education.
Affettività – pratica dell'insegnamento – educazione	Affectivity – teaching practice – education

SOMMARIO: 1. Depictions of affectivity: a look at the perspective of Philosophy, Psychology and Teaching Practice.

1. The classroom comprises an affective space, in which emotions, feelings, motivations and interests come together at all times with cognitive development. When thinking otherwise, we would be taking this place as a deposit of information, leaving teachers and students facing conflicts and interactions prevailing individualism, incomprehension, lack of space for listening and speaking, non-respect for the other time, space and action. In this sense, the teaching performance is a work of human interactions, that is concretized in the relationship with the other, in otherness.

Affectivity is innate in the human interaction of teaching practice: it permeates the teacher-student relationship and can reveal affective experiences, either positive or negative, awakening pleasant or unpleasant feelings in the teaching-learning process. Considering affectivity as an element of teaching practice, it is necessary to mean it

* Saggio sottoposto a revisione secondo il sistema per *peer review*.

beyond the sentimental field, but as a central element in teaching, as an aspect that guides didactic choices within the mediation process, in the relationship with the other, both for teaching and learning.

By the way, thinking about affectivity in the teaching work in the classroom encouraged a reflective movement on the representations of affectivity also present in Philosophy and Psychology, as well as, thinking about how the depictions of these different areas are articulated and contribute with an approach to Education, specifically, in the teacher-student relationship, within the teaching and learning process.

Initially, in the field of Philosophy, affectivity had been understood in an opposing relationship between reason and emotion. This perspective was explained by Leite¹ as a dualistic conception of the human being; in ancient times, it was represented by philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 BC), who understood opposing feelings and reason, so that the feelings resided in the heart, while the brain, represented by reason, performed the function of restraining these feelings.

Furthermore, the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) registered his famous quote “I think, therefore I am” with a clear dualistic conception of man, that is, the division between the dimensions of cognition and affection, as he implicitly suggested the valorization of the rational. In addition to Descartes, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also evidenced this opposition between reason and emotion, presenting the valorization of reason, since emotions and feelings represented an illness for mankind².

In contrast to the dualistic view of the human being, the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) discussed his ideas about the construction of knowledge and introduced the thought about the human being in a monist perspective; according to it, body, mind, reason, emotion and affections represented a unique structure, constituting the human being’s cognitive base. In his proposition, he demonstrated opposition to the philosophy that ignored the power of affects in the human actions, as he stated «I want, now, to return to those who, instead of understanding, prefer to abhor or ridicule the affects and actions of men»³. Thus, it became evident that the construction of knowledge and the truth about it goes through affectivity. In addition, he left his contribution on the philosophical definition regarding this dimension, as he stated: «by affection I understand the affections of the body, by which its power to act is increased or decreased, stimulated or restrained»⁴.

Furthermore, researcher Pasqual also mentioned in her master’s dissertation that the conditions portrayed by Spinoza express the body’s ability to be affected by an

¹ S.A.S. Leite, *Afetividade nas práticas pedagógicas*, in *Temas em psicologia*, 20 (2), 2012, p. 356.

² M.S. Vasconcelos, *Afetividade na escola: alternativas teóricas e práticas*, in *Educação & Sociedade*, 25 (87), 2004, p. 616.

³ B. Spinoza, *Ética*, tr. br. di Tomaz Tadeu, Autêntica Editoria, Belo Horizonte 2009, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

element, an object external to it. According to her words: «For example, for Spinoza, there are good and bad affections. The bad ones can be the sadness, for example, which prevent, in most cases, the transforming action of the subjects, as in the same way, they can enable him to seek the transformation. It is the affections that drive our actions and it is the personal and singular sense that we attribute to them that make us have this or that action»⁵.

People can be affected in different ways, «by which their power to act is increased or decreased, while so many others do not make their power to act neither greater nor lesser»⁶. Thus, this potency results from experiences, from interactions with the external, with the other, from the affections that these relationships produce, meaning it is conditioned to the relationship with the other.

In Spinoza's consensus, affection is the dimension that determines, along with reason, the positive or negative representations of the relationships with the other and of the lived experiences. The educational process and the affection defended by Spinoza can reveal a potentiation or inhibition of the teaching-learning process, according to the quality of the lived experiences. As we are introductively proposing, this is something directly related to the experience mediated by the teacher.

However, despite the contributions of Baruch de Spinoza, the opposition between reason and emotion, and between cognition and affection, was still preserved for a long time. At the end of the 19th century, for example, it had its greatest manifestation in the movement called Positivism, which supported the production of scientific knowledge as the fruit of reason alone. This thought confirmed the valorization of reason in the processes of construction of knowledge and cognition⁷.

Considering the strong presence of dualistic thinking in philosophy and science, Leite evidenced the positivist influence on 21st century educational systems, covered in an educational process centered on rationality: «The secular influence of the dualist conception in the practices of educational institutions is undeniable: we inherit a conception according to which educational work involves and must be directed, essentially, towards the development of cognitive aspects, centered on reason, and that affectivity should not be involved in this process»⁸.

Nevertheless, the monist conception of man (constituted by body and soul, reason and emotion, and recognizing affections as affectivity, energies and forces that can modify one's power of acting and thinking) was once again evidenced *a posteriori* in the psychological studies on the affectivity by authors such as Lev Vygotsky and Henri Wallon.

⁵ D.M.S. Pasqual, *A base afetiva-volitiva na constituição de educadores (as) ambientais, doutorandos (as) do programa de pós-graduação em Educação Ambiental da FURG*, Dissertação de Mestrado, Rio Grande 2009, p. 62.

⁶ B. Spinoza, *Ética*, cit., p. 49.

⁷ S.A.S. Leite, *Afetividade nas práticas pedagógicas*, cit.

⁸ Ivi, cit., p. 357.

Psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), in his studies on language development from a sociocultural perspective, defended learning as an activity that takes place from social relations, since the incorporation of cultural instruments occurs in interaction with the other. The concept of social mediation gained space in research on development and learning.

In addition to his main theme and along with the learning process, he brought his contribution regarding the affective dimension in the construction of cognitive processes; in this way, he realizes a clear opposition to the idea of human being based on the separation between cognitive and affective dimensions. In this regard, Oliveira also showed that «Vygotsky explicitly mentions that one of the main defects of traditional psychology is the separation between the intellectual aspects on the one hand and the volitional and affective aspects on the other, proposing the consideration of the unity between these processes»⁹.

Thinking about cognitive development is only possible if we consider its affective relationship, since it is from the interaction with the other, with the social environment, that the objects of knowledge makes sense (generic, determined representation) and meaning (subjective representation). In turn, the representations of meaning are immersed in the relationships of affection, constituted in the interactions experienced with the other.

As an example, we can think of a learning situation in a school context, in which the quality of the affective interaction/mediation between teacher and student(s) is capable of awakening different meanings in relation to the learning object. Regarding this, Tassoni investigated Vygotsky's theory and cognitive processes, showing that according the author «all learning is impregnated with affectivity, since it occurs from social interactions, in a bonding process»¹⁰. This means learning processes are permeated by affective experiences.

Thus, in the reinterpretation of this psychologist's ideas, Tassoni showed that affectivity evolves from cognitive development, just as it depends on that for its growth. As an example, in childhood, affective manifestations are purely organic, represented by emotion. Subsequently, in the process of constructing symbolic representations, affectivity gains space in communicative interactions, and elements such as the intonation of the voice influence cognitive development, based on an affective bond.

As a teenager, from Lev Vygotsky's perspective, Tassoni presented that affective manifestations are rationalized, represented by social demands between human relationships, such as respect, justice and equality. In particular, in the relationship

⁹ M.K. de Oliveira. *O problema da afetividade em Vygotsky*, in Y. de la Taille, H. Dantas, M.K. de Oliveira (org.), *Piaget, Vygotsky e Wallon: teorias psicogenéticas em discussão*, Summus Editorial, São Paulo 1992, p. 76.

¹⁰ E.C.M. Tassoni, *Afetividade e aprendizagem: a relação professor-aluno*, in 23ª Reunião Anual da ANPEd, Campinas 2000, p. 3.

between teacher and student(s), the non-fulfillment of these requirements is understood, by the student, as absence of affection. Therefore, in the stages discussed, social interaction is a central element in human development, and pedagogical mediation is the basis of cognitive development.

As we have seen, the cognitive development process is based on motivations and affectivity. In this way, it seems that the relations of meaning obtained in learning are correlated with mediations, affective exchanges of the individual in the teaching and learning process. The teacher, as a mediating subject, tends to influence the relationship between the subject (student) and his/her learning process. Thus, it is possible to understand affectivity as a dimension that enhances and intensifies practices understood in mediation in the classroom. Its potential, in this way, is directly related to affective social interactions.

In addition to Lev Vygotsky, French researcher Henri Wallon (1879-1962) also addressed affectivity in the human development process. Although he was not a teacher, his writings help to think about schooling, because he brings the figure of the teacher in relation to the development of the subjects and the educational process. He developed studies on human development, from early life to adulthood, with studies on psychogenetics being his main contribution to science.

In these studies, he presented the affective dimension in the constitution of the subjects. He understood affectivity as a set, which encompasses emotions, feelings and passions, being a central dimension in the constitution of subjects, essentially in the construction of knowledge. In addition, he revealed the distinction between the concepts of affectivity and emotion. Emotions refer to organic, visceral structures, being perceived in muscle changes, in crying, for example.

Tassoni's statements also help to clarify the contributions on affection made by Wallon, explaining that:

Affection, in its turn, has a broader conception, involving a wider range of manifestations, encompassing feelings (psychological origin) and emotions (biological origin). Affection corresponds to a later period in the child's evolution, when symbolic elements appear. According to Wallon, it is with the appearance of these that the transformation of emotions into feelings occurs. The possibility of representation, which consequently implies a transfer to the mental plane, gives feelings a certain durability and moderation¹¹.

In this sense, Henri Wallon asserted that affection can be conceptualized as the subjects' willingness to be affected by their experiences and relationships with the social environment, whether these experiences are pleasant or unpleasant.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

Furthermore, from the contributions of research carried out by Mahoney and Almeida¹² on Wallonian studies, affection in relation to the cognitive has different stages of development, understood between childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Such as:

- *First stage* called *impulsive-emotional*, from zero to one year old, affectivity is expressed from physical contact, in body sensitivity. At that moment, affectivity is directly linked to physical contact and caring and the first perceptions of the physical space can affect in a positive or negative way;

- *Second stage* called *sensorimotor and projective*, from one to three years of age, affectivity starts its representation from speech. During this period, in the educational process, the teacher needs to provide different experiences, so that each child can, in its own way, get to know the world around them;

- *Third stage* called *personalism*, from three to six years of age: affective relationships happen from the representations of contact with the other. At this stage, not only practices that explicitly show respect for differences, but also room for expression are necessary for the teaching and learning process based on affectivity;

- *Forth stage* called *categorical*, from six eleven years of age, the world around a child is explored from the cognitive and social activity, considering the capacity of thinking from abstraction, and its evolution to categorical thinking. Recognized by Wallon as the beginning of school life, affective work implies paying attention to students' knowledge, the necessary paths for them to develop knowledge and the different evaluative possibilities. The attention and the pedagogical work in this stage «reveal feelings and values and favor or not this discovery of the world»¹³;

- *Fifth stage* called *puberty*, from 11 years of age onwards, adolescence is characterized by the search for autonomy and self-affirmation, by the presence of confrontation and questioning. In this phase, the work with affectivity consists of awakening the differences between ideas, feelings and values, the identification and respect for oneself, and the other;

- After the puberty stage, the *adult phase* was recognized by Henri Wallon as a process in which the subject reaches maturity, with one's self-knowledge

¹² A.A. Mahoney, L.R. Almeida, *Afetividade e processo ensino-aprendizagem: contribuições de Henri Wallon*, in *Psicologia da Educação*, 2005, p. 20.

¹³Ivi, p. 11.

and self-control, so that one recognizes one's limits, weaknesses, motivations and feelings. Affection is awakened in the relationship with the other, so that one can develop from it and, in solidarity, allow the other to also develop him/herself. As an example, we have the teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher (adult) «has better conditions for the welcoming the other, his/her students and his/her peers»¹⁴.

In this way, Henri Wallon's stages of affectivity, as presented by Mahoney and Almeida, can serve as a basis for teaching reflection in their formative processes. This is because they, along with the contributions of the professional teaching experience and the experiences with their students, can influence the understanding of the development of each student, in the face of the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, the teaching and learning process based on affectivity from the perspective of Henri Wallon understand the classroom as a place for expression and discussion, attention to individualities, setting boundaries and respecting diversity and different relationships in an interactive process. Therefore, these practices confer the mobilization of affectivity in the teaching work.

On the other hand, when affective practices as place of alterity, boundaries and respect are negative in the interactive teacher-student relationship, they can be transformed into conflicting situations hindering the process of teaching and learning, since «the way the teacher relates to the student reflects on the student's relationship with knowledge»¹⁵.

In addition to the investigation in the field of Philosophy and Psychology, there are also movements engaged in the investigation of affectivity in the field of Education. As an example we approach the works developed by professor and researcher Sérgio Antonio da Silva Leite. In proposing a dialogue with the theoretical references Henri Wallon and Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, the author recognizes the teacher as a mediating subject, and gives this mediation process an affective nature. According to the mediation carried out by the teacher, it can awaken negative or positive affective impacts in the interactions with students, facilitating or impairing the students' relationship with the learning object.

Leite made negative criticisms of the dualistic thinking about the human being and the appreciation of reason and the cognitive dimension to the detriment of emotion and the affective dimension. This researcher identified the affectivity dimension as a central element in the learning processes, pointing the great challenge to the approach of affectivity in the face of educational programs focused largely on the cognitive dimension. Thus, it becomes «fundamental to build an adequate theoretical model,

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 24

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 26

which enables an understanding that goes beyond the traditional view or common sense about the reason x emotion relationship»¹⁶.

The concept of affectivity defended by the author, based on the contributions made by Wallon and Vygotsky, is defined as a broad process. This process involves emotions and feelings, and has its development in relation to social interactions, and the representations given from of those interactions. According to Leite, «[...] affectivity is a broader concept, constituting later in the human development process, involving more complex experiences and forms of expression, developing with the appropriation, by the individual, of the symbolic processes of culture, which will enable their representation»¹⁷.

Leite's notes allow us to understand that, in the classroom, the mediation process between a student and an object of knowledge is not associated only with the cognitive dimension, as it also involves its affective character. Thus, in this relationship, teaching mediation can cause positive or negative affective repercussions.

From the notes on affectivity approached by Baruch de Spinoza, Lev Vygotsky and Henri Wallon, we can establish parallels between their contributions and Education. These authors understand the development of the subjects in a monist perspective and consider that the processes of knowledge construction are linked to social interaction. In addition, they pointed to affectivity as the central dimension of the human being, along with the cognitive dimension.

Furthermore, affectivity was revealed by these authors as affections, energies and forces that can modify people's power to act and to think, awakened from interactions with others. This makes it possible to think that, in the teacher-student relationship, affectivity in the mediation process allows students to develop different meanings in relation to cultural objects and learning, according to the quality of the relationships mediated by the other.

From the considerations presented, we can also recognize that the teaching practice, a process of human interactions, is innate in affectivity, since the teaching and learning process does not comprehend a purely cognitive, rational character. In addition, the understanding of the teachers' practice requires being guided beyond the cognitive character, since the development of teaching and learning is innate in human interactions. Thus, it is not to be understood only in relation to the cognitive, but also as a widely affective process.

Affection guides the depictions that the subjects attribute to their experiences with the other¹⁸. Thus, it permeates the pedagogical practice as an interactive action performed by teachers with their students in school environments. Furthermore, the affective relationship emerges from the teaching work and requires being present in their formative paths, as it represents a fundamental element in the pedagogical action

¹⁶ S.A.S. Leite, *Afetividade nas práticas pedagógicas*, cit., p. 359.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 360

¹⁸ E.C.M. Tassoni, *Afetividade e aprendizagem: a relação professor-aluno*, cit.

since «the affectivity that manifests itself in the teacher-student relationship is an inseparable element of the knowledge construction process»¹⁹.

The teaching and learning processes are (or should be) guided beyond the relationship with scientific content, facts and knowledge historically constituted. Pedagogical work is closely linked to the system of representations that the teacher has in his/her relationship with the other. Their interaction with the student is imbued with the ability to affect the other, making it possible or difficult, stimulating or not their power to act. Recognizing such affection on the development of the teaching profession is what we understand as necessary to work on teacher training processes.

Thinking about the educational process, it is necessary to go beyond the fragmentation between affection and cognition, called the monist perspective of mankind. Since these two dimensions remain intertwined, and through affection the learning subject has access to the symbolic world, to knowledge, once motivations, emotions, motives, intentions and desires can lead to the development of cognition, or not. Thus, in mediation for the teaching-learning process, based on affectivity, the teacher awakens, provokes the other to knowledge. In this sense:

The future relationship that is established between the student and the object of knowledge (in this case, school content) is not only cognitive, but also affective. This shows the importance of the pedagogical practices developed by teachers, as they will be mediating the relationship established between the student and the various knowledge objects involved. It can be assumed, therefore, that the success of learning will depend, in large part, on the quality of this mediation²⁰.

The didactic choices made by the teacher for the teaching and learning process directly imply the relationship with the other, because of the ability to affect, in a positive or negative way. Therefore, we confer affectivity as a founding element of teaching practice, mobilized in the teacher-student relationship, developed daily in one's practice.

Thus, there is no denying that a classroom comprises an affective place, in which emotions, feelings, motivations and interests congregate at all times with cognitive development. In thinking otherwise, we would be taking this place as a deposit of information, or as represented in the words of Fortunato et. al: «how insane it is a teaching and learning process without the dimension of affectivity and systemic thinking which leads us to confront and search for new knowledge»²¹.

The lack of recognition of affectivity in teaching practice as a knowledge immersed in the field of teacher-student relations configures this demented process criticized by

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 7.

²⁰ S.A. Leite, A.R. Tagliaferro, *A afetividade na sala de aula: um professor inesquecível*, in *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 9 (2), 2005, p. 248.

²¹ I. Fortunato et al., *Afetividade, educação e o pensamento complexo*, in *Varia Scientia*, 10 (17), 2010, p. 21.

Fortunato et. al. This tries to leave teachers and students facing conflicts, facing interactions that prevail individualism, incomprehension, lack of space for listening and speaking, non-respect for the time, space and action of the other. These conflicts, often caused by neglect of affectivity, hinder the process of exchanges in interactive learning. This is crucial if we consider the premise that learning is understood as in Freire's words: «educational practice is all of this, affection, joy, scientific domain and technical capacity in the service of change or, unfortunately, the maintenance of the status quo»²².

Thus, the quality of teaching practice, of teaching and learning process is directly linked to the affective nature of pedagogical mediation, in relation to the other. The choice of learning objects in different classes, the different didactics for developing the classes and their evaluation proposals, the paths for meaningful learning, as well as the chronological order for introducing each content, in order to respect the maturity of the students; the starting point to approach a certain subject, considering what students know, the experiences they have about it, depend (among other issues) on the teacher's affective stances and standpoint, once it is capable of providing a learning process through a positive or negative approach to knowledge.

In addition, it is important to consider that the welcoming of each student, the words spoken by the teacher, the way they are put, the tone of voice, and the moment of speech, looks and facial expressions, are affective choices within the teacher-student relationship.

In this perspective, is necessary to be affected to learn it, so that the student can assign meaning in his relationship with the teacher and with the object of knowledge. It is as stated by Paulo Freire by noting that «the importance of these gestures that multiply daily in the plots of the school space it is something we would have to seriously reflect on»²³. Thus, discussing, reflecting and recognizing affectivity in teaching practice must be guided by its formative processes as a central issue. After all, the affective teaching practice does not make a teacher less professional, less respected, but it enables the school, or at least the classroom, to be a place of human relations, of teaching and learning and respecting the human being in their development, in the face of their individuality and collectivity.

In the end, along with the know-how that guides different knowledge areas, professional training, teaching techniques and systems, and those understandings developed in the teaching experience, we do not think, in a hypocritical way, to propose the way out, or the magic formula to solve all the problems faced by teachers daily in the classroom. However, we think to contribute, reflexively to the practice, identifying that there is knowledge mobilized in the teaching relationship with the student, which we think is understood as a central characteristic of this professional activity and

²² P. Freire, *Pedagogia da autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa*, Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro 1996, p. 161.

²³ Ivi, p. 19

consequently of its formative process. After all, there is no teaching without the relationship with the other. And in this relationship with the other is where affection lies.