

## **Teachers as Early Social- Emotional Skills Apprentices: The Affective Self- Understanding Challenge behind the Chair**

**Sofia Dal Zovo**

University of Verona  
*sofia.dalzovo@univr.it*

---

**Abstract:** *This paper will focus on the Italian reality of the teaching world, and on the new theme for our State in particular: the social-emotional learning (SEL) linked to the role of the teacher. Examining the present literature that highlights some scholastic relational difficulties, we come to recognize the importance of some dimensions of working experience that can condition the well-being can bring discomfort to the teachers, and consequently to the quality of the scholastic reality. It thus emerges that taking care of relationships, is basic also in the world of teachers. Across a research that will start, we come investigate and to describe the emotional experiences lived in the classroom, using the narrative and reflective diary, thus improving a sense of affective self-awareness into the teachers willing to participate in the research, particularly in Verona.*

**Keywords:** *social emotional learning, teacher education, emotional experience qualitative research, narrative diaries*

---

### **1. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT TEACHING IN ITALY**

The fact that teachers are a category of workers who are in big trouble is there for everyone to see. Various challenges may create or increase an uncomfortable situation. Very often this kind of discomfort is not due to an overload of organizational and bureaucratic elements (anyway these elements have to be considered a burden as they can be a constraint for the teachers), but poorly cultivated skills, or more specifically defined by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic Social emotional learning), socio-emotional skills make a difference for the faculty, as is clear from the latest researches in this field. For example CASEL, is a project founded in 1994 by Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, Timothy Shriver, Linda Lantieri, Mark Greenberg and David Sluyter, whose mission is to introduce the socio-emotional education learning as an essential part of the individual. It aims to collect scientific data to confirm the contribution of the social and emotional skills not only to achieve positive goals at a school level, but for a general personal and social well-being. Since 1993 even the World Health Organization (WHO) has included the rule of the emotions, that is the awareness of how the emotional part of each of us has a strong influence on our actions and attitudes, in the life skills, which are necessary to live and in which education must also invest a lot. On the other hand, in Italy it seems that it is hard to talk about social emotional skills, even from an educational point of view. If we glance inside the Italian school contexts, the problem appears evident. There is a feeling that recently social and political system forgets the school. Nevertheless, some institutions tried to put at the centre of their lives the aspect of well-being that involves all the people participate in the process in the training and educational process. As a matter of fact, emotions shine through voluntarily and involuntarily and influence teacher-student interaction: the students are in fact aware of the emotions felt by their teachers (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). For example, in some kindergarten of Milan, the teachers asked for the presence of a psychologist to help them not only to deal with some problematic and understanding aspects of the behaviours expressed by the children, but also with the conflict that sometimes occurs between teachers and parents, because it is difficult to manage on their own (Panciroli et al. 2013). The teachers themselves, then they point out that they would need more individual training, exchanges among colleagues about practices that they already made in order to help out each other increase the awareness of their gazes, so arise those preconceptions and judgments that are stuck in now priori and they are no longer subjected to a critical awareness, and finally, work on the conflict among teachers to defuse a collective climate

of hostility that was leading to a strong friction. So considering the reflections of the teachers about their condition, it is confirmed the commitment and enthusiasm for their work, but if bad judgements and few merits continuously arise, these experiences lead to anger, disappointment and impatience (Vecchio, Velasco and Miglioretti, 2013). At this point it is necessary to recognize the importance of work experience in influencing the well-being of teachers and consequently the quality of the school situation (Pedrabissi, Santinello and Rolland, 1993). It follows that, carefully cultivating relationship, is, is fundamental also in the world of teachers to aim for a more positive mood and well-being for both personal and group. It would be necessary to start giving value to the socio-emotional skills of the teacher, in relation to the high exposure relationship of this profession, which inevitably leads to emotional fatigue. The teachers are significant reference points for the classroom setting, and since they carry out one of those professions which are called *helping profession* cannot get out of knowing consciously the emotional world, considering that their work is mainly characterized by a high rate of relatedness. Even Rogers (1970) spoke about of the helping relationship as a partnership, in which one of the two people involved, aims to promote in the other the growth, development, maturation and the attainment of a more appropriate act. Teaching is surely an emotional practise: through daily interaction with students and adults, teachers use their emotions, generate emotional reactions and learn emotional structures. It is only to acquire knowledge.

## **2. WHAT IS IT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE?**

To explain what social- emotional competence means at first it is necessary to remember the different facets of the so-called basic emotions, which are numerically limited. Six major categories of emotions have been identified: happiness, anger, disgust, surprise, fear and sadness, that individuals from different countries and cultures are able to recognize and associate them in each situation (Ekman, 1984; Ekman and Friesen 1971). The concept of Emotional Intelligence (IE) therefore, that came to the fore with Goleman in 1995 has found roots in earlier authors, Salovey and Mayer (1990), who argue that emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and express emotions, to know how to use understand and manage them; in himself and in others. The IE refers to the ability to recognize, in particular, the information conveyed by emotions, identifying the causes and possible consequences, knowing accurately, classify and describe emotions and moods which are too complex. It stands to mean being so reflective and integrating adaptively cognitive processes, in order to improve the activity of thinking in problem-solving, decision making and planning. From here it was possible to extrapolate the concept of social-emotional competence, which according to one of the first authors who provided one of the first definitions (Saarni, 1999) is to be a competent individuals who are active in reminding: of their emotional state, the ability to recognize the emotions of others, a willingness to use the emotional vocabulary and cultural expressions available in their own culture; cultivate the ability to empathic involvement, sharpen the distinction between emotional states known and proven fact, mature new ways to cope with negative valence emotions through the use of self-regulation strategies, possible only after the self-reflection has become a 'habit; come to the awareness that the nature of the relationship is defined by the way in which emotions are communicated within the relationship, and finally the emotional self-efficacy. In the vein of Italian literature, however, we have the first contributions on the social-emotional competence that is seen as the set of capabilities that enable you to recognize, understand and respond coherently to others' emotions and to regulate their expressions (Albanese, 2006). Or, the social-emotional competence is meant to represent a summary of the integration between affective domain and the social domain, indicating that we cannot consider one without considering the other at the same time (Baumgartner, 2010). The emotional competence thus facilitates a series of adaptive social behaviour, through reciprocal modulation of emotional states (Izard, 2001) and the generation of responses to social problems (Lamerise and Arsenio, 2000). In the light of these definitions, what can you do to ensure that the Italian teachers, more and more able to enhance and hone their social-emotional skills in order to have a greater ability to manage their emotional experiences, thereby increasing the well-being and school relational skills with others? How emotions can be understood as a resource within the educational process and soothe emotional distress so that it is always more difficult to cope?

### **3. THE CHALLENGE OF ITALIAN SCHOOLS IN VERONA**

Giving voice to the emotional content in Italy, the teachers are need to assess the importance of developing what they call social-emotional skills just from another angle , more phenomenological, which is self-awareness if internal feeling state. The teachers are realizing that the world of teaching is inevitably complex and problematic. That demands decrease the discomfort that often is an inner and emotional weight. To this end, it is necessary to give more attention to minimize the poor relationship skills. Affective self-awareness then, understood phenomenologically as deep self-knowledge and reflection about their emotional experiences. It can be assumed, therefore, that in each of us there is a "heart of the life of the mind", the substance of which is given by our core beliefs and the feeling that accompanies them (Mortari, 2009). It is essential to try to identify those that are the fundamental feelings that characterize one's own person, to pursue this self-awareness of saying that one is able to shed light on its inner essence. In other words, "you must understand what the so-called basic emotions and the situational emotions" (Nussbaum, 2004 p.21). For example: you can live a superficially leaving no footprints on being, or feeling pervaded by a joy deeper that persistently characterizes an individual. And the same can be done for the bitterness, sadness, and so on. Relational and emotional skills, for this reason, are vital regardless of the employment sector in which it operates, but should be grown especially for those professions that involve a strong relatedness with each other. For this reason it would be useful to focus on the socio-emotional skills within and relate to the same person of the teacher, going to understand more deeply his "emotional geography" (Hargreaves, 1998). What we need to investigate further, to bring scientific novelty, is how to teach, what to teach before, not because the choice of knowledge is not important, but because no content can be learned so effectively if the training does not raise the involvement and curiosity. The practice of self-affective states that we should focus on improvement of appropriate social-emotional skills, starting with a solid maturation of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge stands as a living experience of own being which reaches out to themselves, and at the same time the situation a path of self inquiry that can open up an inner journey of analysis. In support of the above mentioned notion, Mortari ( 2009) states that in the life of the mind nothing is lost. What I thought maybe something that you emotionally overcome or forgotten, it can re-emerge suddenly creating disorientation and confusion, or it can resurface with greater intensity than when you emotionally overcome or forgotten, it can re-emerge suddenly creating disorientation and confusion, or it can resurface with greater intensity than when you had lived. It is in these problematic moments that the discipline of reflection engaged in the development of socio-emotional skills that may limit the reactions improvised or inappropriate: the process of self-investigation allows a deep reading of the inner self. This type of practice may be necessary for professionalising teachers, to understand the importance of emotional-affective dimension during class time, and how the teacher lives. In support of this assertion would also be useful, always to increase emotional self-awareness, deepen teachers' conceptions about the nature of their role and the regulatory strategies of the emotions that they already put in place at school, both in terms of relationships and individual effort. It is born as a result of the international literature on the topic of emotional distress related to the vision of the current landscape of the world of the school, and more marked by the difficulties of the class teachers. We thought the challenge of self-affection for teachers, as a basic condition for a true personal knowledge of its affective dimension, as a momentum to an enhancement in the formation of socio-emotional skills. Just because by teachers themselves, there is a need for a change, to give space to the size and value emotional conscious, that it can and should become resource. The school of this historical period requires a different kind of teacher, distinguished by a professionally different from that of the past, who has long been a performer, now must become active participants in the educational process (Cambi, 2002).

### **4. TOWARDS QUALITY TEACHERS: THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER**

«Who is not able to prove nor amazement, nor surprise, is dead: his eyes are weaken » (Albert Einstein). Even the well-known scientist with these words emphasizes the essentiality of cultivating one's emotional side, to arrive at a real awareness of their own emotions and feelings so that there is life in a look at more aware of reality, original and unique from emotional life. The school should develop in young people the qualities and skills that represent a value for the well-being of the community. "A community of individuals all the same without originality and

without personal goals, it would be a poor community without possibilities for development” (Einstein, 1965 p.79). Be equipped with emotional intelligence therefore, express, recognize and manage their emotions must become an essential feature of the educational process at school, the school must develop educational pathways through specific and which teachers should be the prime movers. In this regard, it is not to disrupt the school program, but going to affect the style of teaching. The Italian school requires quality teachers, teachers who become experts in social emotional education. “The social and emotional meaning to be given to education is to make the emotions and the social teaching of the content of cross-cutting, which are no longer considered occasional intrusion or irrelevant with respect to traditional knowledge: this is a new educational enterprise” (Morganti, 2012 p.50). The teaching is not confined to disciplinary mastery or organizational and educational skills, but is embodied communication skills, interpersonal and emotional competences, which are needed to be a "reflective practitioner" (Schon, 1983). It cannot and should not be the only activity in their own right on the emotions, but they must be carefully integrated during class time with the knowledge of content and favouring traditional instructional learning (Ausubel, 1968).

### **5.THE REFLECTIVE DIARY: WRITING THAT HELPS THE EMOTIONAL SELF- AWARENESS**

At this point it is clear that creating classroom climate emotionally and socially inclusive is a challenge for teachers. The training of teachers on these issues is vital to make sense in the school context that emotion is a resource and opportunity to create innovative new ideas. Thus, teachers need to understand that the affective self-understanding is the starting point to learn more about themselves and the way they perceive their emotional side. In that way so you can get to this emotional self-awareness, from a profound experience of self, as a base to get to develop social-emotional skills. As has been observed in some previous qualitative research, the diary is a valuable tool because it allows the eye to take on a reflexive gesture. A reflective gesture is the reflection of mind in which we observe what happens in themselves. But to cultivate a good reason it takes time, in the sense that the practices of self-inquiry must be exercised to become parties to the structuring of the self, to become "flesh and blood" (Stein, 1999 p. 452). This has been proposed to the teachers of primary and lower secondary education, who have decided to participate in the research project: narrating the form of writing a diary, every day, for a month, their emotional experience (positive or negative) school. The teachers who participated in the project are Verona (city and rural) and Trento (town and rural area) with a possible accession of teachers from schools in the UK. The research project is starting in this period as a target for teachers who have decided to participate, to start from a greater self-knowledge, through the use of narrative writing, to arrive at that 'affective self-awareness needed to emerge, refine or enhance the social-emotional skills that would increase the personal well-being and that of the class. Recognize, name and deal with emotions means having first of all self-care, even of their emotional side. For self-care, in this case, is the practice through which care of his own soul, his own inner part, which depends on the quality of life. To take care of one's soul is therefore necessary to cultivate a sense of tension, and this is the standing listening to the primary voltage for the human being: the voltage to what is good (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics I, 1 in 1094 2-3). The research question of this project is: "That phenomenon can be observed when teachers write a reflective diary?" The teachers then, starting from the narrative writing daily for a period of one month, put in question the predominant emotional experience of that day. By doing this step by step build their emotional profile, which will be analyzed according to the phenomenological method, in the case of qualitative research. The teachers participating in the research project, agree to questioning, practicing a genuine process of self-inquiry, through the instrument of reflective diary. “The importance of keeping a journal of research is functional also need to make the process of investigation a "public affairs" to be compared within a context of social research” (Mortari, 2007 p.227). The diary of research has a long tradition with regard to the European culture, as many texts were written in the form of narrative diaries, to increase self-understanding both cognitive and emotional, in order to become more self-aware. The writing of the diary is now considered one of the most important time of the search and is commonly used by teachers engaged in heuristics. But “ because it will become a useful tool epistemic you need to practice writing with narrative continuity, almost like a diary” (Mortari, 2007 p.228). The diary is in fact a tool for training, documentation of research, as well as reflection. It is a tool that reveals the subjectivity of the teacher as well as promote the 'self-assessment: it allows to penetrate deep into

the lives and experiences of the teacher. The task of keeping a diary helps to develop different skills: observation, documentation, and reflection. But what is more interesting is that according to a look formative writing relating to a 'personal experience, allows the retention, that provides an experiential material on which back reflexively, to get awareness of their experiences. There are several possible courses that profits are derived from the discipline of writing a diary. The task of documenting their own practice regularly contributes to enhance the ability to analyze detailed observation; develop the ability to investigate cognitive processes and put them into words, to focus on the contradictions in which you are located; give expression to the emotional experiences , from which it tends to escape. Writing also allows you to listen authentically themselves. Some teachers, before joining the project have shown, however, distrust, fear of being judged as teachers not valid, and afraid to write with difficulty, or even difficult to find the meaning and usefulness of this kind of writing, which has as order to improve their socio-emotional skills. It may be useful then find space for sharing, share this fiction writing with other teachers participating in the project, with which you can read extracts from the diaries. "The conversation around the experience can provide in-depth insights of relieving the sense of weight, fatigue and uncertainty, (Altrichter, Posh, Somekh, 1995 p.14) since it is a private-writing and individualistic".

## **6. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD CAPABLE OF READING EXPERIENCE**

For this type of qualitative research, the method cannot be defined a priori and is therefore not submissive a single legitimate interpretation, to which all should undergo. It is important, in this regard, agree that each research field has its way of conceiving the method, so that it adheres to the quality of the object to which it applies and the research question from which it springs ("What kind of phenomenon is detected when the teachers write a reflective diary?"). The method is like a horizon and as "a horizon is not a fixed boundary, but something that walks with us and invites us to proceed further" (Gadamer 1994), so the method is not a default route in advance, but a framework of signs to build the action heuristic, which in the course of the research varies more or less radically, in relation to the results that it produces results that the researcher is called upon to examine and evaluate continuously, to detect recurrent actions for improvement of the research methodology and set of tools. The narrative is therefore suitable language practice to account for the human experience, as situated action. The use of the narrative form is common not only in those who carry out practical activities, where lived experiential is important, but also for researchers. The written report is in fact essential to bring out the transparency of the research process : how the research question has been identified , such as assessments has been achieved, the procedure for interpretation etc. ... Just because the narrative interprets reality , the adoption the narrative method applied to the experience itself , requires , perhaps more than other instruments epistemic , epistemological a garrison. So for this specific qualitative research project is intended to adopt the method phenomenological- eidetic ( Mortari 2010) , which is based on the fact that phenomenology takes as its object of investigation lived experiences and experiential , which are at the heart of qualitative research ' internal social sciences, phenomenology is to drive the voltage to establish itself as a rigorous science , and this is the main objective of qualitative research undertaken to gain a clear scientific credibility , the quality of phenomenology , is that it is a philosophical method and why educational research is looking for a rigorous method , phenomenology can be a valuable point of reference.

## **7. AFFECTIVE SELF-AWARENESS FOR ITALIAN TEACHERS: THE FIRST STEP TOWARD SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS**

This project was created and is spreading from its ethical necessity to leverage the intrinsic value for a person to possess good social and emotional skills, especially for teachers: reference points for students in school and ambassadors of 'education in the classroom. It is unthinkable, in the light of what happens every day in school, family, peer and community in general, do not deal with an issue so crucial to the individual and social growth, such as education social-emotional (Morganti, 2012) . It is not permissible to ignore even the decisive influence they have on our emotions, feelings and moods, and that all the more reason are at stake, when the work that takes place every day is full of relationships. And to be emotionally intelligent you feel the need to educate the emotions, that is, to bring intelligence into their domain, developing social-emotional

skills and pro social skills. The teacher today cannot escape from this first challenge, which allows the person itself, through a thorough understanding of themselves, thanks to the writing of a diary narrative, to get to the key to improving his skills and socio-emotional self-awareness. Competence in socio-emotional skills is one of the professional profile for teachers. Therefore to become a quality teacher, a given teacher has to have the knowledge and skills to be put into the service of the school. This element will help the personal well-being and relationships teachers will have with others, both outside and inside the school context. Have the courage to go deep into the knowledge of the inner self and put it in word, forms the basis for gradually see the construction of their own emotional profile, accepting it and improving on it. The school context itself requires that the teacher possesses strong doses of self-control and emotional competence, in order to deal with potentially stressful situations, without downloading anxiety and aggression in relationships. Teaching interpreted as emotional undertaking (Sutton, Mudrey - Fireplace, Knight, 2009). It refers to the value of knowledge, skills and know how to be where thoughts, emotions and actions are one. Then, teaching seen as emotional undertaking starts with a purpose, a goal you want to achieve and the way you put in place to achieve it. We will see if through this research project which aims to emotional self-awareness, learned through fiction writing journal, for Teachers of schools in Verona can be seen as a new way to improve the social-emotional skills.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Albanese O. et al (2006) *Competenza emotive tra psicologia ed educazione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano
- [2] Altrichter H., Posner P., Somekh B, (1995) *Teachers investigate their work*, Routledge, London
- [3] Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea* I, 1 1094 a 2-3
- [4] Ausubel D. (1968) *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View*, Holt, Rinehart and Wiston , New York.
- [5] Baumgartner E. (2010) *Gli esordi della competenza emotiva. Strumenti di studio e valutazione* Ed. Universitarie di lettere economia e diritto, Milano.
- [6] Cambi F. (2002) *Dopo l'autorità, dopo la "ricreazione"...dentro l'autonomia* in Id. ( a cura di) *La progettazione curricolare nella scuola contemporanea*, Carocci, Roma 9-23.
- [7] Denzin N.K. (1984) *On understanding emotion* McGraw-Hill, London
- [8] Einstein A. (1965) *I pensieri degli anni difficili*, Einaudi Torino
- [9] Ekman, P. (1984). *Expression and the nature of emotion*. In K. Scherer and P. Ekman (Eds.), *Approaches to emotion* (pp. 319-343). Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [10] Ekman P, e Friesen ,W. V.(1971) *Costant across cultures in the face and emotion* in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 17. 124-129
- [11] Gadamer H. G. (1994) *Il movimento fenomenologico*, Laterza Roma- Bari
- [12] Hargreaves, A.(1998) *The emotional practice of teaching in Teacher and Teaching education*, vol.14 n.8 835-854
- [13] Izard C. (2001) *The Emotions Course. Helping children understand and manage their feelings: An emotion-centered primary prevention program for Head Start. Teachers manual*. University of Delaware; Newark, DE
- [14] Lemerise EA, Arsenio WF. (2000) *An integrated model of emotion processes and cognition in social information processing*. In *Child Development*. 71:107–118.
- [15] Morganti A. (2012) *Intelligenza emotiva e integrazione scolastica*, Carocci, Roma
- [16] Mortari L. (2007) *Cultura della ricerca e pedagogia, prospettive epistemologiche*, Carocci Roma
- [17] ID. (2009) *Aver cura di sé* Mondadori, Milano
- [18] ID. (2010) *Dire la pratica, la cultura del fare scuola* Mondadori, Milano
- [19] Nussbaum M. (2004) *L'intelligenza delle emozioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna

- [20] Panciroli A. Nastasi V. Orlandelli C. Salerio V. Parini A. Zamponi M. Di Stefano Castelli S. D. L. Berti, (2013) Esperienze di ampliamento del dialogo e della partecipazione nella scuola primaria e dell'infanzia, Scuola Italiana Moderna, La Scuola Brescia, n. 10 pp28-38
- [21] Pedrabissi L., Rolland J. P. e Santinello M. (1993) Stress and burnout among teachers in Italy and France in Journal of Psychology, 127, 529-535
- [22] Rogers C. Kniget M. ( 1970) Psicoterapia e relazioni umane Boringhieri, Torino
- [23] Saarni C.(1999) The development of Emotional Competence, The Guildford Press New York
- [24] Salovey P. Mayer J.D. (1990) Emotional Intelligence in Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9, 129-65
- [25] Schon D. A. (1983) The reflective practionier: How professionals Think in Action, Basic Books, New York
- [26] Sutton R. E, Mudrey – Camino R., Knight C. C. (2009) Teachers' Emotion Regulation and Classroom Management in Theory into Practice, 48, 130-137.
- [27] Stein E. (1999) Essere finito e essere eterno. Per un'elevazione al senso dell'essere, Città Nuova, Brescia.
- [28] Vecchio L., Velasco V. e Miglioretti M., ( nov- dic 2013) Fattori di benessere e malessere lavorativo nella professione dell'insegnante” in Psicologia e scuola n.30 Sitography <http://casel.org> <http://worldhealthorganization.com>