

Chapter 15

Educate Emotions: Notes for a Critical Examination of Emotional Education Proposals



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15.1 Introduction

For some years, there has been a demand for the inclusion of the emotional dimension in formal educational systems in various countries. Supranational organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016), the Inter-American Development Bank (Bassi et al., 2012), and the World Bank (Guerra et al., 2014), along with various civil society associations and academic proposals, aim to point out that it is urgently required to develop emotional education – also referred to as socioemotional skills, emotional competencies, among other similar terms – in the educational system, with the explicit and central purpose of improving people’s adaptation to the growing social uncertainty, instability in labor markets, and, in general, the increasingly rapid transformations of globalized societies and economies.

In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, Brazil, and Argentina, there are emotional education school programs under various names that are financed by multinational organizations and companies. Added to this are multiple training programs aimed especially at teachers, which emphasize their benefits in dealing with various school problems: violence, difficulties living with peers and teachers, learning difficulties, loss of sense of school activity, and desertion, among others (Bisquerra & Hernández, 2017; Fundación Liderazgo

PhD Program in Communication, Universidad de la Frontera and Universidad Austral de Chile. The author thanks the National Research and Development Agency (ANID) for granting the national doctoral scholarship that has made it possible to carry out the research exercise of which this work is a part.

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Chile, 2021; Barrantes-Elizondo, 2016; Barrios-Tao & Peña, 2019; Gómez Cardona, 2017; Pérez & Filella, 2019; Milicic & Marchant, 2020; Mujica & Toro, 2019).

In Chile, since 2018, there has been a bill on emotional education presented by a foundation (Fundación Liderazgo Chile, 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 postpandemic return to school, a series of disruptive events and violence have occurred that somehow suggests the adoption of training measures –beyond those implemented by public policy – that point to the socioemotional dimension of educational communities (Abramowski & Sorondo, 2022), in the understanding that it is the critical dimension on which phenomena as varied as lack of motivation and desertion, school violence, adolescent pregnancy or drug addiction depend (Bisquerra, 2000, 2003). It is understandable that the expectations derived from a pedagogical work on emotions take on special meaning against the background of such a contingency and also in the context of an educational system questioned due to the scant explicit consideration it offers to affections¹ and, in general, in an institutional crisis scenario (Dubet, 2006; Dubet & Martuccelli, 2000; Duschatzky & Corea, 2001; Tenti Fanfani, 2011). Considered in this way, the possibility of including emotional education in schools can only be received as good news.

Some authors have drawn relationships between this discourse that raises the need to educate emotions and broader movements, for example, the so-called “emotional turn” and “affective turn”² in social sciences and humanities or the so-called “therapeutic ethos.”³ The first emerged in the '70s and '80s of the last century through pioneering research in sociology and anthropology that sought to rehabilitate emotions as a social and cultural human phenomenon in the context of a rationalist tradition that referred them to the irrational. The second one, appearing at the beginning of this century and which – based on the contributions of Spinoza and Deleuze, among others – underline the role of corporality in the emotional dynamics (Bericat Alastuey, 2016). For its part, the notion “therapeutic ethos” indicates a culture that promotes values such as autonomy, self-sufficiency and happiness as a strictly individual option of the subjects, and materialized through artifacts widely disseminated by the cultural industries: self-help literature, movies, TV shows and

¹It is necessary to point out that education, and in particular teaching, is considered by some authors as an activity of an eminently emotional nature (Zembylas, 2019; Cornejo-Chávez et al., 2021). Similarly, ministerial documents refer to “integral education,” and some progress has been verified, such as the inclusion of quality indicators associated with noncognitive factors in standardized assessments, such as academic self-esteem or school climate. However, education continues to be identified, in the best of cases, with a practically exclusive interest in rationality to the detriment of creativity, expressiveness, and emotions.

²According to Ahmed (2019), this affective turn refers to “(...) an intellectual project that seeks to problematize the place that affects and emotions play in the field of public life and its operation in the management, reproduction and continuity of the power structures that organize relationships dismantling the epistemological hierarchies that sustain the dichotomy between emotions and reason, reversing the devaluation of affects understood as mere psychological states” (p.11).

³Other authors refer to similar phenomena such as therapeutic emotional style (Illouz, 2007), psychological code, or positive code (Béjar, 2011).

series, magazines, meditation apps for mobile phones, among others (Eccleston & Hayes, 2009; Nobile, 2017).

This paper assumes the hypothesis that discourses on emotions and happiness are characteristic of neoliberal societies (Binkley, 2011; Cabanas, 2018; De La Fabián & Stecher, 2013) – being present in management strategies, sales, human resources, advertising, self-help devices, among others – and that one of its current expressions in the formal educational field is educational proposals that place the emotional sphere at the center of their concerns. We will focus on “emotional education” or “positive education,” – explicitly or implicitly, and in an area that can be considered borderline between the academic field and popular culture – take as sources and foundation positive psychology and emotional intelligence (Bonhomme, 2021; Cornejo-Chávez et al., 2021; Illouz, 2010; Menéndez, 2018), psychological schools that have received relevant questions (Menéndez, 2018; Prieto Egidio, 2018).

Both the importance of such criticisms, the notable proliferation of emotional and happiness discourses in culture and, above all, the indisputable relevance and topicality of the demands for a more pertinent and attentive education to the vital experiences of children and young people, justifies that emotional education proposals to be critically addressed in order to discuss and assess their scope and implications for educational communities, and the possible development of alternatives based on theoretical perspectives that manage to capture the transformations and complexities of current social, cultural, economic and mediatic scenarios.

This chapter begins by situating education and the emotionalization of the culture (Ahmed, 2015) in the context of neoliberal policies and global transformations typical of late capitalism. Next, emotional education is presented as an expression of neoliberal governmentality in the educational field, to then review the arguments that account for the various critical perspectives on emotional education. Finally, some of the implications of the topics reviewed are discussed, as well as possible alternatives.

15.2 Neoliberalism and Education: The Company as a Metaphor

Does education consist of giving each boy or girl, each young person, the opportunity to fully develop their potential as a person and as a member of society? Or, is education a service that is sold to a customer, who is seen from his earliest childhood as a consumer and merely a target on which to focus marketing? (Ball & Youdell, 2007)

According to Jódar (2007), the term “neoliberalism” indicates not only an economic model but also fundamentally a way of governing social processes so that – beyond the diversity of manifestations that it could adopt depending on the local specificities – the basic aspects that define it would be the adaptation of the state to the market, organizational forms that emphasize flexibility, deregulation, and post-Fordist culture, in addition to the formation of new forms of subjectivity marked by the promotion of a “flexible” and “self-entrepreneur” subject.

Foucault posits that the subject is not a natural essence but rather a historical and political product that is closely linked to the exercise of certain types of historically contingent power relations. Thus, subjectivity is the result of the application of a series of technologies, situated sociohistorically within the logic of a certain governmentality⁴ that articulates knowledge, power, and subjective constitution (Jódar, 2007). It is essential to point out that—consistently with the Foucauldian approach—this type of analysis must be located historically. According to Deleuze (1995), at present, this moment corresponds to the transition from disciplinary societies to postdisciplinary societies, also called “control societies.”⁵ Thus, while disciplinary society implied “the broad installation and generalization, in a diverse set of institutions, of disciplinary normalization and Fordist practices of social regulation” (Fraser, 2003, p. 17), operating through confinement, detailed spatiotemporal structuring, hierarchy, and normalizing judgment materialized in techniques such as statistics, administration sciences, diagnoses, among others (and evident in the case of emblematic institutions in Foucault’s analysis, such as prison, hospital, barracks, psychiatric and school), the presence of postdisciplinary society supposes a mutation and a new regime of social regulation. It would be a mistake to reduce this mutation to a pure technological transformation at the level of production (e.g., digitization); it is—as Deleuze (1995) proposes—a profound reorganization of the capitalist economy, with the corresponding societal changes in the technologies of production and power. In this sense, in addition to the technologies of production, communication, and domination, Foucault (1991) noted that

[...] in all societies there is another type of technique: techniques that allow individuals to affect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, and this in such a way that the it transforms, modifies them, thus achieving a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power. Let’s call this class: techniques of the self (pp. 3–4).

This is important because from now on, Foucault (1995) will understand governmentality as closely linked to the technologies of domination in conjunction with the technologies of the self: “I call ‘governmentality’ the confluence between the techniques of domination exercised over others and the techniques of the self” (p. 77).

In the context of “the progressive and dispersed installation of a new regime of domination” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 284) that represents the postdisciplinary or control society operating from a post-Fordist, delocalized business model, with the primacy

⁴Jódar (2007) states that with this term Foucault “analyzes the relationship, historical and rational, between a set of technologies and the political-social ways of leading individuals. So that the rationality of government comes to be an expression of the complex historical conjunction of powers-knowledge, as well as the effects—both social and mental—that the techniques linked to them produce in the experiences that constitute us as subjects. Through technologies, political rationalities unfold. For this reason, in the “conduct of behaviours” of individuals, rationalities and technologies are only analytically separable. All of this is implicated in the complex and multiple practices of governmentality” (p. 146).

⁵For Jódar (2007), this transition from disciplinary to post-disciplinary forms is far from taking place in a resounding and clearly delimited manner. The case would rather be that of a certain coexistence, with multiple overlaps between one and the other.

of marketing, flexibility, and adaptability to continuous change (Jódar, 2007), these new forms of social regulation allow the emergence of new forms of governmentality of educational systems.

According to Jódar and Gómez (2007), in the educational systems of Western societies, the progressive consolidation of educational policies of a neoliberal nature and their subjective effects is verified in a school governed by government technologies, among which stand out neomanagement as a form of school management (Ball & Youdell, 2007), the promotion of a pedagogical culture of optimization, and the rise of the business sense of self-government. As Laval (2004) proposes, one of the central phenomena of this new neoliberal rationality is that the company becomes the model par excellence for organizations such as schools, and therefore the entrepreneur becomes a model of subjectivation. This implies the introduction of logic and the language of business sciences in the field of education (Laval & Dardot, 2013), with the consequent production of subjectivities governed by the imperatives of being flexible, versatile, and competitive (Jódar, 2007). As various authors point out (Ahmed, 2015, 2019; Binkley, 2011; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019; Davies, 2016; De la Fabián & Stecher, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2019; Illouz, 2007, 2010), one of the privileged areas of this neoliberal colonization are the emotions.

15.3 Emotions and Emotional Capitalism

From a historical perspective, Rendueles (2017) states that, from its beginnings, it was evident that the orthodox economic theory did not represent an adequate interpretive framework to account for emotions in capitalism. It was about incessant flows of emotions derived from the profound transformations of traditional, family, and labor institutions at the beginning of capitalist development, emotions susceptible to economic use through their more complex management, which by then was nonexistent.⁶

In “Cold Intimacies. The making of emotional Capitalism”, Eva Illouz (2007) situates psychology as a catalyst for the influence of emotions since the beginning of the twentieth century, from two moments: the introduction of Freud’s psychoanalysis in the United States and Elton Mayo’s work psychology. Psychoanalysis inaugurated a language through which what until then was proper and exclusive to intimacy was made public, giving rise to an emotional culture that quickly expanded into the language of management and marketing. Meanwhile, Elton Mayo promoted

⁶Davies (2016) points out that J. Bentham was the pioneer in recognizing the role of emotions in the social system. Already in 1871, Jevons managed to connect the economic logic and the apparently inaccessible emotional dimension of the subjects through a mathematical formulation based on the comparison of various preferences. According to this system, individual choices in the market, governed by pleasure/displeasure, would represent a reliable orientation that would guarantee collective subsistence, and therefore, they would be the only emotional expressions to be taken into account (Rendueles, 2017).

the use of work strategies in which emotional management was the central foundation. As Illouz states (2007):

The language of psychology was particularly well suited to the interests of managers and entrepreneurs: psychologists seemed to promise nothing less than to increase profits, combat labor conflicts, organize non-confrontational relationships between managers and workers, as well as neutralize class struggle through its incorporation into the benign language of personality and emotions (p.46).

According to Hernández (2006), the current emergence of the emotions in culture is part of a hegemonic discourse, which is inscribed in the need to face the complexities derived from the progressive disappearance of ideological certainties and moral foundations according to which subjects build their identities and project their life in the context of late capitalism. This author proposes three axes to understand the contemporary emergence of emotions. First, from the '70s of the last century, capitalism began to colonize areas that until then were typical of private life, for example, Hochschild (1983), who describes the value of emotions in services through the notion of “emotional work” or, already in the '90s, the sphere of personal development (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002).

Secondly, the disappearance projects that have triggered a retreat into inwardness, in an impotent and hopeless individualist rhetoric that seems to repeat the romantic evasion of the late nineteenth century: “since you can’t do anything, you have to focus in your well-being” (Hernández, 2006, p. 97). The alternatives seem to be a resigned withdrawal into emotional inwardness or emotional intensity through the frenetic consumption of strong emotions. At the educational level, the above implies a school that is no longer linked to projects of social transformation and consequent individualistic subjectivation. Third, emotions are proposed as a referent of the spectacle society, that is, emotions as part of a “cult of the self,” part of an exercise in permanent self-exposure: “Today every wish, plan, need; each passion and relationship is abstracted as a sign and is an object to be sold and consumed” (Poster, 1997, cited in Hernández, 2006, p. 97). This cult of self promotes incessant demand and consumption of well-being; incessant in reality because from this perspective the market economy is not based so much on consumption as on permanent dissatisfaction.

15.4 Emotional Education

Education can contribute to increasing the number of motivated, engaged and responsible citizens by strengthening the skills that matter. Cognitive skills like literacy and problem solving are crucial. However, young people who have a strong social and emotional foundation can thrive better in a highly dynamic, skills-driven job market if they persevere and work hard. They are more likely to avoid physical and mental illness if they control their impulses, have healthy lifestyles, and maintain strong interpersonal relationships. The cultivation of empathy, altruism and caring prepare them better to provide social support and actively engage with society and in actions that protect the environment. By managing

emotions and adapting to change, they can also be better prepared to weather the storms of life, such as job loss, family breakdown, hospitalization, or victimization (OECD, 2016)

The advance and wide cultural diffusion of positive psychology – also called “science of happiness”⁷ – has paved the way for the development of emotional education in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, Brazil, and Argentina, among others, where there are emotional education school programs under various names and financed by multinational organizations and companies (Instituto Ayrton Senna Brazil, Botín Foundation Spain, Emotional Education Foundation in Argentina), in addition to multiple training programs. One of the most popular emotional education models in Spanish-speaking countries corresponds to the Bisquerra (2003) model based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)⁸ model. In 2000, this author defined emotional education as an

educational process, continuous and permanent, which aims to promote emotional development as an essential complement to cognitive development, both constituting the essential elements of the development of the integral personality. For this, the development of knowledge and skills about emotions is proposed in order to train the individual to better face the challenges that arise in daily life. All of this is aimed at increasing personal and social well-being (Bisquerra, 2000, p. 306).

Meanwhile, in 2007, it was pointed out that emotional education is an

educational process, continuous and permanent, which aims to promote the development of emotional skills as an essential element of the integral development of the person, in order to train them for life. The objective of emotional education is the development of emotional competencies (Bisquerra & Pérez, 2007, p.75).

This version of emotional education finds foundations in positive psychology and emotional intelligence (Bisquerra, 2000; Bisquerra & Hernández, 2017), and, as explained in the second definition, the development of emotional competencies is proposed as an objective. The theoretical construct “emotional competence” is subject to controversy regarding both its name (e.g., emotional or socio-emotional) and the various components that are or are not considered part of the construct. However, it is important to remember that this reference to emotional competencies allows the specification of objectives and with it the evaluation by means of standards, which supposes the entry of emotions into the logic of accountability.

⁷Academic movement founded by Martin Seligman at the end of the 1990s, with strong support from the American Psychological Association (APA) and transnational companies (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019; De La Fabián & Stecher, 2013) that it intends to position itself as an alternative to traditional psychology –based in its opinion on a disease model– and affirming the existence of some key psychological factors to help people lead a happier life (Seligman, 2003).

⁸Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), founded by Daniel Goleman. As of 2019, CASEL has been present as an educational model in more than 30 states of the United States and is considered an example to follow in various countries (CASEL, 2020). According to Cornejo-Chávez et al. (2021), “CASEL receives funding from foundations of large businessmen such as Bill Gates (Microsoft), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) and North American companies such as LG Electronics Company, in addition to multiple projects and state funds” (p.6).

Additionally, Bisquerra and Pérez (2007) understand emotional competencies as “the set of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes necessary to understand, express and regulate emotional phenomena appropriately” (p. 69). The authors point out that it would be a central element for the achievement of “effective and responsible citizenship,” while emphasizing the adaptive implications of emotional competence, since it

promotes a better adaptation to the context; and favors coping with life circumstances with greater chances of success. Among the aspects that are favored are learning processes, interpersonal relationships, problem solving, obtaining and maintaining a job, etc. (p.69).

CASEL (2022) defines socioemotional learning (SEL) as

the process by which all youth and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (p.1).

In the same context, the so-called CASEL 5 model contemplates five areas of competence: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-control, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making. Taken together, these domains involve abilities to understand and manage one’s own emotions, thoughts, values, and behaviors effectively to achieve certain goals; the ability to empathically understand the perspectives of others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts; the ability to establish and maintain supportive relationships with individuals and groups; as well as the ability to make constructive decisions about personal behavior and social interactions in various situations (CASEL, 2022).

Similarly, Bisquerra and Pérez (2007) present a model of emotional competencies very similar to the previous one, which is based on five components: (a) emotional awareness, designated as the “ability to become aware of one’s own emotions and the emotions of others, including the ability to capture the emotional climate of a given context” (p. 70); (b) emotional regulation, which refers to the “ability to manage emotions appropriately. It means becoming aware of the relationship between emotion, cognition and behaviour; have good coping strategies; ability to self-generate positive emotions, etc.” (p.71); (c) emotional autonomy, understood as a “set of characteristics and elements related to personal self-management, among which are self-esteem, a positive attitude towards life, responsibility, the ability to critically analyze social norms, the ability to seek help and resources, as well as emotional self-efficacy” (p.71); (d) social competence, defined as the “ability to maintain good relationships with other people. This implies mastering social skills, capacity for effective communication, respect, pro-social attitudes, assertiveness, etc.” (p.72); and (e) skills for life and well-being, understood as the “capacity to adopt appropriate and responsible behaviors to satisfactorily face the daily challenges of life, whether private, professional or social, as well as the exceptional situations with which we are encountering. They allow us to organize our lives in a healthy and balanced way, providing us with experiences of satisfaction or well-being” (p.73).

The type of approaches just reviewed are currently facing criticism of a diverse nature. The main ones will be summarized below.

15.5 Critical Approaches to Emotional Education

Critical approaches to emotional education – also called positive education – are varied (Abramowski, 2017, 2018; Cabanas, 2018; Cabanas & González-Lamas, 2021; Cornejo-Chávez et al., 2021; Menéndez, 2018; Nobile, 2017; OEI, 2020). According to Cabanas (2018), schools and universities are settings in which the application of objective-based psychological interventions, such as those indicated in the previous section, presents a positivist and individualistic bias. A wide range of interventions based on positive psychology and happiness have found “an educational culture increasingly interested in emotional competencies, personal management skills and the promotion of entrepreneurship” (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, p. 84). Such interventions are often justified by the fact that we are living in a period of deep and accelerated social, economic, political, technological, and ecological transformations that challenge mental health, social cohesion, and learning and, therefore, make it necessary to aim to strengthen the emotional life of people.

Additionally, Cabanas and González-Lamas (2021) identify two sources of insufficiencies in emotional education: scientific and ideological sources. Regarding the first, they point out that the main shortcomings of positive education are the “absence of a general theoretical framework and lack of accumulated evidence; conceptual and methodological limitations around main constructs; and moderate efficacy and generalizability of its key interventions” (p.68). On the other hand, from ideological biases, they identify “the marked individualist, decontextualized and universalist character of the movement” (p.75), adding that positive education represents the “last and most recent manifestation of a long list of firmly convinced therapeutic pedagogies that psychological factors play a more determining role in understanding and solving educational problems than social, economic or contextual factors” (p.75).

For his part, Menéndez (2018) raises what he estimates is a series of problems associated with emotional education programs (or “emotional literacy”): (a) reduction of the emotional phenomenon to a set of predefined, quantifiable, and normalized skills, susceptible to educative development; (b) orientation toward the regulation and standardization of the emotional expressive potential through the use and promotion of standardized expressive forms; (c) scientific reduction of emotions (as biological, neurological, and psychological reality) in which the historical, cultural, political, and, above all, biographical variables associated with emotions are ignored; (d) individual reduction in which a simplification of the social world is appreciated where the subjects are solely responsible for their success/failure, making invisible the influence of social and political structures on individual trajectories; (e) understanding of social harmony as a product of emotional regulation and the promotion of positive emotions, thus transforming an ethical/moral problem

into an emotional and therefore individual problem; (f) recognition of universal emotional structures and rules, which implies the question of how they are negotiated or what the possibilities are of answering them.

Referring to the practices of emotional education in Argentina,⁹ Abramowski (2017) affirms that it is an initiative that reissues in the present an education of a moralizing stamp based on an idea of emotion that reduces it to its biological and individual aspects, idealizes the happiness, reproduces a taxonomy that distinguishes between “good” and “bad” emotions, thus making invisible the affective complexity that occurs in classrooms on a daily basis. Similarly, Hernández (2006) points out that the promises of education seem to have lost social relevance and have been replaced by a retreat inward toward the search for (individual) happiness through emotional education that teaches key psychological factors that lead to it – happiness that, according to Cabanas (2018), would not represent just an emotion but rather “a specific and normative type of subjectivity that is intensely and predominantly defined in emotional and psychological terms and practices” (p.237).

Emotional education comes to update a new psychologizing reductionism, this time in a cognitive-emotional key.¹⁰ The place that social dimension – the others – occupy in the approach to emotional education is problematic, from the moment in which emotional intelligence is basically considered as the ability to recognize one’s own and others’ feelings and the ability to manage them (Menéndez, 2018). This means that understanding one’s own emotionality and that of others is based on maximizing one’s chances of success. Therefore, its affiliation to emotional intelligence would reproduce in emotional education (and with respect to the relationship between the subject and others) a type of strategic action (Habermas, 1992), which is a type of action focused on the means to achieve certain ends; that is, it responds to rationality conditioned by efficacy, so it is always an interested action (Table 15.1) (Colom & Melich, 1994). Faced with this type of instrumental rationality, Habermas opposes communicative action, in which the subject is no longer the individual but

Table 15.1 Types of action

Action orientation Action situation	Action oriented toward success	Action oriented to understanding
No social	Instrumental action	
Social	Strategic action	Communicative action

Source: Colom and Melich (1994)

⁹In the Argentine provinces of Corrientes (year 2016), Entre Ríos (year 2016), Neuquén (year 2017), and Misiones (year 2018), emotional education laws were approved.

¹⁰Del Río and Álvarez (1997) point out, the presence of four reductionisms in the history of psychology and that remain to an important extent in mainstream contemporary psychology today: reduction to the rational, to the individual, to the internal, and to the innate. What appears to be the claim of emotional education, based on the notion of emotional intelligence, is the overcoming of the reason-emotion split characteristic of Western science. Even conceding this dubious point, emotional education maintains the remaining reductionisms: the innate, the internal, and the individual.

the community, where the language is oriented to understanding (no longer to effectiveness), and where the participants no longer pursue individual success but mutual encounter:

In the communicative action, the participants are not permanently oriented towards their own success; rather they pursue their individual goals on the condition that their respective action plans can be harmonized with each other on the basis of a shared definition of the situation (Habermas, 1992, p. 367).

Finally, the trend of the emotional education toward psychological reductionism has been insistently pointed out, going against the current of advances in disciplines such as educational psychology (Baltar, 2003; Nobile, 2019; Prieto Egado, 2018; Ramírez-Casas & Valdés-Morales, 2019); the nonconsideration of the contributions of social sciences regarding emotions by proposing emotions as belonging to the subjects without reference to the various contexts – interactional, cultural, social – and the relational frameworks in which emotions come to life and meaning (Ahmed, 2015; Illouz, 2010; Menéndez, 2018), in addition to the promotion of forms of conformism and adaptability of subjects to living conditions crossed by processes of social and educational inequality, the latter aspect being particularly present in Latin America (Abramowski, 2017, 2018; Cabanas & Sánchez, 2012; OEI, 2020).

15.6 Reflections by Way of Synthesis

In Chile – the so-called neoliberal laboratory of the region – emotional education proposals could be considered a promising sign of progressivism after four decades of educational policies marked by commodification, consequent social segmentation of the educational system, standardization, and accountability measures of high consequences (Elacqua et al., 2014). However, in this case, caution is advisable since, as Cornejo-Chávez et al. (2021) point out, the apparently progressive discourse of emotional education underlies an individualistic, decontextualized, and competitive perspective of education. Educational research has shown that the culture of accountability causes changes “in the way knowledge is organized in schools, the way academic decisions are made, the educational good that is privileged” (Ferrada Hurtado, 2017, p. 342). In this sense, the presence of public policy devices, such as orientation to measurable and standardized results, the centralization of control, bureaucratization, the individualization of responsibility, and accountability, among others, operate an instrumental rationality that generates phenomena such as curricular narrowing and the training of students to respond to standardized tests, among others, marginalizing at the same time the bonding or personal/emotional developmental aspects of the students (Ferrada Hurtado, 2017).

It is worth asking how a school culture of these characteristics could address demands related to the emotional and bonding dimensions of the students. For

example, in the eventual case that personal and social development indicators¹¹ (MINEDUC, 2019, p.1) manage to acquire a status equivalent to cognitive performance indicators, it is plausible to assume that they would be subject to the same standardized evaluation exercise that characterizes the accountability, and it is equally plausible to assume that positive psychology and emotional intelligence could provide the tools for emotional measurement, evaluation, and the training of school staff.

The need to advance toward a deeper understanding of the emotional sphere, which allows for forms of pedagogical work relevant to the affective development of students, is currently facing the hegemony in the academic market of theoretical models that assume reductionist perspectives that are basically oriented to the social adaptation of the subjects,¹² the psychologization of complex social problems with consequent individual responsibility, a focus on emotions oriented toward individual performance, and the denial of emotions called “negative,” in addition to the creation of markets around the emotional (Cornejo-Chávez et al., 2021).

The verification that the purpose of working pedagogically in the affective-emotional dimension must go beyond mere adaptation to the environment in order to focus on its development in context, as well as the need for alternatives, has encouraged a task of recovery and conceptual re-elaboration in order to provide the necessary theoretical referents, an effort in which interesting advances are being made (Bonhomme, 2021; Larraín & Haye, 2020; Toassa, 2009; Veresov, 2017; Zittoun, 2017). For example, Vygotskian cultural-historical psychology has replaced the concept of *perezhivanie*,¹³ translated into Spanish as “experience,” which dynamically relates to emotion and cognition and which is essential to understanding the diverse way in which the social environment influences the course of development of different individuals, which we already know is rather a subjective relationship. In a similar line, the idea of art as a social technique of emotions has been revealed. In his work “Psychology of Art” (2007/1925), Vygotsky does not conceive of art as a modality for the simple expression of individual emotions.

¹¹ The currently called personal and social development indicators (MINEDUC, 2019), originally called “other quality indicators” (MINEDUC, 2013), were included among the aspects to be evaluated by the then recently created Education Quality Agency. These indicators are academic self-esteem, school coexistence climate, healthy lifestyle habits, gender equality, school motivation, citizen participation and training, school attendance, school retention, and technical-professional qualification. However, this measurement has received significant criticism (Oyarzún & Falabella, 2022).

¹² Abramowski (2017) draws attention to some aspects of the OECD guidelines (2016), such as the discursive place assigned to education (adaptation) and the romanticized ways of referring to the various conditions of precariousness and socioeconomic and political instability (“storms of life”), which is evident in the extract that serves as the epigraph of the “Emotional Education” section of this work.

¹³ The concept is difficult to translate into languages other than Russian. In English, it has no equivalent, and at the time, it was translated as “experience,” but clearly, the word does not reflect the meaning that Vygotsky assigned to the term *perezhivanie*. For this reason, in the current literature translated into that language, the original Russian term tends to be maintained. In Spanish, its translation has been accepted as “experience” (González-Rey, 2000, 2011).

Rather, art operates in the sense of organizing and objectifying emotions, making it possible to distance oneself from one's affective life (Larraín & Haye, 2020). This is interesting since through the mediation of cultural artifacts, the possibility of a public exploration of emotions opens up – questioning, response, etc. – as well as potentially broadening the spectrum of available emotions, which will depend on the degree of dominance and involvement with certain cultural mediators that offer such a possibility.

For its part, the Chilean educational system has undertaken various actions to incorporate the emotional component in formal education. Since the formulation of the concept of “emotional climate in the classroom” (LLECE, 2002); the first school coexistence policy, referring to a peaceful coexistence, respect for each other, integrating differences between peers, etc. (MINEDUC, 2002); and the “Marco para la Buena Enseñanza” (Framework for Good Teaching) (CPEIP, 2003), it is possible to begin to verify a progressive positioning of languages around the importance of emotional climates in terms of both school coexistence and learning. However, it was not until the approval of the General Education Law (LGE, 2009), after the student mobilizations of 2006, that indicators linked to the personal and social development of students were created (MINEDUC, 2013).

The inclusion of these indicators effectively allows their evaluation; however, they are assigned less importance than the indicators related to learning objectives.

Finally, in 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a context in which an important part of the country's educational establishments held classes online, the Ministry of Education of Chile developed a proposal called “Claves para el bienestar. Bitácora del autocuidado docente” (Keys to Well-Being. Teacher Self-Care Log) (MINEDUC, 2020). It is a document – registered as a self-help manual – aimed at providing guidelines, advice, and exercises to teachers for emotional self-regulation and the development of emotional competencies. Its content is divided into four sections (or “keys”), called “live according to your purpose,” “recovery,” “direct your thoughts and emotions,” and “cultivate your relationships.” If we add to this the Emotional Education Bill presented by a foundation in 2018 (Fundación Liderazgo Chile, 2021), there is a panorama in which in recent years, concern for the emotional sphere in education has been interpreted through the codes of positive psychology and emotional intelligence.

As Abramowski (2017) points out, emotions enjoy good press today, so that – in the face of the unquestionable emotional – the critical exercise of settling the social and political meaning of the various educational proposals that thematize the emotional in education seems essential. The ease with which some of the critical arguments, such as those presented in this work, are (or are likely to be) identifiable with positions that deny importance to the role of the emotional should lead us to reflect on the way in which emotions are treated in the dominant discourses and, above all, about the discursive appropriation of common sense based on which neoliberal ideology operates.

The “Good press” of emotions (Abramowski, 2017) is, in this sense, an important key that deserves exploration: the emotional dimension today seems to carry an aura of purity that assimilates it to the genuine, a redoubt where the truly human

would dwell, individuality, to the time a kind of source as well as means of expression and freedom.¹⁴ It should be remembered that this was the place symbolically assigned to emotions in the context of the counterculture of the 1960s, where the bureaucratic social system of control – and the school as one of its most emblematic redoubts – was contested by the values of freedom, creativity, and expression. We should ask ourselves if this is the place that emotions take today or, rather, if we are facing a scenario in which emotions have been integrated into a functional discourse of economic interests and the social control of the neoliberal system through various technologies. We maintain that we are witnessing the latter and that the “good press” of emotions – and the consequent uncritical acceptance of emotional education by many actors and educational communities – lies to a large extent in continuing to assume that emotions are still in a kind of countercultural scenario but dependent on a hegemonic social discourse around emotions.

As has already been pointed out, there is no doubt about the central relevance of emotions in education, but it seems that – as Menéndez (2018) raises – a complex issue like this requires more exhaustive, in-depth, and, above all, more critical approaches, with openness to ambiguity, unpredictability (Abramowski, 2017), and, ultimately, the recognition of the political nature of emotions (Ahmed, 2015). Probably this path must be traveled through multiple explorations, but two aspects seem particularly relevant to us: the assumption of a social approach in the consideration of emotions and the recognition of the corporeal/material dimension of emotions.

Emotions are phenomena that can manifest on an individual level but whose dynamics are closely connected with the social and cultural world, requiring a move away from normative formulas – and therefore unidirectional – to assume dialogic approach. As Illouz proposes, “emotions are deeply internalized and unreflective aspects of action, but not because they do not carry enough culture and society, but because they have too much of both” (2007, p. 16).

On the other hand, given that the contemporary social and cultural world is also media and technology, a genuine and critical exploration of the cultural consumption of children and young people is inevitable in this approach, which would connect emotions with media education, literature, cinema, and artistic education, among other related fields. In this perspective, an interesting line of inquiry is the one followed by Swiss researcher Tania Zittoun (2017), who proposes that cultural artifacts, such as novels, movies, and comics, among others, can operate, under certain conditions, as symbolic mediators in the work of elaborating affections.

¹⁴ It is interesting that the classic image of emotions as an “irrational” dimension (present in history, psychology, and sociology from about a century ago) has been replaced in certain interpretations by an image that could be called “new age,” which is rather beatific in character. I believe that this is related to the transformation of the social imaginary throughout the twentieth century, associated with the progressive questioning and erosion of the notion of rationality that founded the idea of progress. This would make the strong opposition between the rational and the irrational (reason/emotion) less plausible, giving rise to alternative imaginaries of emotions but functional to late capitalism.

From a historical-cultural line with elements of psychoanalysis, the author states that these artifacts can reflect part of the affective experience of the person to open up the opportunity for them to distance themselves and reflect on their experience through semiotic forms (Zittoun, 2017). Works like this suggest that an important key in the exploration and elaboration of alternative emotional approaches from education requires incorporating the symbolic dimension (what do they read? What series and movies do young people watch? What music do they watch/listen to? What artistic manifestations question your world?) that connects emotions with imagination, creativity, and – as Jerome Bruner (1996) points out – possible worlds.

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