



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

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ATEE Spring Conference 2024

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Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th – June 1st, 2024
S. Agostino, Bergamo



Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni



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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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Teacher education and motivation culture

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Abstract

Initial training processes can foster the paradigmatic transformation of the novices' imagery of teaching, with the overcoming of the idea of the teacher as a mere devotee of a discipline. This training season can help to develop an awareness of the fact that school learning is not an exclusively intellectual phenomenon: it cannot be understood by ignoring the affective-motivational dimensions and not considering the person as a whole. Among the professional referentials of teaching action must necessarily be the ability to establish appropriate relationship systems with pupils and the ability to promote their motivation and participation, ensuring the gradual progression of meaningful learning.

Keywords: motivation; teacher education; knowledge; affectivity; educational relationship.

1. The contemporary school and motivation to learn

The relationship between school motivation and teacher training is a key issue for education systems in the near future. Indeed, many social analysts point to the growing disaffection of young people (at least in Western countries) towards the school practices inherited from the 20th century, and the growing fatigue of the adult world in taking on the task of helping those born in the new millennium to discover for themselves why it is worthwhile to embark on the path of knowledge proposed by educational institutions.

«Teachers are perfectly aware of this; in fact, only those who have direct experience with the school world know that the main topic discussed in class councils, in planning meetings, in informal discussions, in contacts with parents, is the motivation to learn. Pupils who are strongly interested, eager to learn and guided by a lively personal curiosity for things in the classroom are rare; on the other hand, students who show a marked lack of interest in the teaching-learning processes, apathetic pupils, with little desire to do, physically present in the classroom but mentally absent, are on the increase» (D'Alonzo, 2017, p. 5).

Such considerations invite us to point out a paradox and a profound educational emergency: in the so-called 'knowledge society' (characterised by an enormous availability of knowledge and by an unprecedented ease of access to it) there is often a widespread poverty of school life and a profound reduction of its dimensions of meaning, with inevitable repercussions on the experiences and performances of the younger generations (Tempesta, 2008). Growing problems mark the everyday life of many pupils (disaffection, failure, mechanicism, uncriticalness) but also of many teachers (fatalistic and minimalist attitudes, tendency to burn out, anxious search for stratagems to promote gratification and results in disciplinary learning and transversal educations).

It is, of course, a complex, multifactorial and 'patchy' phenomenon, rooted in the broader socio-cultural context and the transactions that characterise it. But this evident 'school sickness' (Imarisio, 2007), in addition to reasons of a general nature, has reasons that directly concern the school institution (its overall didactic-educational approach, the dynamics and experiences that characterise it), and among these some concern even more specifically the motivational dimension (on which we will focus in these pages): an entitative and non-incremental conception of motivation (as a factor fatalistically present or absent in the growing subject, and therefore not educable); the conviction, tacit and implicit but widespread, that the care of motivation is the responsibility of the student and his family, but not of the teacher (already too busy with the onerous task of 'informing' in an exhaustive manner about the discipline to deal with similar 'formative' issues); the widespread recourse to extrinsic motivation or messianic faith in teaching techniques and technological tools that can solve the problem, without the full and conscious participation of those personally involved. If we want to address these issues by trying to identify the fundamental educational problems and the strategic lines of an effective training proposal, it becomes decisive, in our opinion, to resemantise the pedagogical issue of school motivation by making a double emphasis: the centrality of the culture of the educational relationship and of school motivation in the multiform professionalism of the contemporary teacher (with the consequent need for a conscious and instrumental training in this sense in the Teacher Education paths, both initial and in-service); the centrality of the work on intrinsic motivation for school knowledge (with the consequent need to avoid rhetorical or moralistic approaches, in favour of paths based on epistemic curiosity and on the subject's need for growth in its relationship with the world) (Leyva-Rodríguez, 2022; Reeve, 2022).

Only a generation of teachers who are not afraid to challenge themselves even on these issues (which inevitably call into question the educational and social responsibility of the teacher and his constant work on his own motivation, before that of his pupils) can hope to show the youngest the beauty and fascination of cognitive work, combating the tendencies towards depersonalisation and gregariousness that are not lacking in the generalised daze of the communication society.

In this sense, the (terminological, logical and phenomenological) opposite of distracted is not attentive, but attracted, because the fundamental dynamic of human experience (rather than in the effort of will to dutifully respond to incomprehensible social obligations) consists in following the trace of the recoil that the richness of reality inevitably arouses, triggering cognitive and affective energy.

We need to be aware that the school is in the midst of a delicate and uncertain transition process. After the season of the elite school and that of the mass school, a courageous rethinking of the meaning and dynamics of schooling appears necessary (integrating top down reform processes and bottom up evolutionary processes): schools today are called upon, first and foremost, to fully embrace the educational needs of each student, to allow personal access to cultural experience, to snatch from passivity, mobilise talents, put into action (rather than simply provide basic literacy and content).

2. The professional teacher facing the complexity of knowledge

Like a prism with many faces, the identity of the professional teacher is rich, plural and multifaceted (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008; Tempesta, 2016), and there is now an awareness that it results from the combination and integration of multiple dimensions (Baldacci, 2013; Vinatier, Altet, 2008): cultural, educational and socio-relational, psycho-pedagogical, methodological and didactic, practical-reflexive, organisational. The teaching professionalism can be effectively represented by the model of the hologrammatic hexagon (Margiotta, 2006), along whose perimeter are placed the figures of the expert in a domain of knowledge, the technical expert, the social actor, the creative craftsman, the reflective professional. In an architectural function, to connect the whole network of interdependencies that in teaching practice are realised between these dimensions (thus avoiding conceiving them as competences that simply accumulate), the function of the teacher as educational leader arises.

Among the professional referentials of teaching action, understood as descriptors of the teaching profession, there is certainly the ability to establish appropriate systems of relations with pupils (and with families and colleagues) and the ability to promote pupil motivation and participation, ensuring the gradual progression of meaningful learning.

Initial training processes can be the place where the paradigmatic transformation of the novices' imagery of teaching takes place, with the consequent overcoming of the idea of the teacher as a mere devotee of a discipline. It is necessary, therefore, to use this formative season to develop an awareness of the fact that school learning and study are not exclusively intellectual phenomena: one cannot understand them, therefore, by ignoring the affective-motivational dimensions and not considering the person as a whole.

The *affectus*, understood as the inevitable backlash that reality arouses in the subject, is at the origin of the cognitive process of the *intellectus* and accompanies it throughout its development: consequently, affective education is an integral part of knowledge education. A very special place within it is given to understanding demotivation in terms of the anaffectivity of scholastic experiences/non-significance of learning and the work of promoting motivation, a very critical aspect (as we have seen) of study processes today. The fundamental support point for addressing the affective-motivational issues of school knowledge appears to be an educational-didactic relationship capable of building a bridge between knowledge and interest.

Recent pedagogical literature has given ample space to the topic of affective education in schools, especially in relation to the problematic nature of young people's emotional behaviour in the context of a complex and globalised society (Ianes, 2007; Meyor, 2007). It is, however, generally juxtaposed (when not opposed) to school education, increasing uncertainty around the mission of educational institutions and the contradictory nature of social demands on schools. Investigations into the intertwining of affectivity and knowledge within school learning processes are less frequent (Baldacci, 2008; Petracchi, 1993): it appears, therefore, of great interest to analyse school dynamics in order to grasp descriptively and proactively the link (still insufficiently highlighted) between affectivity and learning, emotions and knowledge, passion and reason, motivation and study; to examine the theories of emotions in a pedagogical perspective, the intrinsic relationship between affective adhesion and knowledge, the problems of anaffectivity and demotivation in contemporary school experiences, the aims and methodologies of an affective education oriented towards the promotion of the learning experience (Tempesta, 2008).

Contrary to what a certain neo-enlightenment claims, it is not possible to know anything without an affective involvement with what is known, and intelligence, if it does not want to be reduced to a mere impersonal recording of data without tractive force, is always an affective intelligence.

The subject of motivation and its place in knowledge education is of particular importance in this respect. There is, between motivation and learning, a delicate and complex circular relationship: in order to learn and study, one must be motivated to do so and, on the other hand, effective learning and study have a motivating feedback on the subject, which drives one towards application by enhancing self-esteem, a sense of self-efficacy and gratification. This acknowledged centrality of motivation in learning processes and in educational interventions designed to promote them does not prevent the management of the motivational dimension in training contexts from often appearing characterised by misunderstandings and inadequate or even counterproductive solicitations. Such can be considered approaches that interpret motivation in an innatistic or voluntaristic sense, those that idealise school learning and study, those that invite knowledge by relying on more or less overt forms of emotional blackmail, pride or competitiveness, avoidance of social reprobation or conformity to ideals/objectives shared by the prevailing public opinion. All these types of motivation, which we can summarise as extrinsic, appear partial: they are not entirely ineffective, but their effectiveness is not deep and lasting. Taken together, they constitute a kind of 'short route' of motivation to knowledge, but on closer inspection they prove to have short breath and a limited and superficial mobilising capacity. One must realistically take them into account, and indeed try not to exclude them from motivation support interventions: if properly targeted, they can manifest a relative value.

3. Training teachers in the motivational dimension

The horizon of a teacher education adequate to the contemporary educational challenge is certainly that of a generative teaching, which has in the educational relationship its archimedean point. There is, in fact, a profound connection between the quality of the educative-didactic relationship and the quality of knowledge. Knowledge is, in fact, eminently a matter of education. It flourishes within a relationship that introduces one to the world, in which a process of intentional promotion takes place that is capable of arousing: meaningful and collaborative educational-didactic interactions; clear and intrinsic motivations; the exercise of a rationality open to reality and experience; the development of methodological skills of a strategic and metacognitive type.

Training courses, using both the resources of pedagogical research and those of educational practice, can be an opportunity for novice teachers to delve into the nature, role, dynamics and promotional strategies of school motivation. It concerns the reasons and experiences we propose to the younger generations when we invite them to engage their energy in the cognitive task ('why study?', in general and with reference to the individual discipline).

A reorientation is needed, starting with young teachers, to innovate a school still too dominated by demands for exhaustiveness (the primacy of the object) but inattentive to learning needs (the agentivity of the subject).

Scientific study and professional practice, therefore, as an opportunity to discover the intrinsic motivation of school learning: a chance to satisfy epistemic curiosity (Berlyne, 1971), a chance to discover reality and to enhance experience (Dewey, 1949), a place for building competence, autonomy, personal leadership, self-efficacy (Harter, 1978; Bandura, 1996).

Studying the construct of motivation can help to grasp the centrality of the motivational dimension for the well-being of learners and their educational success (Weiner, 2010). Motivation is the 'fuel' of all human activity: it implies the experience of a need, the representation of a goal and the anticipation of a series of connecting paths (Nuttin, 1983). From this perspective, it may be useful to analyse situational models, person-centred models and interactionist models; motivation as a state and motivation as a trait, and thus the whole of the conative process (which includes the motivational aspect in the strict sense and the volitional aspect, the initiation of the cognitive process and the ability to persist in commitment); the distinction, still relevant today, between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and the more recent view of a continuum of motivation (Deci, Ryan, 1985), which extends from complete de-motivation to full motivational self-regulation, presenting all the intermediate stages.

Working in situations to promote motivation for school knowledge can help to realise its concrete educability, to overcome fatalistic or voluntaristic interpretations, to move from a static to a dynamic

vision, to discover the value of teachers' action in this field: in short, to verify in practice how the ability to support the development of intrinsic, drawing and lasting motivation is a constitutive part of the multifaceted professionalism of the contemporary teacher.

In this perspective, it may be useful to be aware of the intervention proposals developed in recent years by educational research and the relevant experiences made: motivational projects focusing on needs, reinforcements, cognitive control, interests, study methods, the use of teaching strategies and new technologies, relational aspects and the classroom climate, and dimensions peculiar to individual disciplines (Ricchiardi, 2005).

To summarise, we can say that the concrete realisation of motivational virtualities is significantly linked to an intentional action carried out by teachers through cognitive, affective-relational and methodological interventions: these correspond to the main factors of motivation that scientific investigation proposes to us, warning us to always consider them inextricably and dynamically connected.

In the first place, interventions concerning the cognitive area should be considered: special attention should be paid to a didactic approach aiming at focusing and developing interest (starting from spontaneous interests and then attempting a 'shift' towards discovered and acquired interests, increasing their range and horizon), without being excessively determined, at least in the initial phase, by concerns related to the necessary professional duties (completeness and 'internal' exhaustiveness of the didactic proposal, adequacy to pre-established quantitative and qualitative standards, and so on). It should be borne in mind that motivation, with reference to school learning, has progressive levels of concretisation: motivation to knowledge is one thing, active readiness to participate in school life and to learn through study is another, and the tension to study a specific subject, at a precise moment, in a particular context is another. Motivation for knowledge cannot be extrapolated from the student's overall experience, and must reckon with the co-presence of a myriad of conflicting motivational drives: the ability to mobilise interest, that is the attraction that the subject feels with respect to a specific object, therefore becomes decisive.

This practically translates into an attempt to foster the increase of intrinsic motivation (to know, to understand, to enrich one's cultural background, to explore reality), through a didactics that focuses on significant themes, attentive to differentiation and open to the possibility of deepening particular topics. It appears important to constantly keep alive the credible indication of the reasons for knowledge, but also the suggestion of suitable learning steps: a motivating action is carried out by the teacher who, together with each pupil, establishes short-term individualised objectives (goal setting) on which to conduct a formative assessment, proposes activities and assigns tasks of proportionate difficulty, supports the identification of personal cognitive styles, of the strategies most appropriate to the task and to the subject's own learning methods.

Here we can see the link with the second area involved in the intervention on motivation to scholastic knowledge, the methodological one: the focus should be aimed at progressively handing over to the subject the mastery of his/her own learning and study process, providing precise indications on the positive aspects to be strengthened and on the deficient ones to be integrated, on the mistakes made and on the paths to be followed to remedy them. As for knowledge, also for competence there are intrinsic motivations that the teacher is called upon to help discover: to become capable, skilled, experts in knowing how to perform certain operations and in mastering disciplines, aspects of reality, subjects, practices.

Progressive mastery of the study processes tends to reduce motivational fickleness, to increase continuous and permanent motivation to learn, to cultivate it by responsibly internalising the needs it entails. Attention to the methodological dimension develops motivation because it accentuates internal causal attribution and expectations of success, enhancing self-determination and self-awareness as the protagonist of one's own study: a subject gradually capable of autonomously choosing the ends and means of learning, of managing difficulties and failures, of self-evaluating one's own study, of growing by opening up to experience, of looking at oneself with an attitude of positivity.

This brings into play the third dimension of motivation that educational intervention must seek to promote: the affective-relational one. This intention is realised within a 'school-community' marked by a positive and committed classroom climate, attentive to people and collaborative. Teachers are called upon to seek out a type of relationship with pupils that fosters the development of self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy: this happens when the relationship is capable of authentic acceptance and enhancement

of individual characteristics, personal history, talents and difficulties, and at the same time is capable of proper authority.

Within a relationship of this kind, other motivational dimensions find fertile ground than those that drive towards knowledge and competence: we could call them existential, because they concern the need to be recognised and valued, and at the same time to grow, to realise one's own life project in interaction with the educational and cultural proposal of the school.

The effective teacher boosts motivation by supporting the level of aspiration and stimulating its gradual elevation: he, in cooperation with the family, positively intervenes in the constitution of the ideal self, manifesting a positive openness to the pupil's chances of success and providing concrete suggestions on how to reach the goals (Robinson, 2022).

Very relevant, for the promotion of motivation, is the ability to manage error, a phenomenon that not only triggers cognitive dynamics, but also affective ones, with considerable consequences on self-esteem: the fear and reiteration of failure tend to generate fear of disapproval and avoidance strategies, which block the dynamics of knowledge.

Decisive, finally, is the student's clear perception of the adult's own motivation: one does not educate so much by what one says but eminently by what one is, which is why only those who are adequately motivated, or rather those who do not stop searching for food to nourish their motivation, can effectively motivate to the cognitive and educational adventure.

The work on learner motivation therefore, like a sort of boomerang, inexorably sheds light on the quality of teachers' educational-professional motivation (or its degeneration) and the need to continually cultivate and reawaken it in the course of the life cycles and different seasons that characterise professional life. In this perspective, the teacher as a motivated motivator, constantly committed to developing his professionalism and still curious with respect to the questions he tries to arouse in his pupils, appears to be the main factor in promoting a quality school, capable of launching the young generations of the liquid, plural and hyper-technological society of the third millennium into the adventure of knowledge.

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