

## **Emotional Education: A New Paradigm**

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*The purpose of this article is to make an approach from the advances of neuroscience and neuroeducation to the importance of the implementation of emotional education in the Colombian educational system. First, some constructs related to emotional intelligence, emotional education and socioemotional competencies are examined, and the theories and concepts that support these terms are approached from the perspectives of different authors. Secondly, a general analysis of the Colombian educational system is made, describing the predominant role played by educators in emotional education, and the current regulations related to this type of education. Finally, a reflection is made on the reality of the Colombian educational system and how important it would be for the country to include emotional education in the educational plan of students.*

*Keywords: neuroeducation, emotional education, socioemotional competencies*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last few years, the education system has been faced with enormous challenges, being the object of many pressures; the socio-cultural, technological and economic transformations of current societies, the rapid changes and the growing and progressive complexity of the world of the 21st century, provide this system with new challenges in the training of the citizen of the future and present it with new social demands to be satisfied

The global challenges of today's societies, global warming, poverty, discrimination, migration, the COVID-19 pandemic, associated with the problems of the education system itself, school dropouts, violence, stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, bullying, among others, have raised and generated reflections on the real role that this system should play to address these social problems.

In general, there has been consensus and a growing awareness by academia of the need to change and improve the preparation of students for the functioning of a just, equitable and sustainable society in a demanding and constantly evolving environment, therefore, it is necessary to consider the complexity of the education system itself and the multitude of problems that it must address.

Clearly, we cannot insist on continuing with the traditional educational paradigm with the expectation that significant changes and improvements in the system will occur if education is approached from the

traditional viewpoint. In fact, any real transformation strategy and policy must deal with the current socio-cultural and economic problems and must address the various external and internal factors that concern the system.

As educational entities and individuals consider and analyze the problems that affect students in a holistic and integral manner, and address not only academic deficiencies but also socioemotional difficulties, students will become much more aware of the reality that surrounds them and will become more critical individuals of the complex realities and changing environments of today's societies.

In this sense, Bisquerra (2003) points out that "education has traditionally focused on cognitive development, with a generalized neglect of the emotional dimension" (p. 11). However, for this author, it seems that there is a consensus that education, being oriented to the full development of the student's personality, should be complemented to achieve both cognitive and emotional development.

To achieve these objectives, the educational system must once and for all evolve and change the old educational paradigm; we must leave behind the old conception of a system whose essential training was cognitive ability, and begin to assume the true dimension of comprehensive and formative training. According to Gardner (2016), the development of IQ is not enough to ensure the success of an individual, there are emotional factors that count as much as intellectual factors and that education generally does not address in formal education.

Emotional education is an urgent need in today's societies, therefore, the acquisition, strengthening and development of socioemotional skills and competences in today's students seem to be fundamental requirements for their adequate education, especially if we take into consideration that many of the personal and social problems have emotional roots that should be addressed through education.

The need to develop emotional education is not only a necessity in educational environments, it is a necessity in general society. Socially and emotionally intelligent citizens will be subjects with greater probabilities of success in their personal, academic, social and work environments, so it could be pointed out that many of the social problems that burden individuals and groups today, are closely related to the development of these skills. Thus, poor management and control of emotions, lack of empathy, solidarity, tolerance and respect for diversity and others, point to a poor development of these skills.

In this sense, several studies endorse the inclusion of emotional education in educational programs due to the relationship between this type of education, academic performance and well-being in general. Thus, studies by Rivers et al. (2012) suggest that students with inadequate or deficient emotional skills are more prone to school maladjustment, interpersonal problems and anxiety. Saklofske et al. (2012), points out that greater emotional regulation and a better adaptability process are helpful in coping with academic stress and achieving academic success. Similarly, Brackett et al. (2011), state that students with high levels of emotional competencies are better prepared for stressful situations typical of school evaluations, which is reflected in better academic performance.

Undoubtedly, emotional education in educational systems could become the most effective tool to transform not only the teaching-learning practices and methods of current educational models, but also to produce prospective changes in the citizens of societies. Beyond the recent interest and the scientific and academic voices in support of this type of education, both the social-emotional learning programs for students, which seek the acquisition of basic skills to recognize and manage emotions and interpersonal relationships, and the social-emotional teaching programs for teachers are innovative initiatives that aim at ambitious horizons.

The inclusion of this emotional education once and for all in the educational programs of all schools would provide a favorable context to take the definitive step towards the change of the educational paradigm, and thus finally achieve the so-called integral education.

Pedagogical models and programs of study have found in emotional education, supported by neuroscience and neuroeducation, the necessary bridge to develop in students an ethical, pertinent, reflective and responsible knowledge and know-how. In this paper we will make a conceptual approach to emotional competencies and emotional education from a theoretical review, while analyzing the role of the teacher in socioemotional learning, in order to give a general overview of the state of emotional education in Colombia.

## **APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

Before discussing the definition of emotional competence, it is necessary to start with the concept that would change the way of conceiving intelligence, emotional intelligence. In the 1990s, this intelligence appeared as a new scientific concept in the article by Salovey and Mayer (1990), which would launch this term into scientific and academic research, initially in the fields of psychology. Thus, this type of intelligence was originally defined as “the ability to control one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate between them and to use this information to guide thought and actions” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p. 189).

Thus, the arrival of this concept in scientific and academic circles was preceded by innovative research and constructs that would give foundation to the theory of emotional intelligence. First of all, research in the field of psychology was producing a cognitive revolution that brought scholars and researchers much closer to understanding and comprehending the concept of intelligence, so that, from the social intelligence proposed by Thorndike (1920), horizons were further expanded, passing through the multiple intelligences of Gardner (1983) and Sternberg (1985), until reaching the emotional intelligence of Goleman (1996), who would end up catapulting the construct to all areas and sectors of society, even pointing to this intelligence as much more important to achieve personal and professional success than traditional intelligence.

Secondly, and almost in parallel, research on emotional states gave reliable signs of their significance in cognitive processes, showing the influence of these affective states on such essential functional brain processes as memory, concentration, executive processes and decision making. For Damasio (2011), emotions are the foundation of survival and culture, and feelings are the foundation of the human mind, since these emotional states are essential to truly understand human thought.

These findings, although they contradicted the traditional conception of emotion as a disturbing state of the individual, and challenged the philosophical dichotomy between reason and emotion, ignited a promising field of research among psychologists and neuroscientists, opening up the possibility of an indissoluble relationship between emotion and intelligence. In this sense, an articulated conception of these two concepts was developed in the fields of psychology and neuroscience, leading to the development of a large number of investigations and studies that demonstrated how other non-cognitive skills such as attitude, motivation, self-regulation, resilience and social and emotional skills, which go beyond academic skills, determined successful performance (Bowles and Gintis, 2007). Likewise, people with higher and better levels of socioemotional development presented higher indicators of well-being in a general sense (Guerra and Bradshaw, 2008), so that the importance of emotion and emotional intelligence in any area of daily life became evident.

Now, having clear the theoretical foundations that support emotional intelligence, emotional competencies according to Bisquerra (2003), can be understood “as the set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes necessary to understand, express and regulate emotional phenomena appropriately” (p. 22). Therefore, it could be pointed out that these competencies are capabilities learned by an individual based on emotional intelligence that contribute to have control and management of their emotional states, which help or contribute to obtain a better performance or success at personal, family, professional or work level.

On the other side, Saarni (1999) defines this type of competencies as “the skills and abilities related to emotions that an individual needs to mobilize in order to face a changing environment, consolidate his identity, facilitate his adaptation, strengthen his sense of personal efficiency and self-confidence” (p. 178). In this sense, this author defends emotional competence as the demonstration of self-efficacy in social relationships that provoke emotions, while pointing out that emotional competence refers to the individual’s effective capacity to manage his or her own emotions, which is essential to negotiate interpersonal relationships.

## **WHAT IS MEANT BY EMOTIONAL EDUCATION**

The document submitted to UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, “Learning: The Treasure Within,” commonly known as the “Delors Report” (Delors, 1996),

proposed a holistic and integrated vision of education based on the paradigms of lifelong learning and the four basic pillars on which education should be based: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Thus, since the 1990s, this report has suggested the essential foundations on which education should be based for the personal and social development of individuals.

In this context, after a few years, it seems that education systems continue to build their foundations on the first two pillars, leaving the last two pillars somewhat forgotten. At its 46th International Conference on Education (ICE), UNESCO raised the issue of whether the pillar of “learning to live together” has failed, since all the representatives of the member countries recognized problems that conspire against the possibilities of humanity living together in peace. The challenge, therefore, is to include the other two pillars, learning to live together and learning to be, in order to guide or at least redirect education to a much more integral formation that focuses more on the socioemotional development of the individual and of society.

In this sense, emotional education plays a fundamental role in achieving these objectives and is key in the individual’s learning to face the challenges of the 21st century. For Steiner (2011), emotions exist as an essential part of human nature, therefore, emotional education helps to manage emotions in such a way that they improve the personal power and quality of life of the subject, as well as the quality of life of the people around them. Likewise, for this author, this education improves interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, while making cooperative work possible and facilitating the feeling of community.

According to Bisquerra (2016), this education “is an educational process, continuous and permanent, which aims to enhance the development of emotional competencies as an essential element of human development, in order to train him/her for life and with the purpose of increasing personal and social well-being” (p. 18). For this reason, according to this definition, this education must be present throughout the life of the individual, especially in the early stages of neurodevelopment, a stage in which the subject can establish better neural connections that allow a greater consolidation of certain functional states.

For Bisquerra et al. (2015), emotional education would act as a primary prevention system, since, by being emotionally competent, the individual would be able to apply his emotional intelligence in the different contexts of daily life, thus, in the face of pressing situations of anxiety, depression or violence, or addictive social situations such as drug use, the individual would have the ability to respond appropriately to such situations. In the same way, these emotional competencies would allow the individual to minimize his vulnerability to certain social situations associated with stress, impulsivity, aggressiveness, among others.

Likewise, it should be kept into consideration that this type of emotional competencies is acquired and developed progressively in the life of the individual, with the family playing an essential role in the consolidation of these competencies, thus, this type of competencies could be considered the most difficult ones to be developed and consolidated by the individual. Therefore, for Rodriguez (2014), “emotional education is a response to social needs that are not sufficiently addressed in the academic school curriculum or in the knowledge of families who mostly ignore its importance” (p. 105).

According to Bisquerra (2016), a student can more easily acquire cognitive competencies, so learning to solve equations, read correctly and know social movements could be acquired in a short period of time, in contrast, learning to regulate and control emotions requires much more time and lifelong training.

In short, emotional education is one of the main means to promote a comprehensive training and enhance the development of social and emotional skills in human beings, therefore, achieving these skills in individuals in general would lead to better scenarios to help reduce poverty, exclusion, oppression, discrimination and improve from diversity and difference the levels of justice and equity in today’s societies, which would bring greater collective benefits and greater social cohesion.

## **THE TEACHER’S IMPACT ON EMOTIONAL EDUCATION**

In recent years, several studies have pointed out the role played by socioemotional competencies and how they can affect the teaching-learning processes (Durlak et al., 2011), as well as a variety of behaviors

associated with physical and mental health, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and academic and work performance (Brackett et al., 2004).

In light of this research, it is necessary to analyze the role of emotional intelligence and socioemotional skills of teachers in the teaching process. In this sense, the need arises to work on emotional education in these from university training and during the professional development of their pedagogical work. This requires the implementation of specific programs in emotional education that show the relevance of emotions in the teaching process.

Neuroscience and psychology studies support the importance of this type of training, both for its importance in the development of critical and assertive thinking and for its intrinsic value in the teaching-learning process.

From the perspectives of Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2004), teachers should be emotionally intelligent in their work, since their pedagogical work in the classroom represents the model of adult socioemotional learning with the greatest impact for the subjects in training, and because being emotionally intelligent individuals they can cope more successfully with the vicissitudes of everyday life and assume the work stress that their work in the educational context could generate. Therefore, it is necessary for the individual in training to have an emotional educator, since, if he/she does not have this type of competencies, it would be very difficult for the subject in training to acquire, develop and consolidate this type of socioemotional competencies.

In the country's public educational institutions there are daily situations of coexistence among the members of the educational community that cause alterations in the development of educational processes, so that through the institutions' own bodies, such as the coexistence committees in which teachers, directors, students and parents participate, solutions to such problems are sought, however, these committees often aim at punitive or purely academic solutions, without generating changes that really address coexistence conflicts at the social and emotional level, leaving aside the individual as an integral being that needs to be addressed in all its dimensions.

From the point of view of Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2004), the teacher "is an irreplaceable model of emotional intelligence" (p. 2). In this sense, it should be emphasized that after the family, the educational environment represents for the individual the second most influential place for the formative process, even more so if it is taken into consideration that part of his neurodevelopment takes place in the school environment, therefore, this school environment is structured as the ideal place for the acquisition of both cognitive and socioemotional competencies, the teacher being a main protagonist and perhaps the most important reference after the parents for the development of socially and emotionally acceptable attitudes and behaviors.

In the same sense, Abarca et al. (2002), considered that the teacher, almost invisibly in his pedagogical practice through curricular activities, is involved in the affective regulation and the regulated expression of both positive and negative emotions, creates environments that promote socioemotional skills, as well as through the experience of emotional strategies for the solution of interpersonal conflicts; in addition, through his teaching process he promotes empathic skills, showing students the importance of attention, listening and respect for the opinions of others.

On the other hand, the teacher must have the emotional capacity to implement didactic and methodological strategies that promote the development of socioemotional competencies, proposing activities that allow active, reflective and participatory participation, where students can strengthen interpersonal relationships and expressive and communicative skills. The best way to achieve this would be through group activities, where cooperative and collaborative learning allows, from diversity and differences, the participation of all students, in order to reach agreements and consensus among all, which would be very constructive when faced with conflictive situations.

In short, emotional education must be present in the school program, not as just another subject, but as an emotional model that permeates all subjects in a transversal manner, and can, through the teaching-learning process, address the contents of the areas, cultivating both cognitive and socioemotional competencies, in order to teach life skills and social and emotional wellbeing.

## **NORMATIVE STATUS OF EMOTIONAL EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA**

In Colombia, public educational policies are framed in the Political Constitution of 1991 and more especially in the General Education Law or Law 115 of 1994, whose guidelines establish the educational process for Colombian citizens.

This law states that education fulfills a social function and that it is a process of permanent, personal, cultural and social formation based on an integral conception of the human person. In addition, it points out the full development of the personality [...] within a process of integral, physical, psychic, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social, affective, ethical, civic and other human values. Notwithstanding its purpose, and including an integral conception of the individual, this law makes no mention of emotional education or its importance for the integral education of the citizen. In fact, the only mention that Law 115 of 1994 makes about an emotional state is in Article 46, when it refers to education for people with emotional limitations or exceptional intellectual capacities.

On the other hand, in its article 23, it indicates the mandatory and fundamental areas that must be taught in order to comply with the objectives and purposes previously stated, finding that the only area that points towards social and affective formation refers to the area called ethical education and human values. It should be noted that this area taught in the country's public institutions often deals with contents whose meaning has little weight in the study plans, or presents the teaching by the teacher of subjects that rarely contribute to the true social and affective formation of the student. Moreover, this area, whose weekly assignment generally consists of 1 hour, is most of the time considered as a filler or complementary subject, taking away the true importance it really deserves.

However, since its issuance this law has been modified by decrees, regulations, resolutions, ministerial directives and even rulings of the constitutional court, which in some way sought to remedy or correct the shortcomings of the original law. Many of these reforms have been directed especially to the management of resources, educational coverage and quality policies, leaving aside, if not forgetting emotional education.

In 2014, and being in sync with the dialogues and peace processes with guerrilla groups in the country, the Department of Peace was created through Law 1732 of September 1, with the aim of strengthening in students values and behaviors that would promote the development of an awareness for coexistence and a culture of peace in the country. In principle, this subject was to be officially taught in all public institutions in the country, but its inclusion in the program's to date has shown setbacks, and to date it has not been included in many programs of study of the nation's official establishments.

The substantial change to start implementing emotional education in the country seems to arise with the National Ten-Year Education Plan 2016-2026 (PNDE), which explicitly includes in the specific strategic guidelines of chapter one: "to create a comprehensive system of teacher training and qualification that seeks to develop [...] and socioemotional skills, for the proper management of school contexts, enhancing in their students the necessary skills to meet the challenges of the XXI century" (p. 38). In the same sense, the seventh strategic challenge states: "To implement a comprehensive education for citizenship through the development [...] and socioemotional skills and citizenship competencies for peaceful coexistence and culture of peace in the educational community [...] in a cross-cutting manner throughout the educational program" (p. 54). Thus, it could be said that Colombia finally realized the importance of the development of socioemotional skills and competencies in the formative educational processes of its citizens.

However, the policies or form of implementation of these strategies in the educational sphere have yet to be defined. The plan is designed to meet objectives by 2026. For the time being, a bill is currently in the Congress of the Republic, Law 438 of 2021, which seeks to implement the compulsory chair of emotional education in all educational institutions in the country at the preschool, elementary and middle school levels. The objectives of this law, which is already in its second debate, seek, among others, to innovate educational and pedagogical practices, promoting emotionally intelligent schools that meet the emotional needs not met by traditional education and promote the development of emotional and life skills that contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

## REFLECTION ON THE COLOMBIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

Considering what is known about the brain, it is a fact that education influences the structuring and organization of the brain, in such a way that the way synaptic connections are established and the neural networks related to educational processes occur at the level of the different structures that form the cerebral cortex, thus allowing the product of the learning acquired in the process of neurodevelopment of the individual to determine to a great extent the development of competencies and skills, both cognitive and socioemotional. Therefore, to educate is to modify the neural structures of the brain, thus emotional education offers the possibility of glimpsing in the individual in formation a true cognitive and emotional revolution at the time of learning and teaching. According to Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2004) and Goleman (1996), societies and the educational system tend to overvalue academic intelligence to the detriment of other capacities, despite the fact that there is growing evidence that shows that being cognitively intelligent is not enough to guarantee academic, professional and personal success.

Emotional education is a concept widely used in recent years in the field of psychology and neuroscience. However, it is an education that is largely beyond the reach of Latin American public schools, particularly within the Colombian educational system. This situation may be due to the fact that in many countries of the region, including Colombia, emotional education, despite being in the international educational concert for years, has only recently been sanctioned (Argentina and Peru) or is being processed (Chile, Uruguay and Colombia) the laws that allow it to be in the school curricula (Argentina and Peru).

The situation of public schools in Colombia today, and especially in rural areas after months of the covid-19 pandemic, revealed the sad educational inequity in the country. If we compare the gap that exists between urban and rural public education and between public and private education, we can see how access to basic resources such as internet, computers and even the most elementary school supplies determine the school success of the subject of education. This reality glimpsed by a pandemic made it possible to observe how educational inequality contributes to social and economic inequality, thus creating a vicious circle of poverty.

Given these disparities, education in the country continues to be somewhat stagnant; there are several problems that continue to hinder the development of this sector, poor school infrastructure, alarming dropout rates and high teacher absenteeism in vulnerable areas of the country, among others, show the long way to go to achieve quality education. Added to this, the OECD's PISA study, a standardized test of high school students in which Colombia has been participating since 2006, reflects relatively poor learning results compared to other nations. In the latest study, from 2018, Colombia ranked last in reading, mathematics and science among the 37 OECD countries, behind Mexico and Chile, in fact, the results of these tests indicate that Colombia ranks last in all competencies assessed since it has been a member (OECD, 2019)

In Colombia, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, emotional education is still in its embryonic stage. The nation's official public institutions do not include social-emotional learning as an essential component in the formative process of the student in their curricula; therefore, students in the official sector do not have the necessary strategies or pedagogical tools for emotional management.

Despite worldwide advances in the fields of neuroscience and neuroeducation and the validated role of emotions in the teaching-learning processes, in the country today, this education seems to be in the hands of academics and educational researchers who see emotional education as an opportunity to improve education in the country.

Implementing emotional education in Colombian schools, then, seems to be an urgent need, especially considering that in today's societies, in a constantly changing and diversifying world, the classroom is the place where students are often exposed for the first time to individuals with different opinions, beliefs and customs. For this reason, a strong emotional education will help students better understand their thoughts and emotional states, become more self-aware, and develop more empathy for others in their community and the world around them. Likewise, developing these competencies in the classroom could help students of all ages to better understand their emotions, feel them fully, and make positive and responsible decisions,

creating frameworks for achieving their goals and enhancing their learning while building positive relationships with others.

On the other hand, the way educators approach emotional education is crucial to achieve the desired objectives. Although social-emotional learning is not currently a designated subject in the curriculum like science or mathematics, these competencies can be integrated in a cross-cutting manner in the curriculum. When educators plan activities with the learning brain in mind, based on student motivation and interests, students will be more inclined to participate and less likely to become cognitively and emotionally disengaged from the subject matter. By fostering the educator's sense of empathy, self-awareness, and feelings of safety and inclusion in the classroom, emotional education could have a positive impact that lasts a lifetime.

## CONCLUSIONS

Emotional education in the country and in the world is an undeniable fact; this is supported by research in fields such as neuroscience and psychology (Greenberg et al., 2004; Brackett et al., 2004). The process of paradigm shift from traditional education to emotional education is a process that requires time and must be gradual. Emotional education emerges as an educational strategy in line with the needs of 21st century societies and the skills and competencies that the subject of education must acquire in modern societies; therefore, its implementation is essential.

In Colombia, the current reality is that despite the fact that the ten-year education plan includes guidelines aimed at the development of socioemotional competencies by Colombian citizens, there is still no formal structure on how to carry out training in these competencies through the educational system. On the one hand, the lack of political and state will, which in general has little interest in the education sector and has limited knowledge about education, and on the other hand, the lack of preparation and qualification of the vast majority of teachers regarding emotional education and social-emotional competencies.

Ten-year education plans have been devised every 10 years since 1996, which unfortunately remain only as theoretical references of what could be and never is. The law that implements emotional education in the country seems that it could be sanctioned in the year 2022, and in this way, as contemplated by this law, emotional education could be established as a mandatory curricular subject. This opens the way to start implementing emotional education in the country's schools, however, much more than a law is needed, it requires teacher training and qualification programs, as well as well-founded educational guidelines to guide the implementation of these social and emotional competencies in the school curriculum.

As long as the meaning of education in Colombia continues to be measured by statistical tests and quality indicators that only aim at quantitative assessment, the country will continue to be mired in serious educational problems. Education in the country should be seen or should mean a social sense of equity and should be guided to human development, which allows better indicators of social and emotional well-being. The World Bank and the OECD estimate eleven generations in the country for a Colombian family to get out of poverty, for a young Colombian to go from a precarious situation and improve their economic income a little; in the last two decades the rates or inequality gaps instead of improving, are getting worse every day, to the point that these have quadrupled from 2002 to 2018. In other words, education in the country is not fulfilling its social function, because if the inequality gaps increase every year, the system as such is failing, so the children of poor families in the country will continue to be poor or even worse, increasingly poorer.

In conclusion, the traditional way of conceiving education centered on academic and intellectual learning is being forgotten. Complementary competencies and skills related to emotional states are becoming more relevant every day. This new reality, based on neuroscience and neuroeducation, demands a different kind of education. The main purpose of current educational systems is the formation of a human being with skills and competencies that make him/her human, for this reason, the educator in addition to having pedagogical, didactic and curricular competencies, must be a suitable, active and socioemotionally intelligent individual, which consequently allows the integral formation of a highly qualified, competent and productive individual, who is capable not only of being employed efficiently by his/her intellectual



capacities, but also has the skills and socioemotional competencies to live in harmony for individual and collective well-being.

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