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# Teacher and student affective bond in the sixth year of elementary school

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**Abstract**: In the light of Henri Wallon's (1975, 1979) discussions on affectivity, this study aimed to understand how the affective bond is built in the relationship between teachers and students of the sixth year of Elementary School who enter a new school. For this, qualitative research was designed and carried out in a state public school in the municipality of Caxambu do Sul, Santa Catarina. As instruments and techniques to produce information, participant observation recorded in a field diary, conversation circles with ten students of the sixth year of Elementary School, and semi-structured interviews with five teachers of these students were used. The information was analyzed through Thematic Content Analysis. The results indicate that the transition to a new school and the change in the school routine generate insecurities and challenges for students, accentuated by the transition from the development phase of the categorical stage to the stage of puberty and adolescence. It is concluded that the affective bond between teachers and students plays an important role in the school transition period and the development phase of the latter. The formation of positive affective bonds between teachers and students is essential for a welcoming educational environment that is conducive to learning. It is suggested that schools develop pedagogical strategies and practices that value and strengthen these affective relationships, contributing to the inclusion and integral development of students.
**Keywords**: affectivity; basic education; teaching-learning; Wallon.

## 1 Introduction

The relationship between affectivity and child development is a significant topic in the Psychogenetic theory, which has been revisited in recent studies that support it, such as the theses by Silva (2016) and Gazzotti (2019). This relationship is central to the present study. According to Ferreira and Acioly-Régnier (2010), Wallon's (1975, 1979) concept of the "person" emphasizes the integration of the organic and the social. It also proposes a synthesis of three functional sets: affectivity, motor act, and cognition. These elements encompass the various stages of development, ranging from birth to adolescence.

According to Almeida (2022, pp. 24–25), the person, as the fourth functional set,

> [...] expresses the possibilities of integration of the functional sets in the developmental process. When considering Wallon's theory to think about teaching and learning processes, equal emphasis is given to affectivity, cognition, and movement, since any activity directed toward one of the functional sets affects the others.

This contribution from Psychogenetic theory provides important insights for understanding teaching and learning processes in the school context. Among the three functional sets, according to Wallon (1975, 1979), affectivity is the first to develop and to be revealed in the child. Affectivity is understood as the individual's ability to influence and be influenced by their environment. It refers to a "[...] set of psychic phenomena manifested in the form of emotions, feelings, and passions, always accompanied by sensations of pain and pleasure, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, like or dislike, joy or sadness" (Codo; Gazzotti, 1999, p. 48).

Wallon (1999) systematized human development into stages in which the child establishes different forms of interaction with both human and physical environments. In the fifth stage, which begins approximately at age 11, known as "puberty and adolescence," emphasis is placed on the influence of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. For Wallon, the puberty and adolescence stage is a particularly dynamic phase, as it separates the child from the adult they are becoming. This stage involves physiological modifications and psychological transformations. At this time, affective functions regain predominance, and the construction of the person and their identity absorbs and monopolizes the adolescent's attention. Emotional life becomes intense and sometimes surprises adults, as imagination and feelings are heightened, reflecting the inner imbalance of youth, with desires for opposition, possession, adventure, renunciation, and independence.

Considering the specific characteristics of the puberty and adolescence stage within the developmental process, this research focused on a sixth-grade class in a state public school. These students experience the transition from Elementary School I to Elementary School II, which involves changing schools. Given this context, the objective of the study was to understand how affective bonds are formed in the relationship between teachers and sixth-grade students entering a new school environment. The research was qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory, conducted from August to November 2023. It took place in a sixth-grade class at a state public school located in a small municipality in the state of Santa Catarina. The school is

situated in the urban area and serves students from both urban and rural areas, with a total of 354 students enrolled at the time of the study. The participants included five teachers and ten sixth-grade students. Among the nine teachers working with this group, three were randomly selected. Additionally, two key informant teachers were invited: the second classroom teacher, who accompanied the students daily in all subjects, and the Portuguese language teacher, since this subject had the highest number of classes for the sixth grade. The students were also selected randomly.

To gather data, participant observations were recorded in a field diary during various moments of the school day, such as arrival, recess, and classroom activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers, and four discussion circles were held with the students. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth in Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the Brazilian National Health Council.

The data were analyzed using Thematic Content Analysis, as proposed by Minayo (2001), which gave rise to the categories guiding the structure of this article. The first category discusses perceptions of the sixth-grade class and the challenges of a transitional period marked by changing schools, developmental stages, and educational processes. The second category addresses the teachers' perceptions of the central role of the family in the difficulties experienced by students entering the new school. The third category concerns perceptions regarding the importance of affective bonding and social interactions within the school environment.

## 2 Challenges of the Transitional Period from the Perspective of Students and Teachers

Wallon (1975, p. 95) emphasizes that "[...] transitions and changes are critical periods that may provoke insecurity and fear in children." This point is particularly relevant, as three aspects of the lives of sixth-grade students characterize what is referred to here as a transitional period, producing significant changes in both school routines and developmental processes. The first two aspects concern the school transition: these students attended Elementary School I in the municipal public school system and, upon entering Elementary School II, had to transfer to the state public school system.

This change of school entails not only a shift in physical environment, teachers, and classmates, but also a new phase in the process of schooling for sixth-grade

students. One notable feature is the increase in the number of subjects and teachers in the final years of Elementary Education. While in the early years students are taught by generalist teachers, who are responsible for all subjects in the school curriculum, in Elementary School II, the teachers are subject specialists, teaching only in their specific areas of expertise.

For the students participating in this study, their age and developmental stage also mark a transitional period between what Wallon (1999) termed the “categorical stage” and the “puberty and adolescence stage.” According to scholars, this period is characterized by intense physiological changes, as well as bodily, cognitive, and psychological transformations that compel young people to appropriate a body they no longer recognize as their own.

According to Silva (2011), the sixth grade represents precisely the transition from a predominantly cognitive, categorical mode of thinking to the functional domain of affectivity, noting that: “[...] the sixth-grade student embodies the idea of being and not being in order to become: being/not being a child; being/not being an adolescent; becoming an adolescent” (Silva, 2011, p. 65). In this sense, the author emphasizes that understanding this process is essential for teachers who work with these students.

The teachers interviewed acknowledged that the changes experienced by students generate certain challenges as they transition into the new school environment. This transition affects how students express their affectivity, even if only temporarily. As one teacher confirmed:

> I must admit that they arrive somewhat insecure and, at times, even frightened by the new reality during the first or second week of classes. Even though they are warmly welcomed by the school administration, teachers, and even by peers or friends they already know, it still takes them a few weeks to adapt. The state school has a larger physical space, subject-specific classrooms, and a greater number of teachers due to the increased number of curricular subjects they now have. They are still children and require special attention. As we’ve mentioned before, they are in a process of transition and adaptation (Teacher 2)

> I feel that these students were still accustomed to the sense of childhood, which makes this a distinct kind of transition. At first, until they made new friends, they often seemed somewhat lost (Teacher 5).

The teachers’ remarks highlight that transitioning schools marks a shift from a previous stage, which was more receptive to expressions of childhood, to a new phase of schooling. They also emphasize the importance of students forming new affective

bonds as part of the adaptation process, particularly the relevance of peer relationships and friendships.

Some students expressed a positive outlook regarding the transition between schools and stages of schooling. Others, however, highlighted certain changes in this transitional process as losses, particularly in relation to playful activities, which they perceived as more prominent in their former school, and to the increased demands of the new school environment. These perspectives are evident in the following exchanges between the researcher and the children:

> **Student Maky**[1]**:** I wanted to say something—I really wanted to come here. My other friend already studied here, and then I found out that we switched classrooms. I really wanted to come here because of that. We thought it would be cooler—and it is cooler. When I found out that we switched classrooms with the teachers, I really wanted to come here.
>
> **Student Batman:** I miss the other school, you know?
>
> **Researcher:** What do you miss?
>
> **Student Batman:** The playground. We used to play a lot there. Here it's tougher.
>
> **Researcher:** Tougher how?
>
> **Student Batman:** Ugh, there's a lot of schoolwork!
>
> **Researcher:** What do you mean by a lot of schoolwork?
>
> **Student Batman:** We write a lot. Math exercises are hard. The math book is really complicated.
>
> **Student Luffy:** Back at the other school, in our classroom at least, almost all the boys— we'd eat super quick, put our plates away, and run out to one part of the school. You know that part near the gate, kind of like a little house? Well, we used to play in that house. When we came here, there wasn't really space to run around anymore. I feel like it was more fun back there.

The students' statements reveal differing emotions upon arriving at the new school. Faced with the need to adapt to recent demands of school routines and the school's physical structure, some expressed positive expectations and satisfaction with the new environment, while others felt disappointed and nostalgic for their previous school. Another aspect revealed in the teacher interviews is that all of them reported encountering challenges with the sixth-grade class. However, only two teachers explicitly linked these difficulties to the transitions experienced by students at this stage

[1] During the first discussion circle, the students chose fictitious names, which were used throughout this article in order to preserve their identities.

of schooling and development: “Some difficulties we, as teachers, always face with sixth-grade classes. They’re usually more restless, more agitated, which is typical of their age group [...]”. “Teachers who work with sixth-grade classes always prepare to deal with behavioral issues in particular” (Teacher 1).

In this regard, Teacher 1 stated that “[...] especially when referring to the sixth-grade class, this group requires greater effort from the teacher.” The challenges posed by the sixth-grade class were further emphasized by other teachers, as seen in Teacher 2’s comment: “[...] this group is hard to handle!” Similarly, Teacher 4 remarked: “[...] it’s the worst class in the school.”

Among the main difficulties reported by teachers when working with sixth-grade students are issues related to aggression, sexuality, and academic underachievement relative to what is expected at this stage. Regarding aggression and agitation in peer interactions, teachers pointed out:

> [...] they’re restless, they talk all the time, have no boundaries, they fight with each other, use profanity, [...] they get into arguments easily, yell at one another [...]. Some are aggressive toward the teachers and also toward their classmates, any word they don’t like, and they already want to fight, they curse.” (Teacher 4).
>
> In terms of behavior, some students are rather rebellious. (Teacher 2)
>
> [...] when we organized group work, they had a lot of difficulty listening to others, getting involved with classmates, they argued. (Teacher 1)
>
> They even have trouble relating to their peers! They use bad language and get offended easily (Teacher 5).

Considering the developmental transition experienced by sixth-grade students, as well as the transition related to the change in school setting and daily routines between fifth and sixth grade, Paula *et al*. (2018, p. 36) point out that this period is “[…] turbulent and marked by numerous conflicts, both for students and for the teachers who accompany them through this transitional process.” From the Wallonian theoretical perspective, it is understood that behaviors such as self-assertion, confrontation, and questioning, though not innate, are common during this stage of development in our society. In this context, the child/adolescent “[…] relies on and aligns with their peers while challenging the values as interpreted by the adults around them” (Mahoney; Almeida, 2005, pp. 23–24). In this regard, it is important to note that the intensity of the “crisis” brought about by the changes occurring during puberty and

adolescence leads, as previously mentioned, to the predominance of affective over cognitive functions at this stage.

The teachers interviewed in this study perceived the aggressive behaviors exhibited by sixth-grade students primarily as disciplinary challenges. However, from a psychogenetic perspective, these behaviors may be better understood as expressions of self-assertion and as communicative signals of the difficulties and/or changes faced by students. Mahoney and Almeida (2005) emphasize that during this period, peer groups assume a central role, and interpersonal conflicts may reflect attempts to establish belonging and identity within the new school context. In light of this, pedagogical strategies that promote positive affective bonds between teachers and students may contribute to mediating these behaviors, fostering a more welcoming environment and facilitating both adaptation and learning processes.

The bodily and hormonal changes characteristic of puberty and adolescence also become more pronounced during this stage. As Santana (2013, p. 42) states, during this period, interest shifts toward "[…] pleasures, the ways of obtaining them, and the bodily changes that are beginning to emerge." This presents challenges for teachers, especially when they fail to understand these changes as an inherent part of this developmental stage.

As Teacher 4 put it:

> Not to mention sexuality, which is just bubbling over! […] I've already covered sexuality this year. But even though it's an important topic, they don't take it very seriously, which makes it hard to explain — they joke around, make inappropriate comments when we watch videos or documentaries related to sexuality.

From the teacher's perspective, there is an early onset in the manifestation of sexuality-related issues, which leads to the loss of childlike behavior and interests and an early entry into adolescence. This, in turn, may compromise students' interest in academic content: *"Among children today, sexuality is emerging earlier, and that also makes studying more difficult, because they start developing other interests"* (Teacher 3). The students' organic conditions are seen as exacerbating what teachers identify as the main challenge: a learning gap and academic underperformance among sixth-grade students. In addition,

> When it comes to academic performance, it's even worse! Some of them, when they arrived here in February, didn't know how to read […], there's a

> lack of interest, lack of motivation, […], many don't distinguish between subjects — they use one notebook for everything, take a long time to get their materials out of their backpacks, don't understand the content, and some even get lost just trying to copy from the board (Teacher 4).
>
> The students show a lack of interest, learning difficulties, minimal family involvement in the educational process, no encouragement for reading and writing, no sense of direction, no life goals (Teacher 3).
>
> They are restless students, with learning gaps and low academic performance — some are very weak! Many reached the sixth grade without knowing how to read or have great difficulty reading (Teacher 5).

A study conducted by Rosa, Fernandes, and Lemos (2020) with 124 adolescents aged 11 to 14 from a private school in the state of Belo Horizonte indicated an association between academic performance, gender, age, and school grade. In that study, sixth-grade students achieved higher average scores compared to the other adolescents assessed, a finding that differs from the teachers' perceptions in the present research context.

For the teachers who participated in this study, the various difficulties and challenges characteristic of this period, such as school transition, developmental stage shifts, and changes in the schooling process that begin in the sixth grade, contribute to the low academic performance observed among students in this context. However, from the teachers' perspective, the primary cause of such performance is attributed to the students' family environment.

## 3 Teachers' Perceptions of the Central Role of Family in Students' Difficulties

Rosa, Fernandes, and Lemos (2020, p. 7), based on their research, state that "correlations between school type, family income, and parents' educational levels demonstrate that academic performance is influenced by out-of-school environmental factors". In the present study, when asked why they believed students faced the difficulties they had mentioned, all teachers attributed them to conditions of poverty and family vulnerability, as well as to the lack of parental involvement in their children's educational process. Thus,

> The lives they lead, the family examples, family disintegration — most of them don't have a father or mother figure. Because, in truth, we who are with them almost every day can see it, feel it — some of the students in this class are treated poorly, their parents don't take part in their school life. [...] These students who came this year from the municipal school to the sixth grade here — they're something else, totally out of the ordinary! I've never seen, in all my years as a teacher, so many problems in a single class. Most of them come just to cause trouble (Teacher 4).

> Family disintegration is one of the problems that affects us directly. If parents helped more, half the path would already be taken. But we can't blame them too much, because many of them are not well-informed or guided in life [...] regarding the families — their minimal involvement with the school — their children have no boundaries, no set mealtimes. Many don't even eat before coming to school. They arrive asking what time the snack will be served, keep insisting: 'Is it almost snack time, teacher?' That breaks my heart! Because some of them go to bed late and wake up late, and their mothers don't have time to serve them lunch (Teacher 5).

The teachers' statements suggest the presence of various prejudices in the school environment that influence how they interpret students' affective expressions and academic difficulties. Among these prejudices are ideals of family held by the teachers, which differ from the real family structures of the students in this class. Teachers often use terms such as "dysfunctional families" to explain students' challenges — but what defines a "functional" family? Are they referring to middle-class nuclear families? When we examine the students' own accounts, we observe that they do reference their parents, but these references do not necessarily align with the teachers' assumptions about what constitutes a mother or father figure.

In this sense, it is necessary to critically examine how teachers understand and deal with family and student configurations that do not match the idealized model. Their narratives also reveal a belief that successful teaching occurs when students comply with school rules and families are visibly engaged in school life — an assumption that overlooks the realities of contemporary society and family structures in all their diversity, as well as the impact of social inequalities on the creation of socioeconomic vulnerabilities. So-called "dysfunctional" families may, in fact, be "functional" in ways that differ from those idealized by the school system.

Collares and Moysés (1996, pp. 259–260) emphasize that bourgeois ideology can be observed "[…] when the teacher unconsciously becomes its immediate agent, excluding, marginalizing, and stigmatizing a child whose only 'fault' is belonging to a socially marginalized group." The observation made by Collares and Moysés (1996) nearly three decades ago still resonates in the field of Brazilian basic education, which, according to Weber and Piczkowski (2023, pp. 11–12).

> [...] with legal advancements and social movements, education has become more democratized and now serves the vast majority of the population. However, this does not necessarily create equal conditions for different groups. Education for all does not guarantee accessibility, nor does it ensure satisfactory access and learning for everyone, or even the recognition of difference. Some persistent features of school culture include classification and categorization, which give rise to dichotomous thinking — for example,

> distinguishing between good and bad students, or labeling individuals as either successful or unsuccessful in school, according to the teachers' perspective.

We agree with the authors that discussions on this topic are not new, as similar research has been published in Brazil for over three decades. What is surprising, however, is the persistence of certain narratives among teachers. "What can be done, and how, to break down beliefs that have become naturalized and entrenched in schools?" ask Weber and Piczkowski (2023, pp. 11–12). We do not claim to have the answer, but we affirm that challenging some school-based assumptions does not mean disregarding the importance of schooling. In this regard, Pieczkowski et al. (2024, p. 14) pose a compelling question: "Where would children — especially poor children — be if they were not in school? How would the right to learn, to experience difference, to play, be guaranteed without belonging to the school community?".

Affective bonds formed in the school environment thus hold a central role, as Spinoza (2009, p. 98) reflects, referring to the body's affections as "affections by which its power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the ideas of these affections." Therefore, the relationships built in school must produce positive affections in students — those that foster their development. In this sense, Gallo invites us to envision a school oriented toward life: "A school that is a place to learn how to live, a place for exercising reflection on oneself, experiencing self-care, and coming to know oneself in order to be and to live well — a place to produce oneself as a singular subject" (Gallo, 2015, p. 445).

According to Masschelein and Simons (2018, pp. 72–73), the school has the duty.

> [...] to believe in the potential of the next generation: every student, regardless of background or innate talent, has the ability to become interested in something and to develop in meaningful ways. What happens in school is always 'unnatural,' 'unlikely.' The school goes against 'the laws of gravity' (for example, the 'natural law' that claims students of a given socioeconomic status are not interested in a particular subject or activity) and refuses to legitimize differences based on the students' specific 'gravitational pull'.

Thus, it is argued that fostering affective bonds between teacher and student means recognizing each child's uniqueness and potential for learning and development, without labels or classifications. This does not imply denying the social vulnerabilities that reverberate within the school, nor the challenges of being a teacher

in a so-called inclusive school situated in a neoliberal society driven by competition, rivalry, and the valorization of individual merit.

The students' statements reaffirm the social and economic vulnerabilities present in their everyday lives. In this context, access to food through the school, and the quality of that food, is frequently highlighted by them as one of the reasons they enjoy attending school. On this point, the following statements stand out:

> **Student Lion King:** I just wanted to say that I really like this new school—the snacks are really good, and the lunch ladies let us go back for seconds! I come to school hungry.
>
> **Researcher:** But don't you have lunch before coming to school?
>
> **Student Lion King:** No! My mom gives me and my little sister, who's in preschool, some breakfast, and then takes us to Grandma's house—and Grandma cooks really late. Then we take the bus, and if we have lunch, we miss the bus. So when recess comes, that's when we have lunch.
>
> **Researcher:** And what do you like the most about the food here at the new school?
>
> **Student Lion King:** Oh! When there's savory food—beans, meat, rice. But when there's hot dogs, I love that too. The hot dogs at this school are different from the other school—they're made with chicken, and they have tomato and lettuce.

It is important to highlight that Wallon (1999) recognized the significant impact that a child's environment has on their development: "It is inevitable that the affective influences surrounding the child from the cradle will have a determining effect on their mental development" (Wallon, 1999, p. 122). In this sense, the precarious living conditions of these students cannot be ignored when considering their development and the expression of their affectivity, yet their potential should not be reduced or confined by these conditions.

Patto (2022, p. 22) emphasizes that "[...] the interpretations of academic failure in public schools organize these and other aspects of life in society into a discourse, allegedly scientific, that assigns responsibility to the very victims of the process". Thus, teachers' discourse reveals ambivalence: at times they blame so-called "dysfunctional" families and their lack of engagement for students' school failure; at other times, they acknowledge that these difficulties are also the result of a broader social context, as reflected in the following statement:

> It reflects what they live and witness daily in the neighborhoods where they live — walking the streets with no set time to return home. Some have already

> been assaulted by older teenagers, gotten involved with drugs, or feel resentment because they don't have better living conditions. Some of their parents are violent toward them, they're mistreated, and so on. […] Some parents don't have steady jobs; they work as day laborers and depend on social services for basic food baskets, milk, diapers, and rent assistance. From what I hear from the students, many of their mothers do domestic chores, take care of their siblings, and cannot work outside the home. So, it's a social crisis, a societal problem, and in my view, there should be public policies in place to teach and guide these families toward better living conditions. Because otherwise, all of this reverberates in the school and deeply affects these students, from birth onward, impacting their entire lives — and this cycle just keeps repeating itself, from parent to child, without end (Teacher 5).

Based on the accounts of the teachers who participated in this study, it is important to highlight the discussion raised by Rodrigues, Aragão, and Rodrigues (2016), who point out that schools in Brazil often impose a uniform pace of learning on all children and fail to critically examine their own pedagogical practices, evaluation processes, and mechanisms of selection and classification in light of the diverse social, familial, and economic contexts of their students. As the authors note, this tendency leads to blaming the children — and, we would add, their families — for academic failure, while absolving the school, the State, and the economic system of responsibility.

When students express themselves, they introduce new perspectives on how families view schooling and their children's education, indicating that families do value both despite the challenges they may face in offering support. Furthermore,

> **Student Rosa:** I have trouble learning.
>
> **Researcher:** What kind of trouble, Rosa?
>
> **Student Rosa:** Oh, I even have a hard time doing homework!
>
> **Researcher:** Why don't you ask your parents for help, Rosa?
>
> **Student Rosa:** My dad can't read, and my mom knows very little. My dad always says, "Study, my girl, don't be dumb like me." He says that if he had studied, he'd have a better job, one with regular daytime hours. He and my mom work loading [referring to chicken loading], they go at six in the evening and come back in the early morning. So my grandma is the one who takes care of us. Yeah, studying is important, for sure.

What the students express aligns with Patto (2022) argument regarding how families value education. Regardless of whether a family lives under conditions of social vulnerability, parents often want to see their children attending school. Even when students face grade repetition or drop out, families continue to hope — and insist — that their children remain in school.

Prioste (2020), based on her research, also introduces a new hypothesis concerning teachers' views on school failure in the early years of elementary education. She highlights that, despite explanations that place blame on children and their families for learning difficulties, "[…] a more careful and in-depth analysis of questionnaires and focus groups indicated that teachers were dissatisfied with federal and municipal educational policies" (Prioste, 2020, p. 18).

Although this study did not directly address this issue, labor precariousness — such as temporary and part-time contracts, teacher workload, critiques of large-scale assessments, and oversized classes — emerged in teachers' statements during interviews and were also noted during field observations. One recurring theme was the high turnover of teachers from one year to the next, resulting from temporary contracts and the need for teachers to work at multiple schools to fulfill a 40-hour workweek. This suggests that, if the research focus had shifted toward this topic, or toward the relationship between school failure and broader issues in the education system, similar findings to those of Prioste (2020) might have emerged.

## 4 Perceptions on the Importance of affective bonding and social interactions in the school environment

Affectivity permeates social interactions throughout life. During childhood, puberty, and adolescence, social interactions in both the family and school environments often carry great significance. These interactions presuppose teaching and learning processes that begin in early childhood and are sustained by affective bonds, whether positive or negative.

In this regard, one might evoke, as an example, teaching-learning situations in which an adult "invites" a baby to pronounce a word through smiles and a gentle tone of voice, and the baby responds with babbling in an attempt to reciprocate the adult's affective investment. This illustrates how the mobilization of intelligence and learning is intrinsically connected to the mobilization of affect. In this sense, Leite and Tassoni (2002, p. 14) note that,

> […] it is the affective bond established between adult and child that supports the initial stage of the learning process. Its role is fundamental during the first months of life, as it determines survival. Likewise, it is through relationships with others, mediated by affective bonds, that children, in their early years, gain access to the symbolic world and thus achieve significant cognitive development. In this sense, for the child, the affective bond becomes both

> important and essential, gradually expanding over time, with the figure of the teacher becoming highly significant within the teaching and learning relationship during the school years.

Almeida (1993, p. 40) adds that learning always presupposes a relationship with another person who teaches, since “to learn is, therefore, to learn with someone”. From this perspective, within the school context, it is primarily in the relationship between teacher and student that the conditions for learning are established. This underscores the importance of building positive affective bonds within this relationship, as Cândido (2019) points out — we tend to be more interested in learning what we like and to avoid what we dislike.

Cândido’s (2019) reflection sheds light on what children express during the discussion circles, as can be observed in the following dialogue:

> **Student Princess:** I like the snacks and [mentions subject] class — the teacher is awesome! Wonderful.
>
> **Researcher:** Why do you think this teacher is wonderful?
> **Student Princess:** Because she always brings different things for us! She brings candy, tells stories.
>
> **Researcher:** Is there anything you don’t like doing at school?
> **Student Superman:** I don’t like going to the principal’s office when they call us there.
>
> **Student Daisy:** Of course — they call you because you’re disruptive. You don’t do your work.
>
> **Researcher:** But why are you disruptive, Superman?
>
> **Student Superman:** I act up because sometimes I don’t like the activities in some subjects. And also because there are teachers who only yell.

In the interviews conducted with sixth-grade teachers, all five participants acknowledged that a positive affective bond between teachers and students is important for the students' development and serves as a driving force in the teaching-learning process, as expressed in the following teacher’s statement:

> Bonding is a type of relationship in which the teacher becomes like a favorite friend within the school environment. Once this bond is formed, the student begins to feel more at ease, relates more easily with other students, and develops their skills more quickly, overcoming their difficulties (Teacher 1).

One of the teachers interviewed described how they observe changes in students' engagement with the subject as positive affective bonds begin to form: “[...] when they are welcomed and valued, over the days, throughout the classes, they begin

to change their behavior. They start to feel important and become more dedicated [...]. Our role is to overcome the obstacles and difficulties we encounter with our students [...]" (Teacher 1).

In line with what the interviewee noted regarding affectivity in sixth-grade classes — the same grade that is the focus of this study — Silva (2011), drawing on her research, affirms that in the interaction between teacher and student, the teacher has the opportunity to:

> […] to exert influence over how the student positions themselves in relation to the educational act. This interaction, without a doubt, is filled with components of affectivity, given that the student is entering a stage marked by affective predominance (puberty and adolescence), during which they actively seek an adult role model—who, in some cases, may be represented by the teacher; or alternatively, may manifest as a rejection of the societal construct that the teacher represents (Silva, 2011, p. 82).

Teacher 1 also acknowledges that the way he expresses his affectivity in the educational setting has an impact on how children relate to him and to his subject, stating:

> [...] in my role, I try to consider their learning difficulties and social realities, and to welcome them with care […] because if students feel welcomed by their teachers, they will feel good, developing respect and admiration for the teacher. They feel safe and confident to ask questions, clear up doubts, participate in class and activities, and become more motivated (Teacher 1).

Tassoni (2008) argues that the mediation carried out by teachers in the classroom during the development of pedagogical activities must be permeated by care, respect, understanding, and valuing the other. These sentiments not only mark the student's relationship with the object of knowledge but also influence their autonomy, helping them to build self-confidence, develop abilities, and strengthen decision-making skills. This is recognized by Teacher 5, who states:

> [...] we realize how extremely important the teacher's role is in the school — not just to teach content, but also to organize and plan activities that promote care and respect for others. To try to connect with the students, to earn their trust and respect, to make them feel important — protagonists in their own growth, intellectually, cognitively, and as human beings.

When teachers describe what they understand as an affective bond, it is often portrayed as something entirely positive, evidenced by gestures of affection such as touching, kissing, hugging, as well as by obedience and/or respect — these being signs that confirm the establishment of an affective bond with the student:

> I see that we have a good relationship — they obey me, I listen to them, they have respect and consideration for me. I believe we've made progress in building affective bonds this year. When I arrive, they hug me, kiss me—even some who were once hesitant to approach people, classmates, teachers. I think we are growing together (Teacher 5).

This teacher also highlights the importance of reciprocity in establishing a positive affective bond. Other teachers emphasize different ways of creating bonds with students, focusing more on the kinds of classroom activities they propose: "[...] the more we get closer to students and create, propose different kinds of activities, the more they admire and like the teacher" (Teacher 3). However, affectivity is not limited to being nice, pleasing the student, or giving and receiving hugs. It implies recognition, in the sense of affecting and being affected, as well as the exercise of empathy and otherness, the capacity to feel indignation in the face of injustice and inequality, and, in the practice of teaching, a commitment to the learning and development of all students. For this, academic rigor (which is not synonymous with rigidity or inflexibility) is an essential part of committed teaching practice.

The students, in turn, describe teachers' expressions of affectivity using terms like *strict* or *nice*, or by pointing out specific teacher behaviors such as *yelling* or *giving guidance*, as illustrated in the following dialogue:

> **Student Princess:** I like everything. Some teachers are strict, but the rest are nice.
>
> **Student Luffy:** I also like [says the name of the subject] — the teacher is nice.
>
> **Student Maky:** I don't like [says the name of the subject]. The teacher is strict. And I have trouble doing the math. He mistreats us.
>
> **Student Princess:** In [says the name of the subject], we only write. The teacher is really strict! He doesn't let us talk. He says, "You came here to learn, not to talk!"
>
> **Researcher:** But maybe you all talk too much together, so he wants more quiet?
>
> **Student Princess:** No, he mistreats us — it's really bad! I don't like him! Sometimes I don't even come to school when we have [says the subject] he's always yelling. He's never brought us anything, has he, kids?
>
> **Other children:** No, no, no, no.
>
> **Student Rosa:** We only write in his class! He says we're lazy.
>
> **Researcher:** Why do you think he says that?

> **Student Rosa:** He says that because some people don't do the work or take too long to do it.
>
> **Student Batman:** We took a long time to do the activities. I don't read fast, so the second teacher helps me.
>
> […]
> **Student Hulk:** She [referring to a teacher] takes care of us, helps our classmates who have diagnoses, and helps us too. She yells sometimes, calls us out!
>
> **Student Daisy:** Of course! You all talk during the teacher's explanations.
>
> **Researcher:** Do you like [refers to the teacher]?
>
> **Students:** Yes, yes, yes.
>
> **Student Hulk:** She gives us guidance, advice, makes cake, and brings it for us to eat. She's always with us.

It is observed that students predominantly describe positive affective bonds with the school and their teachers. When they say they dislike a teacher, they emphasize negative ways in which that teacher expresses affectivity toward them, and they often extend this dislike to the subject taught by that teacher. Similarly, when they say they like a teacher, they speak positively about the subject, indicating an inseparable relationship between affectivity and learning. This is reaffirmed by Leite and Tassoni (2002, p. 267), who point out that.

> […] the student's relationship with a subject is directly influenced by the nature of the teacher-student relationship. Liking the teacher often leads the student to like the subject, and vice versa. When the bond is positive, the student's relationship with the subject also tends to be affectively positive.

In addition to recognizing the role of affective bonding in facilitating learning, some teachers also emphasized that, given the social vulnerabilities of the sixth-grade class, a positive affective bond could help compensate for the lack of such experiences in the students' family interactions:

> I see [the affective bond] as extremely important. We have students from all different backgrounds [referring to socioeconomic level], and students who live through a wide range of situations. They are very affectionate students who need care and who suffer from a great lack of family support. So, we realize how important the teacher's role is, not just to teach content, but to organize and plan activities that foster care and respect for others (Teacher 5).

The children's social vulnerabilities also surfaced during the discussion circle, in which they shared personal experiences and feelings with the researcher:

> **Student Superman:** I work at home and arrive at school tired.
>
> **Researcher:** What kind of work do you do? How do you help at home?
>
> **Student Superman:** My sister and I, who's in class with me, we take our little brothers to daycare, clean the house, cook beans, rice, meat, and then pick them up from school.
>
> **Student Luffy:** They were taken by child services the other day and sent to another family.
>
> **Researcher:** Yes, that can happen.
>
> **Student Superman:** You don't know anything — we were taken away because my dad and mom used to smoke a lot and didn't take good care of us.
>
> **Researcher:** And how was it staying with another family, Superman?
>
> **Student Superman:** It was sad —especially at night. I missed my mom and my little siblings. I cried, I prayed. There was plenty of food at the house where we stayed. But I really missed my mom. It wasn't good.

The previous dialogue shows that even when children face hardships with their families, those families still serve as emotional references for them. They want to be with their families and suffer from the pain of separation, as illustrated in the story above. In this sense, it is important to ask: how can we support these families through public policy so that the children's right to be properly cared for is ensured, without reducing these families to labels and prejudice? What is the role of the school and teachers in making this ideal possible?

The children's voices also highlight the importance of being welcomed and cared for in school for the establishment of positive affective bonds, something that goes beyond the teacher-student relationship and extends to all school staff, as Superman says: "I feel good at this school. The staff, the janitors, the guard, the police officer who watches the yard, they're really nice, they talk to us, they give us advice not to do anything wrong". Student Rosa adds: "I feel welcomed at this school. If something goes wrong, we can go to the office they sort it out. If they need to call the parents, or if we get hurt, they put ointment on it".

Positive affective bonds between teachers and students also foster trusting relationships, which allow teachers to support students when they disclose experiences of violence or suffering:

> Yes [in response to whether students tell her personal things], often when their families argue, when parents fight or hit them, when they can't afford school

> supplies — some students have even confided in me that their parents made them deliver drugs, do forced domestic labor, or that they've experienced sexual abuse" (Teacher 1).

Some teachers who participated in the study associate students' negative or fragile affective bonds within their families with expressions of aggression and disrespect in the school context: "Speaking of affective bonds, some of them don't get a hug or a compliment from their parents, and that shows up in the classroom, in how they behave with teachers. They're rude, they have no boundaries" (Teacher 5). From the perspective of Teacher 4, this would hinder the school's role in fostering students' holistic development: "[...] this whole thing about holistic education, developing critical and humane students, it's just not part of our reality".

From this statement, one might ask: What kind of affective impacts do these ways of seeing and understanding students produce in them? Who is the school that aims for holistic, critical, and humane development actually for — and why is this vision not part of this school's reality?

In this context, Leite and Tassoni (2002, p. 11) point out that "[...] the teacher's behavior in the classroom, through their intentions, beliefs, values, feelings, and desires — affects each student individually". Therefore, the educator plays a key role in the school — not only in students' intellectual formation, but also in their holistic development (motor, affective, cognitive) through pedagogical strategies, inclusive approaches, and engagement with peers and teachers. All of the classroom dynamics and school interactions, if well planned and centered around the teacher, will positively influence the students' overall formation. But how can this be achieved within the current context of public schools?

Thus, one cannot ignore the broader context in which these teachers' statements are produced. Their perspectives echo those of Nóvoa (2009) and Libâneo (2012) regarding World Bank policies for schools in peripheral countries — and, in Brazil, the notion of "the school that was left for the poor." This type of school is defined pedagogically by "[...] meeting only the minimum learning needs and offering a space for social inclusion and basic care, where welfare objectives take precedence over educational goals" (Libâneo, 2012, p. 20), leading to a caricatured form of inclusion for students.

## 5 Final Considerations

This study concludes that the changes experienced during the transitional period, both those related to the developmental stage and those involving the change of school, mobilize students' emotions and present challenges for both them and their teachers in the sixth grade. All teachers reported experiencing difficulties with this group. These include aggressive behaviors, learning difficulties, and issues related to sexuality, which, according to the teachers, are primarily rooted in the students' social and economic vulnerabilities and the lack of parental involvement. In this regard, the teachers' everyday discourse reveals certain prejudices within the school context.

The children, on the other hand, expressed mixed expectations, some positive, but also difficulties regarding the transition between schools, particularly concerning the loss of playful activities such as games and recreational time. This reinforces the importance of establishing positive affective bonds to help ease the transition process.

Different understandings of affectivity among teachers were also observed. Most of them showed concern with building a positive affective bond with sixth-grade students, especially considering that they are new to the school and thus undergoing a transitional process. When teachers describe what they consider to be an affective bond, it is often portrayed as inherently positive and limited to behaviors such as physical touch, hugs, kisses, obedience, and respect, these being the gestures taken as indicators that an affective bond has been formed between teacher and student.

Students, in turn, describe teachers' expressions of affectivity using terms such as *strict* or *nice*, or by pointing out behaviors like yelling or offering guidance. They predominantly describe positive affective bonds with the school and their teachers. When they say they dislike a teacher, they tend to highlight negative ways that the teacher expresses their affectivity, and often extend this dislike to the subject taught by that teacher. Similarly, when they say they like a teacher, they speak positively about the subject as well, indicating an inseparable relationship between affectivity and learning. In addition to recognizing the role of affective bonds in facilitating learning, some teachers noted that, given the social vulnerabilities of the sixth-grade class, fostering positive affective relationships could help compensate for a lack of such experiences in students' family interactions.

Based on the results obtained, several possibilities for future research emerge. These include more in-depth studies that explore specific and effective pedagogical

strategies for creating affective bonds in diverse school contexts. Longitudinal studies could also investigate how the teacher-student affective bond evolves over the school years and what long-term impact it has on students' learning and development.

Reflecting on Wallon (1975, 1999), who throughout his career contributed through research, practice, and political engagement to the appreciation of children and their holistic development, we affirm the importance of investing in continuous teacher training and in adequate working conditions. These are essential so that educators may understand and implement pedagogical strategies that promote positive affectivity in the school environment. Similarly, we highlight the importance of creating school environments that foster positive affective interactions between teachers and students, recognizing the relevance of these relationships for students' development and learning.

To fulfill the ideals of a quality public education, one that embraces students' holistic development and values affectivity as one of many key components for learning, we echo Libâneo's (2012) call for a public school system that integrates sociocultural practices, recognizing and valuing difference and local knowledge with cultural and scientific education.

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