

Emotion and narrative in understanding

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Not only our brain but our entire body is full of informational substances, that's to say messenger molecules which spread out information all over our organism. These messenger molecules are the somatic ground of our emotions. Emotional dynamics has three components: a somatic component, an expressive and behavioral component, and – what is most important for our present aim – a cognitive component. This is why – at a cognitive level – emotions can develop the same informational content that they express at a somatic level.

Thus emotions are the initial manner in which we process information or the first way of thinking. This way of thinking and knowing has specific characteristics. At the same time, it grounds our rational and formal thinking that emerges at around 12 months, goes on developing, and then gains priority over the emotional one at around 11 years of age. Therefore, knowledge processes always have two different interacting dynamics: an emotive one and a cognitive one. The first one is dominant in the preadolescent period.

Table: Cognitive Periods

0-3 years	Infancy	Nesting	Bodily understanding
3-7	Infancy	Kindergarten and Primary School (First Cycle)	Sensory and mythic understanding
8-9	Childhood	Primary School (Second Cycle)	Mythic understanding
10-11	Childhood	Primary School (5 th grade) and Middle School (1 st grade)	Romantic understanding
12-13	Pre-adolescence	Middle School (2 nd and 3 rd grades)	Romantic understanding
14-15	Pre-analytical adolescence	High School	Philosophic understanding
16-18	Analytical adolescence	High School	Ironic understanding

In the pre-linguistic phase (0-3 years), by virtue of their emotional component, knowing processes first pass through the body and then through its sensory capacity. Then they go through gestural communication using the body. Knowing then makes use of music (in particular, its rhythm as generated by movement) and its melody (as generated by affective life); only music's harmony is generated by rational thought. Then our knowledge processes go through primary affective bonds that give children patterns to be followed, making possible a positive emotional dynamic elaboration in forms of attraction, confidence, attachment, expectation and joy.

By virtue of their emotional component, knowing processes, when they are oral linguistic (3-6 years), begin making use of opposites. They emerge from an emotional binary-developed structure, which favors forms of joy (this is why we have humor), of fun (this is why we play), of confidence (this is why we use a sense of mystery), of empathy in its original form (this is why we identify with others). Knowing processes particularly favor the use of storytelling, which can summarize all emotional forms. They also begin to abstract, passing from a sensory level to initial categorical forms. These processes continue through metaphorical tools that allow progressive abstraction starting from the concrete domain to more abstract domains on the basis of a large image-schematic repertoire.

Finally, in the literary phase (6-10 years), knowing processes (by virtue of their emotional component) pass through not only primary bonds but objects-of-the-world bonds as well (this is why we use personifications). They promote a sense of trust – this is why we use story telling that evokes amazement and wonder. Moreover, they favor already structured empathy – this is why we use role-playing and story telling that elicit identification with heroic characters. These processes lay the foundation for the first cognitive forms of investigating the world through observation of details (this is why we use description) and perception of the limits of reality.