

## Book reviews

**Luri, G. (2019).**

*La imaginación conservadora: una defensa apasionada de las ideas que han hecho del mundo un lugar mejor [The conservative imagination: A passionate defence of ideas that have made the world a better place].*

Barcelona: Ariel. 344 pp.

At the present time, saying you are a conservative or support conservatism is not easy, especially in Spain. To do so is an act of bravery and a statement of intent, which exposes you to being considered illiberal by a society that is, in many cases, both libertarian and very vociferous.

Conservatism is nothing less than the fruit of history, of the passage of time and of the events that have a special significance in the life of the people of a country. A conservative is someone who chooses not to forget the past, who wants to learn from what has gone before to be able to face up to the present and build a future with more certainty and strength.

Some revolutionaries and reactionaries see this as a backwards step, as a regression of society, something that is neither true nor objective. Conservatism has a close relationship with revolutions. Indeed, it exists thanks to revolutions; it is the counterrevolution to revolutions. While revolutionaries seek to change everything that is established and fight against power, conservatives prefer to feel that they are the heirs to tradition and shape the modern world from a past.

Gregorio Luri's book, reviewed here, revolves around these questions, as the author, who is aware of the current paradigm in which we live, has decided to attempt a well-argued defence of this position.

Circumspection is a vital term for understanding this idea. Changing what is established is of no use to us; we have to travel to the past to understand what we see and name, and what better way of travelling to the past than reading great books?

There is a tendency to believe that innovation is the future, that we must innovate to move forwards and that this is a clear sign of progress, but innovation and progress do not always go hand in hand. The conservative, Luri states, believes in progress but not innovation. While progress flourishes in parallel with the advance of our intelligence and focuses on content, innovation runs ahead of intelligence and focuses on the speed of improvements. We might tend to think that conservatives spend their lives anchored in the past, but this is not the case. Conservatives are also modern (accepting that the modern does not necessarily have to be *innovationist*), but they refuse to be only that. They want something more; they want to enrich tradition, to feed it, to continue making it.

This discourse often runs into the ideas of the left, who claim that they are the progressive parties, the parties of change, when on too many occasions, all that they achieve is to be innovationists, revolutionaries, and afraid of losing their connection with the world.

In contrast, conservatism is not just a lifestyle, as some people call it; it is an ideology like any other. It interprets the world, it has a view of nature, a moral outlook, the outlines for a programme of government, rhetoric, and coherent criteria.

The great enemy of this ideology is nihilism, which appears when people put aside the prudence that is characteristic of conservatives and give way to science as the sole reference point for thought, something which subsequently leads to nihilistic thinking.

These ideas cannot be separated from the political, and so a large part of the work reviewed here revolves around the *polis* and everything surrounding it. In particular, the concept of *politeia* has a privileged place. *Politeia*, as the author states, is the reciprocal coordination between all of the people of a city that enables them to act. It is not a law; it cannot be written down (if it could, it would be a constitution). *Politeia* includes the desire and need to live that the inhabitants of the *polis* have, the thing that unites them and makes them different from others. This inalienable *politeia* is the fruit of the past, of good examples, of a tradition shaped by a slow process of change. It is clear why renouncing this is not good, since concentrating on *politeia* can teach us a great deal, but in Spain, for some time now, this conscience has gradually been disappearing. The *politeia* is lost when the great writers of antiquity are forgotten, when we forget what has shaped us, when we stop paying homage to the «illustrious dead», as Ramón y Cajal put it, something that leads us ever more towards political backwardness.

Maintaining the health of the *polis* is no easy task, but people must live in a community and this involves being subject to laws. Laws are a need as natural as sexual desire. The law does not seek to express the nature of the human being, but rather to govern human conduct in order to create political animals. Human beings, like the animals we are, tend to give in to our passions and instincts, but we must repress and overcome them. As the author notes: «The law represses our animal side and allows us to aspire to be

political» (p. 113). Therefore, it is vitally important to create institutions to mediate between the individuality of people and the state. We cannot permit ourselves to be completely autonomous; this would be impossible. For individuals to be fully autonomous, they would each need their own particular language, science, and critical self-distance. Attempts at anthropotechnology to free human beings from the political have been in vain. Although individuals cannot stop being political, they can allow themselves to be political to a greater or lesser extent. That is to say, there can be degrees of being political. Being more or less political largely depends on the collective education people receive. Without a suitable collective education, people become degraded, turning into wild animals.

Centuries ago, Plato warned us of the dangers of ignoring these laws, going beyond natural limits and creating a *feverish city*. To prevent this, it is necessary to impose limits, laws that govern the political health of the city and make it a theocracy where the viewers of the *polis* and of themselves are the people themselves.

In the last section of this book, Luri dedicates a series of chapters to analysing the current socio-political situation of Europe, as the *politeia* we form part of, and of Spain.

Freedom is one of the most recurrent themes in the social and political panorama. We all advocate moral freedom to undertake actions, but the freer we seem to be, the more we are slaves. In Europe, we

have gone from a moral authority belonging to the Church, to a moral authority of therapists, Luri observes. We demand more of ourselves morally than we can bear. This causes us shame and, as there is no established morality and everything is valid, nothing surprises us. Making something morally and socially accepted is relatively simple; one simply has to show that there is victimisation, to show that something or someone is suffering because of what is being demanded, this being the best way of making a case.

Something else that has been turned into a burning stigma in modern society, and which is considered in depth here, is belonging to the elite, something that must be hidden at all costs. The meritocracy that exists in our society, is something that, according to some politicians, must be eradicated; hence the class-based diatribes against the rich... But this argument is relatively new. Until relatively recently even a socialist like Fernando de los Ríos, defended aristarchy, the selection of the best for the highest posts. Nevertheless, just as it is important to facilitate the advancement of those who have earned it through their effort and work, it is also necessary to facilitate the demotion of those who have not honourably reached the pinnacle.

Citizens sometimes do not seek what is politically neutral but rather seek out what they want to hear, the power of persuasion and lies. We trust in democracy to solve the problems of citizens without them being fully aware of what is really happening. People live a constant healthy

lie, but without these lies, no democracy would exist at all. For a *polis* to maintain itself, it is necessary to create an emotional superstructure that makes all citizens part of a common truth, even if this does have an element of democratic lie.

Finally, analysing the question in Spain, Luri notes this country's distinctiveness as a nation. After a brief historical overview, in which he cites numerous politicians and thinkers, he shows how Spain has gradually been losing its feeling of nationhood, if indeed it ever really had one, as «there are countries that know how to love themselves ... but in contrast we are either inflamed with passion for ourselves or we are scourging ourselves» (p. 297); Spain is perhaps one of the only countries that does not love its homeland. Every nation has an unchangeable DNA despite changes in political and social fashions, but over a period of 20 years we have completely changed our nature. In my view, this point should perhaps be developed more in the book, given the current situation, to seek the reasons that have led Spain to have this feeling.

Every country has its defects, no patriotism is perfect, but to compensate for this, they make an idealised version of patriotism; this is how to demonstrate self-love. It is important to remind a country of the reasons it should feel pride in itself, without forgetting the grounds for it to feel shame.

As Luri says in his last paragraph, «this book has turned out to be a book of echoes» (p. 329) and the fact is that, like the good conservative and teacher he is, he has at-

tempted to draw on numerous authors of all types to support his position, and we cannot but think that he «preaches by example.»

As well as its great philosophical, historical, and analytic weight, this book is able to outline the importance, once again, that education has in any *polis*, to preserve tradition and educate collectively and so make us political creatures rather than savages. Educating about the past does not have to mean being a reactionary, but simply increasing one's field of vision, enabling the circumspection that can help us avoid repeating past mistakes.

Enrique Alonso Sainz ■

**Quigley, C. F., & Herro, D. (2019).**

*An educator's guide to STEAM. Engaging students using real-world problems.*

New York: Teachers College Press. 153 pp.

I can clearly recall the day I really learned about the concept of the *circle*. This shape, which is apparently easy to draw, by hand or with a compass if you want greater accuracy, has much deeper implications if we pay it the attention it deserves and attempt to understand it to its full extent. One day, when I was a child, the art teacher was off ill and another teacher who was covering for him took a piece of chalk tied to a length of string and made us see clearly the full meaning of the circle. That teacher did not teach us to draw circles — we had already known how to do that for some time. Instead, he helped us touch the circle with our own hands, manipulate it, transfer it, look at it from different pers-

pectives. The circle stopped being a simple drawing on the board or on paper and became a relevant concept, not just for art as a subject, but also for mathematics, as it gave meaning to the formulas we were studying and associated concepts like radius, diameter, and perimeter; for biology as we came to understand why many organisms are round, for physics in relation to the distribution of forces, and for aesthetics in relation to the perfection inherent to drawing itself. This simple transdisciplinary experience changed our perception of the circle and also of other content. It helped us understand that what different teachers talked about was not just relevant to their subjects, but could actually help us to better understand what we were studying in other apparently different subjects. Our perception of reality changed, becoming less narrow and clumsy and more interconnected and complete. That lesson made us a bit more intellectually mature.

This anecdote seems to me to illustrate one of the fundamental objectives of what is known as STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), which is the central topic of the book reviewed here. In brief, STEAM education tries to confront the challenge of disconnected learning, both between different fields and in relation to the students' social surroundings. It is a transdisciplinary method that sets out to teach areas of content and the relationships between them in a way that makes it possible to transcend the content itself and develop a broader and deeper view of reality.

The authors of this book are two university professors from Pittsburgh and Clemson (USA) who, in recent years, have carried out a significant amount of research into this topic, research that is the result of work closely linked to educational centres and considers education, assessment, and development tasks from STEAM programmes. This is apparent both in some of their previous publications and in this book, which has a clear descriptive and practical as well as argumentative character in the contributions to its objective.

The origin of STEAM is fairly recent and within it we find a clear intention to complement the STEM methodology by integrating the arts, understood in a broad sense. However, as the authors of the book note, it is not just a matter of adding a new concept, but also of giving this methodology a more social and humanistic character. The aim of including the arts is to achieve a more creative vision of potential solutions to social problems, which habitually involve scientific questions. It is also intended to help acquire an awareness that, as Eisner noted, problems do not always have a single solution, the solution is not known from the start, and it is not achieved by following strictly a set series of steps, but rather it is gradually created through the process of learning itself. Although, as with any recent concept, there is not a consensus on its definition between different authors, this book specifically focusses on the link between the sciences, arts, and humanities, as a strategy that avoids a narrow vision of the sciences.



In addition to this, STEAM aims to give the concept a more inclusive character so that students who are often not motivated by scientific disciplines, for example, girls and students from ethnic minorities, are more likely to be attracted to them, as STEM is often implemented as part of extracurricular activities with advanced teaching designs, which are not accessible to everyone and lead to very unequal representation in scientific professions.

It is worth noting that, while the result is novel, its various elements are common in the pedagogical innovations of recent years, such as problem-based learning, meaningful learning, or service-learning. Nonetheless, it contributes an aspect that to me seems very significant and that refers to teaching that is transdisciplinary and connected to reality. Methodologies like service-learning have often been criticised for focussing more on service than on learning. Accordingly, while STEAM is aimed at working on social problems in close interrelation with them, something that helps motivate students, it emphasises the classroom more than service, in other words, the intellectual dimension of the problem.

The first chapters of this book explain how this methodology works, and set out the key points for developing STEAM modules. However, this book is not a user manual with specific instructions, but rather a guide with reflections that, in many cases, are rooted in testimonies by teachers who are implementing these proposals. Ultimately, it is a book for teachers, which is closely linked to practice, as is often the case with pedagogic output from the USA, and it

introduces constant allusions to classroom situations and reaches theoretical conclusions based on them to configure a specific teaching and learning model.

As Quigley and Herro explain, students face a situation designed by the teacher in which a problem is posed that they must solve through various tasks. These tasks combine different disciplines naturally and sometimes require excursions from the school and visits by experts in the different areas as a source of information and guidance. As these are real problems, it is not a case of giving a single response, as happens with teaching that focusses on content, but of suggesting reasoned options for solutions based on what has been studied in different subjects.

Along with the more practical chapters that define strategies for introducing this methodology in a school and ways of elaborating scenarios or of evaluating STEAM units, the authors make interesting reflections on the transversality and introduction of the arts. With regards to transversality, they distinguish it from multi- and interdisciplinarity owing to the ease with which the disciplines integrate in the proposed scenarios, occupying the same spaces to prompt new ideas. This transdisciplinarity stems precisely from the reality of the problems, which means that students work on the disciplines without thinking about distinctions between them. That is to say, they use the required knowledge and apply it to come up with a solution. This way of solving problems is what really makes it possible to discover the interconnections between different

disciplines. In regards to the inclusion of the arts in STEAM, the authors warn that they cannot be considered solely in their aesthetic dimension or how they might contribute to beautifying products, but they also play a significant role in design, expressing emotions, and solving problems.

In essence, STEAM is a new example of active pedagogy with important contributions for in-class teaching that promotes more rounded, interconnected, and integrated learning in the context of the educational centre. That said, there are some aspects with regards to the proposal and to the book itself that should be considered.

First of all, reading between the lines in the text, it is not a matter of making all teaching STEAM, but of including this type of activity in the dynamic of the academic year, in a way that complements other activities. The time required to implement it, the resources that have to be mobilised, the timetabling flexibility it demands, among other things, make it difficult to combine with other activities, and so while it might reasonably have a place in the curriculum, this is a particular place alongside other tasks.

Secondly, STEAM supposes various problems that are inherent to its very nature. First of all, transdisciplinarity in content requires teaching staff that react appropriately to it, whether as a team of teachers from different disciplines who work together — something which is not always available — or a teacher who specialises in different subjects, which is di-

fficult in higher years. Furthermore, there is a significant problem matching social needs with the school curriculum, as it is not always easy to find common elements that involve various subjects and make it possible to design STEAM scenarios.

Finally, with regards to this book, we should note that, while its degree of contextualisation is in many ways positive, it does focus on the US educational system, and so it is necessary to transfer its structures to the reader's setting to understand its problems, procedures, and recommendations. Also, in the first chapters, a more thorough theoretical foundation of the principles underpinning STEAM would be welcome. When familiar with this methodology, it is easy to discern principles from Newman's proposals regarding transdisciplinarity; from Dewey relating to experiential learning and contact with social problems; and from Gardner regarding multiple intelligences which are worked on through a range of tasks, and so a connection with these authors would help to shape a more solid proposal in this promising methodology.

Juan Luis Fuentes ■

**Prince T. (2019).**

*Ejercicios de mindfulness en el aula. 100 ideas prácticas [Mindfulness exercises for the class. 100 practical ideas].* Madrid: Narcea. 136 pp.

This book is both innovative and traditional. It is traditional because it recovers and activates a series of ideas and proces-

ses that were forgotten by the cognitivists and academicism. It is also innovative because it adapts those ideas and dynamics and turns them into specific exercises for the classroom.

Mindfulness (generally translated to Spanish as *atención plena* o *plena consciencia*), is it a fashion? Is it a conceptual trend? Perhaps, as the analysis conducted by Ronald Purser suggests, it is a market manoeuvre disguised by the idea of a new spirituality, focused on living in the present moment regardless of the past or future. Is it a simple word to emphasise traditional processes that were neglected for years such as concentration, meditation focussed on self-conscience, emotional education, integral education, etc.? Is it a psychotherapeutic and educational resource needed to regain the internal balance and drive away dysfunctions and other vital issues (stress, existential dissatisfaction, anxiety, pain, sickness, etc.) caused by the dizzying speed of events in the current world? A speed that forces people and communities to change their life into a sort of accelerated existential race as though we were in permanent competition.

Whatever the answer to these questions, and without falling into the naivety of those who claim mindfulness is a revolution that is going to save the world from a catastrophe, it is true that currently there is a need for channels and tools to stop us being swept away by floods of information that appears as quickly as it disappears. This tempestuous and dizzying feature of today's world creates situations that affect the normal development of childhood, pro-

ducing stress, anxiety, emotional tantrums or attention deficit to mention just some of the dysfunctions that nowadays affect not only children but also the rest of the population.

Mindfulness has been shown to improve the wellbeing of people who practice it because it supports the development of positive socialisation processes that help people just to be instead of to have. These processes are necessary in order to activate in each of us skills to defend ourselves from the thoughtlessness associated with the stressful race to have more, no matter how and immediately. In summary, when faced with this disposable culture which uses and throws away knowledge, information, relationships, things, etc., mindfulness offers ideas and tools to avoid being swept along by this torrential current. This is because it helps us to observe and use for ourselves not just our personal internal potential and our own experience of the present, but also to transform external elements into positive energy that is valuable for the personal processes of humanizing self-realization, and to act consciously of everyday life.

The book presents 100 mindfulness exercises for use in the classroom. These exercises are arranged in ten blocks or chapters that include: breathing, guided meditation, active meditation, gratefulness, yoga, emotional intelligence, mindful colours and scrawling, calming down and relaxing, mindful walking, and mindfulness for teachers.

How is the book used? To answer that question, it is important to consider the



implications of its subtitle: *100 practical ideas*. The mindfulness exercises developed in the book are specific and directly applicable but at the same time they are a source of ideas and processes that make it possible to adapt them to other situations. Indeed, at the end of each exercise there are two sections: a) practical tips; b) further ideas.

The students themselves, the education professionals and teachers, the parents, and anyone who is willing to learn the ideas, dynamics and strategies of mindfulness, will find this book a valuable and versatile resource. This works for both active learning and for managing emotional issues. However, regarding this book only as a handbook would be a mistake, as the practical ideas of each exercise are as useful or more useful than the exercise itself. This is why the book has a double value:

a) *Practical*: it develops specific exercises applicable in the classroom.

b) *Theoretical/practical*: extracting the ideas and strategies from each exercise and adapting them to new situations of self-observation, knowledge, experimentation, and calm self-control, so that we know and control ourselves and our environment, and it is not the environment that controls us.

There are many voices that denounce the educational shortcomings of the school, as it has been kidnapped by the dominant academicism, expressed in endless curricula. This book takes a step beyond mere denunciation, offering tools for personal development that can easily be integrated into the school day, as students can adopt and carry them out in an enjoyable and effortless way.

José V. Merino Fernández ■