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**Gairín, J. & Castro, D. (2021).**

*El contexto organizativo como espacio de intervención [The organisational context as a space for intervention].*

Editorial Síntesis. 302 pp.

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While many works consider the organisation of educational centres, this book presents an up-to-date and systematic analysis of their basic components as organisations from the perspective of how these institutions facilitate socio-educational intervention and action.

This work was written jointly by the Professor of Didactics and School Organisation Joaquín Gairín, a leading figure in the field of organisation and management of educational centres, and the Associate Professor of Didactics and Educational Organisation Diego Castro, who has extensive experience in the field of management and non-formal organisations. Their complementary profiles give *El contexto organizativo como espacio de intervención* a special value that expands its outlook from the organisation and management

of compulsory education centres towards the organisation and management of other types of educational and training institutions, such as universities and non-formal socio-educational organisations.

The content of the work is set out in twelve chapters grouped into four parts: organisations in their context (I), organisational components (II), the organisational dynamic (III), and the distinctive aspects of organisations (IV). The authors consider, in a systematic and ordered way, the different components of analysis of the organisations, enabling the reader to opt for a total approach to the components, and as well as attention and depth in reading, analysing, and reflecting on one or more of these components.

The text starts with a brief introduction that enables the reader to position herself in the content of the work. It then goes into greater depth in the exposition and analysis of each setting through a review of the classic literature and most up-to-date focuses. We will now briefly look at

each part with the objective of considering the work's principal theses.

The first part focusses on analysing the relations that the educational centre maintains with its immediate setting, also characterising the educational centre as an organisation. Starting from the assumption that familiarity with the context is essential to be able to act, the authors underline how considering context involves analysing the social-cultural-economic context, the family context, and the administrative context. Therefore, throughout the first chapter, the authors consider questions such as the educator city, the rights and duties of parents or legal guardians, and the relationship between regulations and centre autonomy.

The second chapter considers the concept of the organisation, presenting twelve specific features of educational institutions. It also defines and clarifies some related concepts such as administration, management, leadership, and governance whose meanings are often blurred confounded.

The five chapters in the next part focus on the typical components of educational organisations. Accordingly, chapter three, which is the first in this part, focusses on institutional plans, in other words, the set of documents that establish and formalise the mission, values, and goals of an organisation. Specifically, it sets out the medium-long-term and short-term characteristics of these documents.

Next, starting from the position that "people are the most important component

of organisations, and can make their operation possible or restrict it" (p. 83), chapter four considers the organisation of human resources. Specifically, it considers both the academic organisation of the students and the necessary academic organisation and coordination of teachers, as well as the planning of contributions by other professionals who are involved in educational centres.

Chapters five and six respectively focus on presenting the organisation of material and functional resources, which, along with human resources, comprise the basic elements of the internal educational setting. The authors present the conditioning factors of school space, architecture, organisation of equipment and teaching materials, timetabling, budgets and their management, as well as the rules that contribute to organising the activity of educational centres.

This part ends with chapter seven, which is dedicated to the relational system. Starting from the idea that the centres include a diverse group of people with different interests and goals and that the relationships established between people and groups often shape the functioning of an organisation's structures and how well it achieves its objectives, the authors consider formal and informal relationships, communication, participation and decision-making processes, and the environment and culture as the ultimate expression of these relationships.

Having considered the topics linked to goals, resources, and people, the authors

move on to the third part, which centres on questions relating to the organisational dynamics that mobilise the organisational components presented in the previous part and make them function adequately. Questions linked to management (chapter eight), the running of institutions (chapter nine), and institutional change and improvement (chapter ten) are considered in depth.

More specifically, in chapter eight the authors start from the idea that traditional organisational functions mean the management can be defined as the body or person that habitually exercises organisational functions, analysing the nature and functions of school management, the role of management as agents of change, and of leadership for pedagogical change.

Following on from this, chapter nine goes through the different focuses and models of institutional management that serve as a preliminary to proposing an integrated and comprehensive model of school management that synthesises and adopts the resources and benefits of earlier models from the viewpoint of the current situation.

This part ends with the chapter dedicated to innovation, which beyond clarifying the meaning of the term and considering the relations and differences with other proposals for change (reform, change, and improvement), reviews how processes of change occur, are created, and are implemented.

Finally, the last part is dedicated to the differential aspects of the organisations.

Taking the distinctive characteristics of university organisations (chapter 11) and non-formal educational centres (chapter 12) as examples, the authors make us aware of how the contextual and institutional features affect the organisational aspects.

This work's authors display a very broad knowledge of the subject of organisation and management of educational institutions, which they are able to set down on paper clearly and simply, establishing connections between the different topics they consider, giving the work both rigour and coherence.

A number of questions and activities are suggested at the end of each chapter to encourage debate and reflection and consider the content presented in more depth.

In view of all of this, the book is especially suitable for people who are starting out in the study and analysis of educational organisations, and also for those who are already professionally active in this type of institution and wish to reflect on their everyday work.

This book can be described as a manual of school organisation and so could well become part of the obligatory or recommended bibliography for organisation and management modules on bachelor's, master's, and other postgraduate courses in the field of education, but also other lines of study in which educational institutions are an area for professional activity.

Anna Díaz-Vicario ■

Ahedo, J., Caro, C., & Fuentes, J. L. (Coords.) (2021).

*Cultivar el carácter en la familia: una tarea ineludible [Cultivating character in the family: An Unavoidable Task].*

Dykinson. 176 pp.

This book has been written by eighteen university teachers, three of whom have also acted as coordinators and the foreword was written by Óscar González, teacher and director of a school for parents. This work is the result of a research project at the Universidad Internacional de la Rioja (UNIR) entitled *Character education as the basis for all-round training of students in secondary school and at baccalaureate level*.

The first thing to note, and the reason why this publication is of such importance, is that the matter of character education, and that of virtues, which is very closely connected to it, has scarcely been studied in our country, possibly because these matters, particularly the question of virtues, were monopolised by the teaching of religion. This is not the case in English-speaking countries, particularly in the USA, where character education has been part of educational programmes, albeit with fluctuations, as noted by Concepción Naval, one of the first Spanish teachers to study it, and Aurora Bernal, one of the co-authors of this book. For this reason, the fact that a group of teachers, and university teachers at that, have dedicated their research efforts to studying something of such magnitude as character building, is to be welcomed.

As this is a book written by numerous authors, various issues have been addressed, although almost all of them are related to the learning of character building in the family. This is borne out by the titles of the different chapters: 1. "Families with character and happy lives", by Aurora Bernal Martínez de Soria; 2. "The family as a virtuous community", undertaken by Tania Alonso-Sainz and Francisco Esteban Bara; 3. "Friends, the family that you choose and put together yourself: crucial for education", written by Ana Romero-Iribas; 4. "Sexuality and human training. A critical analysis of a controversial issue", a work by David Reyero; 5. "Educating for freedom", in co-authorship between Josu Ahedo and Blanca Arteaga-Martínez; 6. "Rethinking the role of authority in education and social media", produced by David González Ginocchio and Elda Millan Ghisleri; 7. "Forgiveness education" by María del Rosario González Martín; 8. "Gratitude: a virtue to teach in the family", composed by M<sup>a</sup> Carmen Caro Samada and Juan Luis Fuentes; 9. "Life ecology: how to educate for cheerful simplicity in the family", written by Zaida Espinosa Zárate; 10. "The acquisition of sustainable habits in the family", a work by Arantxa Azqueta and Yaiza Sánchez-Pérez; 11. "The return to basics: the reconstruction of the emotional bond in minors and families in difficult social situations", by Juan Luis Fuentes and Tania García-Bermejo; and 12. "Educating character inclusively: educational opportunities and challenges of functional diversity in the family", by Elena Álvarez-Álvarez and Carmen María Martínez Conde.

To a certain extent, together these titles form a useful map of the contents of the book. This is a publication in which theory is combined, as is to be expected in a research project, with practical suggestions, which no doubt will be of help to parents, to whom the book is mainly addressed, and to teachers. Thus, starting with the foreword, it is brought to our attention that character development begins in early childhood, that is to say, in the family, when the child has not yet started school.

Many authors have defined character in the strictest sense of an inner nature, which would imply a touch of determinism, thereby contradicting any educational intervention. The authors of this book do not do so; in order to avoid the restrictive biological constraint that claims “some people are born with good character and others with bad”, they insist that character can be taught and that this is true from the first moment of existence. This happens over time until the goal of living fully is achieved. To some extent, they mostly follow Aristotle, whom several of them quote, who claims that happiness, the ultimate and universal aim of human beings, will depend on what each of them does with their lives, regardless of the temperament with which each of them was born.

It is in the family, the home of unconditional love, of acceptance regardless of what offspring may do, where a virtuous community can evolve, as a habit that is acquired, like all habits, through repetition and action. This offers parents a

broad range of possibilities for action, in their difficult but fascinating job of raising their children.

From freedom, a fundamental faculty — and a right — the book extracts other issues, which are less often studied in education, but are rather provocative and contemporary, as contributing to character education, and which act together to attain many of the goals in education, such as friendship, sexuality, simplicity, care for the environment, gratitude, overcoming social difficulties and functional diversity.

Human beings are not born free, children are totally dependent beings and gradually become free if their environment allows them to do so. Children need to learn how to exercise their freedom, which should not be seen as an absence of restrictions. To teach about freedom is to understand it in the same way as Albert Camus, say the authors, as “the chance to be better” or, from a social point of view, as Mandela, who said that “to be free is to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”. To teach about freedom is to teach about commitment and responsibility, towards oneself and towards others. A task that is not always easy for parents, due to fear or out of over-protectiveness.

However, friendship, as the ‘chosen family’, helps to develop freedom, as well as many other values, such as generosity, gratitude, sharing, trust, solidarity and mutual growth, since character building occurs in coexistence and relationships with others. The authors deal with these



topics in the different chapters and specifically go into detail on some highly topical issues of major concern to parents, such as the dangers of only interacting on social media, due to the constant exposure and how easy manipulation is, whilst hiding behind anonymity. In this sense, one way for the family to contribute to the healthy establishment of children's friendships is to get to know their friends and show an interest in them, maybe by making the family home a meeting place and building their confidence.

Within freedom, there is also sexual freedom, which only a mature person can have, since it is not a question of 'doing whatever I like and with whomever I like'. Likewise, in the family, although it is predominantly here that sexuality can be taught, it should go beyond, as it almost always has done, providing dry information or instilling fear of undesired consequences. Special care should be taken with the sexual education of children in a hypersexualised society in which minors start accessing pornography, as their only source of knowledge, at the early age of eight years old, which can deeply damage them.

The crisis of authority, both in the family and at school, has been a subject of discussion since the mid-twentieth century. The authors explain what authority is and what it is not, and they focus on social media, as it is a matter of widespread concern for parents. These media, according to the authors, enable the spread of certain problems relating to authority and are a clear guide to the life and role models of school-age children. In this respect, the proposal

is made that if authority and rules start at home, the regulation of social media should not just be left to the government but should also be one of the family's tasks.

Another important point discussed in the book is that of healthy forgiveness, not forgiving and forgetting which ends up creating abusive relationships but knowing how to consciously forgive the harm that has been done and its consequences. It also deals with the study of gratitude as a virtue which encompasses intellectual and emotional aspects, and at the same time there may be a major opportunity to develop it in the setting of the family and school, to overcome behaviourist viewpoints based on exchange.

In chapters 9 and 10, the authors deal with questions regarding an 'ecological life', simplicity and the acquisition of sustainable habits. They highlight the importance of being conscious with regard to consumption, with a reference to the film *The Platform* (*El Hoyo* in Spanish), as an example of the lack of restraint in society and which leads us to think about the environment and how to raise children by nurturing this virtue and encouraging responsible and sustainable consumption. Teaching about the environment is the key to discovering the world around us and at the same time make children and young people aware of environmental problems or even just the problems that affect their community and get them to think of creative solutions to resolve them.

Finally, they deal with the need to rebuild emotional bonds in vulnerable families,



the importance of emotional and psychological closeness, and the difficulties in achieving these goals in certain contexts and building character inclusively. Inclusively understood as referring to a form of participation in which the child has a sense of belonging to the family and society.

In conclusion, this book is a reference guide for parents and teachers which will enable them to find out a little more about how to cultivate character in children and young people in our society. A society which is increasingly more connected and individualistic, which has forgotten about values which are essential for moral and cognitive development. Without a shadow of a doubt, this is an interesting book and it deals with contemporary issues which invite us to reflect on the society around us and on where we want to go.

Natália De Araújo Santos ■

### Fukuyama, F. (2022).

*Liberalism and its discontents.*  
Profile Books. 192 pp.

Little is left of that Francis Fukuyama who years ago consecrated the liberal system in which the United States and Europe lived as “the end of history”. According to the author, the Western system represented the last attainable political stage and would inevitably tend to spread throughout the planet because “the end point of the ideological evolution of humanity” (in the author’s own words) had been reached. *Liberalism and its discontents* unambiguously shows the

intellectual journey that Fukuyama has been undergoing throughout this time, which crystallizes in a much less risky proposal than the one he defended in *The end of history*. The professor’s latest publication considers fundamental aspects for understanding the sociopolitical situation that democracies experience today, in addition to diagnosing their health and systematizing the problems they face. Liberalism has not only failed to spread, but is beginning to face serious threats whose origin lies within liberal societies themselves.

This essay is intended as a defense of “classical liberalism,” a system that Vladimir Putin a few months ago called obsolete. It seems pertinent that, at a time when the terms are no longer clear, Fukuyama begins by outlining what he understands by classical liberalism — a necessary division of the powers of the State and a subjection of public institutions to the rule of law — and the reasons that justify its preeminence over other political systems. He is especially concerned about recovering the liberal principle of tolerance, in the face of the increasingly frequent episodes of groups that prevent politicians and other social actors from freely exposing their ideas (even in universities, whose primary nature is to be spaces for the reasoned search for truth).

Two chapters are devoted to economic analysis, in which Fukuyama shows how liberalism, when it focuses solely on the absolute liberalization of the economy, leads to neoliberalism. In his view, this unbridled neoliberalism advocates an

individualistic and selfish view of the subject, and makes the pursuit of self-interest the sole guide to his actions. Fukuyama unfolds a much richer vision of human nature, recalling that man has a social aspect that allows him to transcend this first frontier and seek interests beyond oneself. Conceiving the human being as a rational being, but excluding emotions, feelings and will, would be to have a mistaken conception of the human being: it would be incomplete. The inverse option — to credit the emotional in excess, discarding reason — also implies cutting off part of human nature.

The theoretical heart of the book lies in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters. Fukuyama again offers a historical overview, in this case of various approaches to the “autonomy” of the human being (Luther, Rousseau and Kant, among others). Absolutizing personal autonomy and the capacity to choose, placing them above one’s own good, corrupts the liberal system, paradoxical as it may sound. This criticism has been postulated by both libertarians (Nozick) and communitarians (Taylor, MacIntyre, Sandel). Fukuyama adds his contribution to this, arguing that not all the options from which one can choose, although lawful, are equally good. In other words, there are some ways of exercising autonomy that are better than others, and that celebrating diversity for the sake of diversity alone does not seem to be a sufficiently solidly based course of action.

There is an underlying leitmotiv that runs through the whole work: the detractors of liberalism come from outside — as

we saw in the Russian president’s statement — but also from within the liberal system. There are ideological options leaning both to the right and to the left of the ideological arc trying to undermine the pillars of the system. It is this internal attack which worries the author the most.

From the left, there are arguments in favor of collective rights and a hard critique against the little success of the liberal program. On the one hand, part of the progressive left began by championing “identity politics” as a way of effectively extending rights and equality, basically to complete the liberal program in a real way and eliminate any type of discrimination. However, taking this program to the extreme meant extending the autonomy of individuals to entire collectives. The problem arises when an individual right and a collective right collide.

On the other hand, from left-wing positions, liberalism is also in the spotlight because of its limited success at the global level: inequality, poverty and injustice continue to exist. The temptation here is predictable: why not tackle these problems from another political framework? The answer is clear: there are societies in which giving prevalence to one of the branches of government — generally the executive over the legislative and judicial — has led to the country’s economic growth, but at the cost of suppressing the freedom and lives of so many. The case of China is paradigmatic.

The conservative attack on liberalism is based on the fact that the latter has

undermined roots, traditions, religion and national unity. This tendency defends that liberalism has become a shell of rules without content (a common reproach made to the European Union). In this regard, Fukuyama reminds us that today's world is not comparable to that of a century ago, and that it will be difficult to find the common trunk that many conservatives claim is necessary to build a solid vision.

Nevertheless, Fukuyama does not succumb to the temptation to disassociate liberalism from the nation-state system which, with its peculiarities, is still in force in our century. One problem with liberalism is the timidity with which it acts when claiming cultural tradition or patriotism. This causes that illiberal nationalism appropriates it. For Fukuyama, the nation-state remains the actor best armed to defend the liberal system and the liberal principles.

The author deals with technology as a threat to the principle of freedom of expression in chapter seven. Fukuyama focuses on some risks, for example, that all the media may fall under the control of a single entrepreneur or business group, or that the Internet may offer massive but poor quality and distorted information. The point here is that the essay does not propose any solution beyond the announcement of the need for a balanced protection of the values of transparency and privacy (which does not really address the heart of the matter).

The book closes with a chapter in which the author draws up a list of principles

for the reconstruction of liberal society. Among them we find the defense of the threatened freedom of expression, the primacy of individual rights over collective rights and the idea that individual autonomy is not absolute. The latter is particularly interesting, since it puts in the mouth of a liberal the idea that there are absolutes that should not and cannot be voted on, absolutes that are even above our freedom. Fukuyama gives the example of slavery: no matter how much the majority voted in favor of it, there is a prior premise, "we are all created equal", and therefore the liberal system not only cannot allow it to be voted on but has the duty to safeguard that fundamental right.

There are two aspects that are particularly relevant for educators reading this book. The first is to rethink the role of the university as a space for academic discussion. A growing aggressive *woke culture* threatens freedom of expression, naturally associated with the university institution. Meetings are prevented, events are sabotaged and conferences are assaulted on the grounds that society contains structural errors that must be corrected, even by force if necessary. The real fact is that someone is banned from public space because of his beliefs, not because of his actions, which is a direct attack on the liberal system.

Secondly, Fukuyama's references to character and the capacity we all have to cultivate it are highly interesting. He defends the need to educate citizens with character and public spirit, since they are the ones who in the end make society flourish.

This is an aspect of enormous interest for all of us who are devoted to education, since, together with the family, the school is where any person begins to work on the forging of character. Fukuyama's point, following in the wake of many before him, is that good character formation leads to the proper exercise of our freedom.

Fukuyama, in short, takes up the problems liberal political system faces and launches some pertinent ideas, as we have seen. The threats to the system are better developed than the solutions, but although some questions remain unanswered, the essay provides us with a fairly accurate map of the situation. Some of the challenges that liberal democracy must face today are clear. And if anything is clear, from beginning to end, it is Fukuyama's belief that there is not yet a better alternative to the classical liberalism that has prevailed in recent centuries.

Jorge Valero Berzosa ■

**Watts, P., Fullard, M., & Peterson, A. (2021).** *Understanding character education: Approaches, applications, and issues.* McGraw-Hill Education. 168 pp.

Educators, including teachers and all professionals involved in the educational process, are fully aware that core elements of education are the personal and social development of the pupils. Teachers play an essential role in allowing their pupils to evolve and become the best version of themselves while being integrated in various social cycles. Clearly, academic

achievements also form an integral part of education. However, when facing stressing factors, schools tend to redirect their goals in order to meet the needs of those pressures. An example of a stressing factor is the evaluation of academic progress through tests and examinations. Some teachers have suggested that these exams do not reflect the real abilities and skills of the pupils. Moreover, some of those measurement tools do not serve the ultimate goal of education which is to help the pupils to develop in a holistic manner; personally, academically, and socially.

The current book introduces the character education approach and its potential impact on schools encouraging personal and social development of the pupils. The book is structured around seven chapters providing ideas, methods, and practices that are emphasized by character education.

The first chapter provides definitions for two key concepts: character, and character education. 'Character' refers to the set of qualities producing specific moral emotions that guide the behavior of individuals. Traits that are stably present in one's character, will shape the true essence of their holder. There are four types of virtues: intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues. These virtues are considered the 'building blocks of character'. Thus, character education is the intentional effort of schools and families to assist young people in understanding and caring about ethical values, along with developing personal and psychological qualities, bearing in mind that

character is an ever-evolving process that should be cautiously evaluated and taken into consideration. By doing so, character education offers an inclusive perspective of an individual as a whole entity. Furthermore, the discussed book takes on a broad neo-Aristotelian approach towards character education. From this perspective, character education stresses the education and development of virtues, that are positive and morally worthwhile, so they can help children in the future.

In addition, the chapter introduces two approaches to pupils' personal and social development. The first approach is positive education, which is associated with the elements of positive psychology implemented in education, such as developing a positive mindset and sense of self-efficacy. The second approach is social and emotional learning, describing the process of obtaining skills and knowledge to construct healthy identities, regulate emotions, fulfill personal and collective goals, show empathy, build supportive relationships, and considerably make decisions.

The second chapter is dedicated to the teacher's character and its role in guiding conduct. While it is well documented in educational research, the impacts of the moral and ethical aspects of teaching tend to be marginalized when academic success and preparation for employability are prioritized by education reforms in schools. As a consequence, along with the constant discussions about schools' assessment scores and accountability of teachers, teacher-training programs convey the message that a teacher's purpose

is limited to passing subject knowledge and technical skills to pupils. However, despite the minor emphasis on the teacher's character and qualities that ought to be demonstrated, there is no doubt that teachers' character has an effect on their personal and professional behaviour. A teacher is exhibited as a role model, influencing the pupils' character development, attitudes, and conduct, both consciously and unconsciously. Moreover, the chapter elaborates on the character virtues of a 'good' teacher, for instance: confidence, humility, teamwork, kindness, empathy, humour, and good communication.

The third chapter discusses the appropriate environment for character education. Usually, school websites and policy documents contain the main vision and aspirations of a school. However, in order to harvest the fruits of those visions, the school needs to ensure translating these intentions into concrete actions. A school should establish a clear set of principals guiding the social and emotional development of the pupils. Involving pupils in the process contributes to creating a shared mission that aims to develop their character. It is the role of a school community to select a set of core virtues and direct it in certain ways for it to be considered as positive. The chosen virtues should correspond with the values and culture that the school attempts to promote. Furthermore, the school's physical environment is vital to reflect the school's vision. A creative, well cared-for learning environment is generated by creative teachers who design and decorate the space in a way that supports character education, and also by



proud pupils displaying their work on the walls and celebrating their success.

The fourth chapter explains the relation between character education and good behavior for learning. The link between character and behaviour is clarified when character is considered as the guide to the thinking, reasoning, and conduct of an individual. Schools which adopt the character-based approach to behaviour lean toward using strategies aimed at developing pupils' intrinsic motivation to behave accordingly, and their ability to make good decisions when managing their own behaviours. Those strategies develop virtues such as respect, compassion, empathy, responsibility, etc. In other words, having good character helps the pupils in choosing the right behaviours and for the right reasons. School behaviour policies are key components in setting out the behavioural expectations of pupils. Although there is no guarantee that those expectations are parallel to the ones at home, the most effective solution is to have a home-school agreement. Following the character education, a school can use various approaches which can encourage positive behaviour for learning, such as giving verbal praise, modelling, assigning roles and responsibilities to pupils, informing parents about positive behaviours at school, etc. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates several positions of behavioural management. Among the approaches mentioned, one of the often used ideas is giving rewards and sanctions. Nonetheless, rewards and sanctions can be useful in promoting good behaviour if they are applied carefully and intentionally within a character based approach.

Chapter five argues the immersion of character education within the curriculum. The fact that character education does not have a constructed curriculum allows teachers to exhibit their skills in planning creative personalized character education fitting their schools. Therefore, teachers should integrate the learning of character and virtues in the contents across the curriculum in a way that is meaningful and interesting, while providing the opportunities for pupils to reflect on what they are learning and linking it to their personal life. For example, character can be taught in a computer science class by focusing on key ethical issues regarding the merge on new technology and being wise users who are able to safely navigate in the virtual world. An additional opportunity to teach character learning is through distinct enrichment activities happening in after-school hours. These activities, including sports club, outdoor learning, and others, develop the pupils' interests beyond the borders of the formal curriculum.

Chapter six reflects on character education beyond the school gates through social action. Also referred to as 'service-learning', social action is considered a core pedagogical strategy in character education, and it is defined as practical actions by young people in service of others to create a positive change. Service-learning consists of an on-going process of action, reflection, communication, and negotiation, which connects the development of pupils' character to their role as citizens. Therefore, service-learning aims to balance between personal and community

development. When pupils participate in a meaningful social action, they understand educational and moral purposes behind it. Also, teachers take an important part in connecting the pupils' experiences in school, with their actions outside of it. By creating an open, discursive, and democratic school environment, the school community builds a strong foundation for democratic forms of social action beyond its gates.

The final chapter offers additional practices and resources that can be used as a part of character education. The first method suggested to teach character is through stories. Using stories is a popular choice to learn about morals and virtues as stories combine imagination and entertainment, and they are considered as a powerful method to engage children's minds and emotions, and enabling them to experience new situations and contexts. Another approach offered is using moral dilemmas. For the purpose of character education, teachers can use moral dilemmas to encourage pupils to reflect on real-life situations requiring and ethical action. As a result, pupils can debate, explain, and justify their chosen response. Furthermore, this chapter mentions using moral exemplars as a vehicle to teach character education. As previously mentioned, pupils can learn via observations, thus, the actions and behaviours of adults in their surroundings imply moral meaningful messages to the pupils. However, teachers tend also to use moral exemplars from 'real life' or literature in order to inspire the pupils to absorb character virtues. Moreover, the chapter proposes a list of

resources, organizations, and institutes for further professional development on applying character education in schools.

In summary, this book is a valuable reading for teachers or educators attempting to understand character education and dive in the process of implementing it on the educational field. It defines, explains, and displays the components of character education and its contribution to developing virtues and ethics in young children. The book connects between theory and practice in a simplified manner, while offering a combination of several insightful case-studies and self-reflective activities in order to illustrate and contextualize the ideas discussed.

Dana Atef Jeries ■

### Balduzzi, E. (Coord.) (2021).

*La sfida educativa della Laudato si' e l'educazione del carattere [The educational challenge of 'Laudato si' and character education].* Studium. 151 pp.

Environmental education has broadened its goals. Whereas in the beginning it was mainly centred on scientific information, consciousness-raising and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of the 154 "myths" of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market). It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others,



with nature and other living creatures, and with God. Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.

Paragraph 210 of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'* represents the substantial opening of this book *The educational challenge of Laudato si' and character education*. It is a work that is profoundly inscribed in an eminently transformative and generatively pedagogical horizon of meaning, drawing lifeblood from the beating heart of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'*: the fruitful, and at the very least revolutionary, perspective of integral ecology.

Such innervation enlivens the identity fabric of *Laudato si'*, underscoring its structurally educational nature, but according to a distinctive and original key of interpretation: the inexhaustible pedagogical-educational soul of the Encyclical is focused in this book on a challenge that, in an indissoluble way, connects ecology and anthropology. Indeed, for ecology to be ontologically structured, the constitution of a new and regenerated man and an intimately transformed humanity is necessary. In order for ecology to materialize and profile itself integrally, anthropology must be challenged equally integrally, developing a peculiar dynamism: that of character education.

"Character" represents the unique identity profile of each individual, inescapably connoted by intentionality, and the term "educate" refers to the dynamic action of not only promotively changing in terms of improvement, but to an authentically transfigurative conversion from the innermost roots of the human being. A concept that is expressed and sublimated by the Greek term *metanoia*. This is the foundational core of the reflection contained in this work: to educate the character of each person under the banner of a *dinamis* that connectively articulates into transformative movement the plane of the capacity to act with the inner level, which ethically and morally interpellates.

But this purpose can only be achieved within an indispensable dimension of pedagogy, which is ennobled and elevated in a masterful way in the Encyclical: freedom.

By virtue of the intentionality that denotes character education, in fact, Balduzzi discusses a human being intimately called to "make himself free," to use Giuseppe Mari's expression, that is, a subject who is the protagonist of his own existence, responsible for who he wants to be and who he will become, and thus engaged in a task that is properly humanizing. For each individual, it is a matter of pronouncing and experiencing a unique, unrepeatable, non-delegable stance regarding "who I am" and "who I am with the world": in a perspective that, by virtue of man's dispositional frailties and shortcomings, and thus of his infinite possibilities in terms of existential perfectibility, is open to ulteriority and transcendence.

To a horizon that is not pre-packaged, but constantly in the making, to be chosen and, with commitment and responsibility, created and built.

Freedom is certainly a fundamental core in Balduzzi's writings, which describes a pedagogical-transdisciplinary vision of the human being as a subject characterized by design, intentionality, inviolable dignity, in accordance with what Robert Spaemann asserted in *Persons. On the difference between "something" and "someone"* (2007): man "cannot be understood as a causal consequence of one of his predicates, or of the totality of his predicates. What he may always be, he is in a way that does not determine who he is". This position is also in consonance with the perspective of Emmanuel Mounier, whose work Balduzzi quotes in this book: "[...] my character is not what I am [...]. It is the form of a movement directed toward a future pushed toward a better-being. It is what I can be more than what I am".

Character education thus develops in a motion which is convergent and ascending at the same time, and which, guarding a gaze of pedagogical-existential complexity and unity, intimately transfigures and converts man, making him integrally new. The semantic backdrop is that of a responsible freedom in which the human being's dispositional fragility and vulnerability are opportunities to "be more," to use a Freirian expression; they are opportunities to become wounded, opening up to bright rays of possibility and further paths, leaving footprints of awareness and value in the world.

Thus, a humanizing space of contiguity between *Laudato si'* and character education appears, in which the immanence of the here and now does not retreat into itself, is not exhausted in the instant, but opens wide to transcendence, to the future, to planning. This is the transformed and renewed space inhabited by virtue (*arethè*): not a simple "doing," but a true way of life in which doing reflects the responsibility of being, in a perspective of proximity that necessarily expands to the We (ethos); this is the dimension in which the inviolable dignity of each person embraces practical consciousness and experiential baggage, linking these elements in an integral and unitary grammar, dual and non-dualistic.

From a structural point of view, the book testifies to the author's open, expert and wide-ranging gaze. A horizon that is tinged with trans-disciplinary value, highlighting not only the originality of the thematized content, but also the art of comparing and dialoguing different perspectives. Indeed, the dialogic scope of the work is evident in bringing together the positions of diverse and internationally prominent authors, relating voices, ideas, experiences, and thus constructing a peculiarly generative and impactful narrative plot.

Organizationally, the book is divided into two basic sections, consistent with the cyclical and systemic nature of "theory-practice-theory" pedagogy itself: the first part is in fact related to research perspectives, while the second, pragmatically oriented, concerns the actual areas of action.

Thus, following the order of the work, Balduzzi opens the first section by highlighting the intersecting roots of meaning between *Laudato si'* and character education, which are transversal themes of the work as a whole: the contribution represents the foundation and springboard for the subsequent development of the dissertation, through three hermeneutical overviews of integral ecology.

Aurora Bernal offers a timely survey of the current importance of character education, in which she explores, in a life-long framework of education the current research, critical issues, potentials, and complexity of the topic under consideration. Bernal also innervates character education in the framework of moral education, emphasizing pedagogical concepts such as autonomy, freedom, and self-determination. Marco Emilio's philosophical contribution, on the other hand, is aimed at investigating difficult-to-resolve tensions against the contextual backdrop of the climate crisis. The keynote problematizes character education and virtue ethics from a perspective of renewal and repair of collective wisdom, rediscovery of common home and destiny, in which individual choices are necessarily conjoined with communal ones. Finally, in contiguity with the regard for the space of the We, the care of the spaces to be inhabited is inserted, through Marisa Musaio's reflection.

Cities, nodes of a world understood as a global construction site, are investigated in their deepest meaning, not only physical, but also anthropological, narrative and existential: through care, it is possi-

ble to build places of authentic encounter, leading to a regeneration of the periphery as a centre of proximity.

The transition to the second part of the book unveils vistas of action within the foundational framework of the connection between character education and *Laudato si'*. The school context, a privileged relational space, is the fil rouge of the contributions collected, starting with the proposal of Carmen Martínez Conde and Josu Ahedo, who present an idea of a school in solidarity embodying nodal values of the Encyclical, such as proximity, sharing, generosity, and equality. Balduzzi continues the discourse, envisaging opportunities to make integral ecology tangible and authentic through the compulsory teaching of civic education in schools, screening potentialities and possible criticalities.

Elena Arbués' wide-ranging international work concerns ecological civicism at the university, recovering its dialogical, empowering and cognitive value, and bringing to light its transformative identity, especially in the area of lifestyle and citizenship.

Finally, Enrico Miatto focuses on the practice of Service Learning: numerous semantic nodes connect *Laudato si'* with this educational practice, but, above all, Service Learning is connoted by surplus, responding to Pope Francis' call to build bridges, open windows on the world, be "outgoing" witnesses.

The zetetic and concrete action perspectives presented in this book open

possibilities of profound transformation to the reader. In particular, one grasps the no longer postponed need to chart paths of generative reparation toward a sense of a communitarian we, now banished in the society of narcissistic positivity envisioned by Byung-Chul Han, which consumes all forms of otherness to the point of elimination.

Without firm bonds, without the “evasion”, about which Emmanuel Lévinas writes, (*dell'Evasione*, 1983) which is capable of snapping us out of the blindness of a solipsistic consciousness hinged in the Self, it is not possible to trigger *metanoia* and become the protagonists of integral and virtuous ecological and anthropological transformations.

The priority is to re-build the quality of human relationships, rediscovering our original creaturely fragility and, consistent with Buberian thought (*Il principio dialogico e altri saggi*, 1993), elevating the relationship with others from “I-it-

self” to “I-you”: a perspective that courageously restores dignity, care and value to bonds.

The dialectical spade work of this book leads the reader to feel and touch deep roots of meaning. They tell of the virtue of taking a complex look at a world in which “everything is connected”; to protect care for the quality of every relationship; to cultivate the strength to live fully the meaning of *ex-ducere*, not only by “drawing out” that inexhaustible best that tells of human perfectibility, but also by emptying oneself of the fullness of self, selfishness, greed, and thus overflowing into the beauty of the Other: the only destination in which to nurture hope, responsibility and action for an integral ecology.

## References

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