
Book reviews

Ibáñez-Martín, J. A. and Fuentes, J. L. (Coords.) (2017).

*Educación y capacidades:
hacia un nuevo enfoque del desarrollo humano*
[Education and capabilities:
Towards a new focus on human-development].
Madrid: Dykinson. 338 pp.

This book, edited by José Antonio Ibáñez-Martín and Juan Luis Fuentes features contributions from twenty-three academics from twelve universities in the United Kingdom, Italy, Mexico, and Spain on the topic of educating human capabilities from the perspective of philosophy of education. The editors specify the perspective from which the topic is examined in the introduction where they state that the search for a dignified society can be based on the theory of capabilities, or human development focus. The contributions by authors of the standing of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen all argue that improving a society cannot be based solely on increasing national income, but that other conditions are need-

ed that allow people to develop their basic capabilities to the highest level. Based on this premise, they raise the need to consider in greater depth the concept of capability, and to determine what basic capabilities are needed and which educational activities should be used to allow for their «cultivation and growth», in the words of the authors.

To achieve this objective, the contributions from the academics named above are incorporated into a well-organised and well-framed structure, with the topics grouped into four major fields: in the first, the study of capabilities is approached from the perspectives of diversity, ethics, universality, and vulnerability; the second comprises theoretical, epistemological, and philosophical analyses of the ethical component and its relationship with capabilities; the third analyses capabilities in relation with the social responsibilities of universities and the contributions from research and experience of learning-service that have been carried out over recent years; and the last area underlines one of the most noticeable

dimensions of the theory of capabilities, namely the one relating to people who are in particularly vulnerable situations.

I will try to draw out below the essence of the contributions by the different authors who have participated in this work, which is united around one of the most important topics: the development of human capabilities, a topic which, as the editors note, has connections with such diverse fields as philosophy, ethics, socio-politics, economics, and education.

In the first part, the two articles by José Antonio Ibáñez Martín and James C. Conroy both consider the theme of the capability to coexist and overcome hatred, albeit from different perspectives. The former analyses the differences between Sen and Nussbaum regarding the list of capabilities and poses a series of questions about Nussbaum's position that, while acknowledging the importance of her contributions, does raise serious doubts about its ability to respond to the most important challenges of our society. Conroy reflects on Brexit, which was backed by large numbers of citizens of the United Kingdom who based their arguments on the idea that *we are not like them*. In both the media and popular beliefs, perceptions of the variety of immigrants who enter the United Kingdom, as well as their range of social, political, economic, etc. motives, are based on a shared identity of *the Others*. The author notes that this populist suspicion of *the Other* has a historical parallel with historical disputes between Great Britain and countries from mainland Europe, with the backdrop of the religious problem that has created so much hatred and discord. To overcome

this situation, he suggests that teaching of religion should not be linked with the beliefs of the *Other*, but it should be an in-depth examination of our own beliefs, systems, cultures, and values.

In the second part, which includes contributions from seven authors, Giuseppe Mari suggests that to promote the growth of capabilities it is necessary to identify the human reference in education, whether with children or adults. In his in-depth analysis of the term «capability», he identifies the need to understand it as something that goes beyond simply transferring knowledge. Antonio Bernal emphasises the central role education has acquired as *fertile capability* for the development of the person. He argues that capabilities are not limited to people's abilities, but that they are linked to their political, social, and economic context in such a way that what we are capable of doing and being shapes our possibilities for being able to choose and act. Emilio López Barajas, an emeritus professor at the UNED (National Distance Learning University), performs an in-depth epistemological analysis of the meaning and sense of human development. This concept requires knowledge of intent, and this relates to will and human liberty. The use of these concepts by politicians and administrators who are unfamiliar with the epistemological assumptions surrounding the meaning of concepts such as information, cognition, or knowledge could have serious consequences in the form of exclusion for many in the race for development. Ana Pagés addresses certain nuances of the concept of *capability as being*, starting from Nussbaum's

focus and the role it gives Aristotle in this concept, identifying and interpreting its implicit connotations. She argues that the concept of *capability* should be expanded using other complementary notions such as *willingness* and *diligence*. María del Rosario González suggests that emotional education must consider the link between ethics, desire, and emotion, and their connection with knowledge of good, moral judgement, and training in virtue. Ethical knowledge must integrate fundamental experiences, those that affect the fullness of life and cannot be ignored in a comprehensive ethical education. Aurora Bernal analyses the relationship between the capability focus and character education, concluding that in both approaches education is seen as an essential element for individual and social human life and, consequently, for human development. Therefore, she postulates an integration of both perspectives to achieve a more complete outlook on reality. Juan Luis Fuentes and Jesús Albertos suggest clarifying the concept of *character education* to differentiate it from related concepts like *moral education*, *values education*, *emotional education*, and *education for citizenship*, with which it overlaps. To do so, they set an objective of establishing the particular limits that are specific to these concepts, especially between *character education* and *education for citizenship*.

In the third part, dedicated to educating capabilities at university, María García Amilburu, Marta Ruiz Corbella, and Juan García Gutiérrez carry out a study of education in capabilities in higher education, emphasising the social re-

sponsibility of universities. They believe that it is necessary to supply knowledge that helps to consider in depth the ethical dimension of our actions and reflect on them, but they also understand that it is important to generate experiences that enable people to experience social responsibility. Concepción Naval and Elena Arbués analyse the implementation of the service-learning method in higher education and its strengths as a host for different basic and specific capabilities, especially emphasising its contribution to the development of professional competences that improve people's chances of finding and keeping a job. Francisco Esteban studies the topic of the development of capabilities that nurture people's character in the context of universities' social responsibility. He believes that universities should educate in three basic capabilities that make it possible to educate a socially responsible student body: the capability to recognise oneself as a learner of a moral question, the capability to embrace the moral merits of university education, and the capability to commit to learn something in particular. Teresa Yurén and José Antonio Arnaz analyse university training in social responsibility in the framework of the UN's Agenda 2030. This project, which aims to create a better future for humankind, requires participation by people and the institutions of which they are part. Higher education has a special responsibility in the achievement of a sustainable human development.

Finally, in the fourth part, which is dedicated to developing capabilities in situations of vulnerability, Fernando Gil

analyses the topic of education and developing capabilities in prison, explaining some of the difficulties this presents. These come from very diverse fields: the penal system itself, the cultural environment that surrounds people, the academic world, and the inmates themselves. Throughout the text, the pedagogical proposals aimed at improving the penal educational practices that affect the development of capabilities are analysed. For his part, Vicent Gozálvarez reflects on disability, education, and the dignified life, analysing the concept of justice as a necessary element for the theoretical framework of inclusive education, performing a detailed critical analysis of the focus on capabilities and its repercussion for people with intellectual disabilities, and concluding with a plea for a revised and enabling theory of justice. J. L. Sánchez, Juan María Díez, and Sergio Pérez set themselves the challenge of thinking about disability, uncovering the possibilities and riches contained in it to undertake the task of providing accompaniment with a new more profound and humane basis. J. Alfredo Pérís considers the topic of the philosophy of maternity in the filmography of Mitchell Leisin, focussing on its role in characterising women and its spiritual dimension. Sara Martínez analyses the philosophical bases for moral education through compassion. To do so, she follows Nussbaum's approach of going to the heart of morality through compassion. Finally, García explains how the focus on capabilities that Nussbaum describes is structured around *creating capabilities* through education.

Kristjánsson, K. (2015).

Aristotelian Character Education.

London: Routledge. 186 pp.

The book reviewed here is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is worth noting the impact it has had in the academic field, demonstrated by the different responses to it in the *Journal of Moral Education* by authors such as Curren, Miller, and Lapsley, as well as the publication of a *précis* of the book written by the author himself, along with a response to the authors mentioned above. In addition, the pertinence of a text whose topic has received increasing attention in many countries round the world is clear. Character education has, in recent years, become an object of study as an example of the ethical turn that education is undergoing, in the words of Ibáñez-Martín.

Indeed, while the title might seem to refer to the history of education in Classical Greece, one of the book's main strengths is its close link to the present day. The author, who is a professor at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, is well aware of the crucial moment in which this text is being published and so has written it taking into account the needs of the moment. Therefore, it has a theoretical character but with clear practical applications as it is a book about the philosophy of education that comes close to psychology. Furthermore, it is accessible to educators as, while it does tackle important issues, it tries to do so using accessible, clear, direct language, with examples from everyday life that ease

understanding, without being a mere academic and intellectual exercise. This philosophical character is also apparent in its highly analytic and well-structured writing style that focusses on refutation as a working method.

It provides a defence of character education with an Aristotelian basis which is updated – or as the author explains, reconstructed – in accordance with contemporary practice and evidence, going beyond mere interpretation of Aristotle's writings. It is based on an examination of the results of empirical studies, arguing that Aristotle would do the same if he lived in our times.

The first chapter comprises a brief overview of the concept of character since the Second World War, where moral pessimism was fertile ground for Kohlberg's model to grow compared with the relativism that appeared to be imposing itself. Nonetheless, after several decades of popularity, this rationalist view lost ground in the face of what the author calls the paradigm of the emotionally vulnerable child, which psychologised character, stripping it of its moral content through concepts such as emotional intelligence. According to Kristjánsson, since then we have been in the era of the flourishing child, which focusses on human development in all its potential, including subjective satisfaction as well as objective external criteria. These initial pages of the book also describe concepts such as character, virtue, and the politically incorrect notion of vice, as well their different variants, emphasising aspects such as their necessary materialisation in every person, the possibility of identifying a

core of virtues that appear in most philosophical and religious systems, as well as the advisability of strengthening them all jointly.

The author gives ten reasons why Aristotle is receiving renewed attention among character educators, reasons that also define this concept: 1) an ontological basis for realism or moral naturalism, 2) a detailed theory of plenitude as the ultimate aim of the human being, 3) recognition of the intrinsic value of human plenitude, 4) a language about virtue that is accessible to teachers and students, 5) establishing a middle point in the virtues that the objective identifies, 6) the prominent place given to emotions, 7) holistic and critical reflection on virtues, 8) attention to the community in character education, 9) identification of different levels of moral development, including behaviour, emotions, and cognition, and 10) moving beyond the dichotomy between direct and indirect moral education.

Turning our attention to chapter 2, we find descriptions of a series of myths about character education along with attempts to refute them through philosophical arguments and data from empirical studies, as well as working from key authors in contemporary moral education, thus illustrating the author's expert knowledge of the field. However, he does not take a dogmatic position, and sometime recognises deficiencies in character education that it is important to overcome, and he consequently presents his neo-Aristotelianism as a necessary reshaping of the philosopher's approaches.

These first two introductory chapters leave open various questions and problems that are covered elsewhere in the book. The first, and for Kristjánsson most important, relates to evaluating character education. It is surprising to find such a clear concern for evaluation in a philosopher, but it is something he sees as necessary for consolidating and continuing this educational concept. After analysing the most common evaluation methods minutely and with a critical eye, he argues for combining strategies that must consider the classic methods of pre-test-posttest with control groups, self-reports, triangulation, moral dilemmas, and ethnographic observation, as well as other more innovative methods such as big data, linguistic analysis, and neuroscience.

Chapter four, which is perhaps the most complex one in the book, focusses on the rarely-studied cultivation of *phronesis*, a process that involves a contradiction as it requires critical thinking that is trained through unthinking habituation in its early stages. Its Aristotelian reconstruction maintains that *phronesis* has a very complex task of organising a good life that cannot be reduced to merely acquiring abilities as it requires a profound theoretical understanding of what the good life means according to empirical knowledge of human nature and its teleological aspiration to happiness or *eudaimonia*. Therefore, it supports the need for both things in education about *phronesis*: abilities that make it possible to confront particular situations, but also a theoretical overview to facilitate access to universals. Consequently, it concludes that character

education must be promoted across all subjects as well as in its own specific one.

The important question about whether character education can undo the effects of a deficient upbringing is the subject of chapter five. Faced with Aristotelian pessimism owing to the absence of habituation, Kristjánsson proposes reconsidering the priority of the contemplative life in an imperfect world, something which can accept other more appropriate ways of living, for example ones that involve helping those who are in a position of need. The author successfully achieves this reconstruction, starting from other Aristotelian ideas that make it possible to admit the moral change in the person while upholding the link to Aristotle's philosophy. He argues that it is possible for those who have had a bad education to achieve a morally good life through contact with virtuous models and reflection on the aims of human life. This process will be hard and complex when the distance to cover becomes apparent, and it will require a healthy dose of intelligence and the ability to think in abstract terms about the aims of human life. In other words, it can be done through philosophical contemplation and not just with prudence, as it is necessary to look beyond the regulation of virtues.

Chapter six considers Socratic dialogue as a method in moral education, responding to the criticisms made about character education owing to its supposed scorn for the dialogical relationship. The privileged place occupied by *phronesis* in Aristotelian thinking and the need to cultivate it through the interaction between teacher and student are two of the fundamental arguments the author raises to

question this idea. Furthermore, the Aristotelian notion of friendship also helps us discuss this apparent dichotomy, as the interaction and dialogue between mature friendly characters is an element that contributes to personal excellence, or, in the author's words: «friendship is therefore an important, perhaps the most important, school of virtue» (p. 125).

The seventh chapter concerns the training of teachers, more specifically, the moral dimension of their profession. It warns us that, while this dimension is recognised by teachers, they call for procedures to be able to give it educational value as they have a feeling of insecurity and a lack of resources that is not addressed in their initial training. Using the provocative example of a Chinese teacher who fled from his school to save his life during an earthquake, leaving his students alone to face the danger, it suggests the risks of what the author calls the «constructivist-cognitive paradigm» in the conception of the identity of teachers and of their affective dimension. Consequently, he proposes a measure which is not free from controversy and involves considering character when accepting candidates for teacher training, something that is divisive owing to the challenges with evaluation set out by the author himself in the third chapter of the book. Alongside this, he recommends that character should be a central topic in teacher training, entailing a more reflexive task of self-knowing and a more critical evaluation from a moral perspective, thus making it possible to discover the values that lie within one's character before venturing into the task of transmitting values to others.

The concluding chapter bemoans the scarce consideration of character in educational policies, dominated by questions such as classroom management and getting results. It argues that to change this situation, it is necessary to influence the public, as once politicians discover that the public really supports concepts such as character education, they will change their policies. Another of the biggest obstacles Kristjánsson encounters is the lack of a satisfactory model of moral education, one that can be applied and accepted by the large majority of teachers. He is perhaps too optimistic when he formulates four conditions that would allow this to become reality: it should meet the needs of the current moment, it should be established with a political consensus between left and right, and it should be supported by a philosophical and psychological theory. According to him, character education meets all of these conditions except the last one, as psychology is still not a firm support for the ethics of virtue or for moral education, for various reasons, responsibility for which is shared between teachers and psychologists.

From this book's many valuable contributions which are barely covered here, I will conclude by emphasising its optimistic and hopeful vision of education. An education that, fortunately, has regained its interest in moral questions, to which the author makes a broad contribution by establishing some vital foundations for this interest to last in time. Shall we join him in this task?

Juan Luis Fuentes ■

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Barraca Mairal, J. (2017).

Originalidad e Identidad Personal. Claves antropológicas frente a la masificación

[Originality and personal identity:

Anthropological keys in the face of overcrowding].

Madrid: Editorial San Pablo. 149 pp.

In this profound and insightful essay, the author tries to find an answer to one of the questions that humankind has, in all likelihood, asked most often: who am I? A question that inevitably addresses the very questioner.

Barraca's enquiries into this question comprise four major blocks. In the first, he tackles the complexity of identity in the human condition, placing special emphasis on identifying some of the factors that in contemporary society seem most relevant. These are factors that can contribute to masking and obscuring personal identity, thus confusing people who, with the deepest sincerity, have chosen to venture to discover who they are.

From the deep and critical perspective of realist anthropology, the author reviews some of the damaging factors that might impede or disfigure the encounter with one's self. In light of this, perhaps with the aim of encouraging potential readers of this work, I have tried to express some of the questions reading it has inspired in me.

Can one guide one's own life in ignorance of who one is or wants to become? What does one's own experience contribute to knowledge of personal identity? Is it necessary to reflect on what constitutes

the fabric of everyday existence? Can the overcrowding of a globalised society dissolve personal uniqueness, making it just another number that is only useful for statistical calculation? How can one distinguish the true identity of the protagonist of the I, the search for social approval, or narcissism? Are we sensitive to attempts at personal and collective manipulation? Do we know how to identify them? Do we have sufficient resources to confront them?

In the second block, the author studies the relationship and dialogue between the I and the you. From the beginning, the encounter with the Other contributes to knowledge of one's own identity. The social dimension of the identity of the individual is an ingredient that is inalienable in this pursuit of personal knowledge.

In reality, there can be no I without you. How often is the encounter with the you what really makes it possible to deepen knowledge of the I! Are interpersonal relationships auto-constitutive with personal identity? What can be inferred from the fact that the person is a relational and essentially dialogic being? Can one's own I shape the relationship with the Other? Can there be personal identity without the experience of loving and being loved?

In the third block, Barraca confronts the problem of the originality of the human being. This personal originality leads us to the question of personal origin, which is based on the unique oneness of each human being. The author's reference to parenthood clearly shows this originality: «A child», he writes, «is always unique, even if it is not an only child. ... No parent

loves or can love all her children with an identical love, ... she loves each one with a different, incomparable, unrepeatable, and intensely personal love» (p. 71). The path in life that each person chooses depends on this originality and its development. The resulting personal biography will be the result of this choice. This radical originality is primordial and it is not a centripetal reality nor a closed off one, and it does not revolve around one's own I, even though the I is partly an outcome of it.

This originality is creative and opens itself up to however many people need it at the same time as seeking to be welcomed, recognised, and valued by others. The way in which it projects itself to and communicates with others does not fit into any category, scheme, cliché, generalisation, model, etc., simply because of the powerful (anthropological and ontological) link between the personal being and biographical originality.

Consequently, no institution (family, school, business, etc.) can sacrifice, crush, or annihilate this personal originality in the interest of the supposed common good. In so doing, it would commit the contradiction of stealing the most valuable thing the person has, the very thing he gives to others and to the common good. This is especially true in the field of education as «the task of education fundamentally involves correctly helping life to develop organically and profoundly, in consonance with the individual's own personal originality» (p. 101).

Sadly, mass society does not seem to be particularly sensitive to the duty to

respect originality and the biographic and creative itineraries that people freely choose. The anonymous and undifferentiated mass, instead, reduces subjects to numbers, crushing and dissolving the most radically human thing there is in them.

Forgetting the mystery of the person – something that is usually interpreted as not being subject to reason and, therefore, irrational – strips him of his unrepeatable value: putting his gifts at the mercy of his vocation in the service of others: a heinous act through which all people and the common good lose out without anyone gaining anything.

In this block, the reader can find the necessary help to answer some of the questions I formulate here and which might affect him in person: is originality something that gets confused with what is outlandish and strange? Can some of the behavioural patterns of users on social networks be classified as original? Is originality at the exclusive service of the protagonism of the I? Does originality serve any purpose if the person does not know himself? Is it possible for the person to «reinvent» himself? Fully? Are there personal «invariant» elements that can never be modified? Is originality just a fantasy image for escaping from oneself or catching the attention of spectators whom the person imitates and to which he adapts himself? Is it not the case that originality is instead at the service of personal identity, of continuity and faithfulness to one's own vocation, to the freely chosen life project? Can one delegate one's own liberty? Is it possible to make one's own life while being a slave to changing

fashions, habits, and customs? Is each person the progenitor of his actions and the author of his personal life?

Finally, in the fourth block, Barraça brings together identity and personal originality in dialogue with justice. «All values matter when developing one's own identity, all of them feed our originality», he writes. Of all of them, he places special emphasis on justice, «the key to any educational effort. This is the case, insofar as justice governs the underlying order in the mutual encounter of different originalities and identities combined in diverse human and educational relationships, those directed towards the holistic development of subjects» (p. 109).

Can any relationship be established between justice and personal development? In my opinion, some people have a very constrained concept of justice which is restricted solely the material. They regard it as something like a giant cake that must be shared out between everyone in exact identical slices. However, personal development, for example, is a spiritual good that is more valuable than material goods and also has a relationship with justice. Its development depends to a large extent on how each person uses his liberty.

People come into this world with a range of different positive traits that have been given to them (gifts), all of them valuable and many still in a potential state. They must be developed, so that they are updated and are as active and effective as they can come to be.

It could be argued that these gifts are personal and fundamentally belong to

their respective owners. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear people say things like «these values are mine and I can do whatever I want with them». Few objections could be raised about the previous statement. In effect, the values with which the subject has been endowed are his and belong solely to him. And as the owner of them, he may do whatever he pleases with them.

However, if we consider this from the social side of his person, then it is indeed worth making an objection, an important and serious one. If this subject develops those values, he will be more competent, will easily resolve serious problems, and will better serve others. Let us suppose that this subject is especially gifted as a teacher. Insofar as he develops those values (knowledge, empathy, capability to seek the truth, verbal fluency, communication, motivation, etc.), his effectiveness as a teacher will increase and with it the possibility of making his future students happier.

His values certainly do belong to him. The consequences of whether or not he develops them are partly his but partly not. If he does not develop his capability to seek the truth, it is likely that he will encounter serious difficulties in transmitting it to his students; if he does not expand his knowledge, it is possible that he will transfer his own ignorance to them, and so on.

The values that the aforementioned teacher has continue to be his, but not all of the consequences of what he has done or ceased to do with them. Many of these consequences seriously affect his stu-

dents: idleness in seeking the truth, demoralisation for knowledge, etc.

In essence, the teacher in the previous example has taken some initial goods (the bounty of the gifts he received, certain perfectible perfections) that he has not known how to, wanted to, or been able to develop and so they have become neglected perfections, in other words, imperfections (anti-values) he will transmit to his students (people who do not belong to him and were entitled to a better education).

In this sense, his behaviour could be classified as unjust, because he has undervalued or ruined his initial values; because as a person, he has not developed to his full status; because as a teacher, he has transmitted to the next generation the deficiency he finds in the values received that he has not cultivated. This way of behaving impedes the act of «giving each person his due», which is the nature of justice.

All things considered, the undeveloped values have prevented him from growing as a person. He has turned the initial «perfectible perfection» which the values comprised into a relative deterioration or absence of the final values available (personal imperfection).

In contrast, if he had made his initial values grow, he would now be a valuable person (he would embody a certain plenitude of values that, with effort, he has earned starting from what he was given); he would make it easier for his students to learn what he teaches them («it is easy to learn with him», they would say); he would help make them feel more secure and confident in their own capa-

bilities (something that would improve their self-esteem and self-concept), and it is even possible that some of them would try to imitate him or would be inspired by his example when discovering their own vocation.

Evidently, spreading a passion for truth and justice among students is a good principle on which to base the art of educating. But an erudite exposition of these values will be of very little use if the teacher does not embody them. Embodying those values means incorporating them into everyday life as behavioural habits. Behaviour is more important than theoretical exposition, however brilliant this exposition might be.

When a value is embodied in the person, it becomes a virtue. An embodied value is none other than what we call a virtue. Growing in virtues is one of the most original forms of developing and projecting one's initial originality. The greater the growth in the field of virtues, the more deep and coherent the personal identity will be.

In this short publication, Javier has presented us with a brief and clear synthesis of one of the questions that most affects the contemporary individual. Really, this question is as old as humankind itself. What is perhaps new is the way in which the contemporary person refuses to face these questions, despite feeling interpellated by them. In these pages, the author opens new horizons to the person, something that is very welcome. On top of this, it has two other important good features: the clarity of his exposition, without excessively complicating these questions,

and – even more significantly – the effort to try to provide us with some solutions. I am very grateful for everything Barraca has taught me in this text.

I recommend a close reading of this essay to teachers and students, psychologists and pedagogues, psychiatrists and psychotherapists, indeed all professionals who in one way or another have to deal with the most valuable thing in the world: care and service for people.

I would particularly like to note the care, accuracy, and good taste shown by the San Pablo publishing house in the printing and publishing of this work.

Aquilino Polaino-Lorente ■

Renzulli, J. S. and Reis, S. M. (2016).

Enriqueciendo el currículo para todo el alumnado [Enriching the curriculum for all students].

Madrid: Ápeiron Ediciones. 260 pp.

What importance does the development of talent have? Can it, in fact, be handled? What is the biggest challenge for a teacher? Can the current teaching model be improved? These questions and many others will occur to anyone interested in the educational world or immersed in it. *Enriching the curriculum for all students*, by Joseph S. Renzulli and Sally M. Reis, allows the reader not only to answer each of these questions in depth, but also to discover a whole model for enriching students that opens up horizons for a world of educational possibilities that make it possible to achieve the aim of ed-

ucation and of educational activity: giving each student what he or she needs for optimal learning. Through in-depth knowledge of the strengths of the students, the SEM model (Schoolwide Enrichment Model) offers them the chance to acquire new knowledge and abilities that complete their education and enable them to rediscover the excitement of learning.

Joseph S. Renzulli, a professor at the University of Connecticut and the director of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, has spent several decades working on studying and developing talent. His numerous publications include books such as *Light up your child's mind: Finding a unique pathway to happiness and success* and articles like «What makes giftedness?», published in 1978. His most noteworthy honours include being named Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor at the University of Connecticut and being awarded an honorary doctorate in Law by McGill University, Montreal. One of his major achievements is the creation of the Confratute programme for teaching development and talent, of which Sally M. Reis is the co-director. Sally M. Reis, who is Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and a professor at the University of Connecticut also works as a researcher at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. She has written over 140 articles, 11 books, and 50 book chapters. Her research focusses on special groups of gifted and talented students. She is also on the editorial board of *Gifted child quarterly*, and has been the president of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). She has also been awarded the title Distinguished Scholar of the

National Association for Gifted Children, and, like Renzulli, she has been named a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor by the University of Connecticut.

This book is a work that is highly recommended for any educator. In its eight chapters, the theoretical character of the work can be appreciated as it examines the SEM model in depth with order, clarity, and simplicity, providing a solid theoretical base. In addition, and making it even more valuable, it has an obvious practical purpose, so that reading it gives clear ideas that can be applied in the classroom or the school, recommendations, and real experiences that mean that reading it will have an immediate impact on educators and their ways of carrying out their educational practice.

The first chapter briefly sets out the reasons behind talent development and enrichment and explains what they are. The authors also establish from the start a series of key concepts and ideas such as working with problems from real life, the change of role of the teaching staff or the importance of learning that goes beyond the merely deductive (didactic), providing a well-defined idea of enriched learning and teaching. With this type of learning «the role of the student changes from being someone who learns a lesson to being a first-person investigator, and the role of the teacher changes from being an instructor and disseminator of knowledge to being a combination of advisor, provider of resources, mentor, and personal guide» (p. 31). Furthermore, the presentation of the objectives pursued through implementation of the SEM model is established as the horizon and basis of all of the actions carried out in the implemen-

tation of the model. «Schools should be enriching places where the mind, spirit, and values of each student are expanded and developed in a pleasant and interesting atmosphere that presents challenges» (p. 33).

With this we come to the second part of the book, which provides an overview of the model. The introduction to the three-ring conception, which defines gifted behaviour as «an interaction of three basic clusters of human traits – above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity» (p. 45), and under the main objective of the model, «to promote both challenging and enjoyable high-end learning across a wide range of school types, levels, and demographic differences» (p. 39) it presents the school-wide enrichment model. In this model, talented students are identified through «test scores, nominations by teachers, parents, and peers, and examples of creative potential or productivity» (p. 49) under the Revolving Door Identification Model (RDIM), currently known as the Renzulli Identification System (or RIS model). In this, the selected students become part of a talent pool through which they access a variety of services adapted to their interests and learning styles. In this chapter, the three components of the SEM model on the basis of which students with talent are offered enriched forms of learning are briefly covered. These include modifications to the ordinary curriculum, enrichment clusters, and the continuum of special services. Through these, various services are offered that make up the portfolio of services: evaluation of individual strengths, techniques for modifying the curriculum, and enriched teaching

and learning. This process «provides a detailed plan to develop talents and gifts and encourage creative productivity in students» (p. 66).

Following the overview offered in the first two sections of the book, chapter three focusses the reader's attention on the continuum of special services and tries to show how these educational options should be implemented depending on each student and their needs. This is why the authors underline the importance of being clear about the students' *continuum of potentials* (input) through which their aptitudes, interests, and learning styles are grouped. Next, a series of organisational methods are introduced that allow the development of these potentials (process). Finally, a *continuum of performances* (output) is provided, showing the learning achieved by the students. In this setting, it is useful to group students and this is frequently used in the SEM model owing to its flexibility and to the cooperative practice established among the students who form part of a single group. Throughout this chapter, elements are established that are as important as the criteria when forming the groups and their handling and the essential role of the teacher for adequate performance by the students.

«Equity is not the product of identical learning experiences for all students; rather, it is the product of a broad range of differentiated experiences that take into account each student's unique strengths» (p. 69). This statement defines the purpose of the portfolio of talent, which is the subject of chapter four of this book and the first component of the

portfolio of services. The SEM model is based, among other things, on the conviction that it is necessary to know students' strengths to be able to build the most appropriate learning for the student based on them. This is why, using this portfolio, it is a matter of knowing their strong points in three areas: aptitudes, interests and learning styles. Information about these is collected through different methods such as SRBCSS scales or the *interest-al-yzer*.

Continuing with the presentation of the services offered through the SEM model, we come to chapter 5, «Curriculum compacting and differentiation», where the authors try to offer the reader a detailed view of curriculum compacting and differentiation, explaining how to modify the curriculum step by step; «curriculum compacting is a differentiation strategy that includes content, processes, products, classroom management, and a personal commitment by the teachers to recognize the differences both of individuals and of small groups» (p. 126). Among other reasons, this chapter is interesting for the guidelines it provides about how to carry out a process of curriculum compacting, including examples, frequently asked questions and various recommendations.

In chapter six we come to the third component of the portfolio of services offered by the SEM model, enriched learning and teaching. «The ultimate goal of learning that is guided by these principles is to replace dependent and passive learning with independence and engaged learning» (p. 165). This objective is met by using the triad enrichment model, «designed to encourage creative productivity

on the part of young people by exposing them to various topics, areas of interest, and fields of study, and to further train them to apply advanced content, processing abilities and methodology» (p. 166) that are typical of the area of interest they have chosen. The triad enrichment model comprises three types of activity: Type I (general exploratory activities), Type II (group skills and abilities development training activities), and Type III (individual or small-group research into real problems), which are explained in detail in this chapter. The triad enrichment model can be implemented using enrichment clusters, «nongraded groups of students who share common interests and who come together during specially designated time blocks to pursue these interests» (pp. 189-190).

Of course, the triad enrichment model has many more forms of use and can act as a foundation for developing different content areas. One example of this is chapter 7, which explains the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in Reading (SEM-R). «The SEM-R focuses on enrichment for all students through engagement in challenging, self-selected reading, accompanied by instruction in higher-order thinking and strategy skills» (p. 205). It is worth taking some time to read this chapter and the model proposed since, as research shows, it has very positive effects on students.

Finally, we come to the last chapter of the book, «Implementing SEM by Using a New On-Line Resource for Enrichment and Differentiation». In this chapter, the authors refer to Renzulli Learning, which is the electronic version of the SEM mod-

el. In line with the steady growth in the use of the internet and online courses, Renzulli Learning is presented as an opportunity to encourage enriched teaching and learning in a closer way and adapted to the latest advances, «combining computer based strength assessment with search engine technology» (p. 214).

This work is an interesting read, and it introduces the reader to a new vision of the educational possibilities that can be provided in the classroom, and the importance of talent development in schools. It is not a case of serving the average student; nor of only meeting the needs of students of the highest or lowest levels. Talent development involves finding and squeezing out the potential of each student. This is the true aim of education, the true role of education, and the clearest definition of talent development.

Patricia Olmedo Ariza ■

Prats, E. (2015).

Teorizando en Educación: entre erudición, poesía y opinionitis [Theorising in education: Between erudition, poetry, and opinionitis]. Barcelona: UOC. 173 pp.

When reading a book, we usually start from the first page and patiently continue along the path the author has marked out for us without any problems. There are cases, like when the text is a collection of independent chapters, where it does not matter where one starts, but there are other cases where the author plays with the reader and suggests an order that almost obscures, or at least hides, the ulti-

mate meaning of the text. This might be one of these cases, as this text by Prats seems to make sense thanks to its third chapter, with the whole text being a dialogue and response to what is raised in this third chapter of the four that make up this work. I will not follow the order of the book. Instead I will start with chapter three, then move on to chapter one and finish with the one I believe is the best of all of the chapters, number two.

We live in times when pedagogical thinking is out of fashion, indeed it even seems that it is a target to attack in any gathering or opinion article. Of course, many people do not regard it as an area of knowledge that has attained the status of science, and it is a realm where opinions can exist in comfort as they do not have to confront a scientific body of knowledge. There are numerous texts that set out to attack the work of pedagogy as though it was pure ideology, unable to produce science with all knowledge at the same level, thus making it impossible to establish an objective hierarchy of value. This is the core problem that the author tries to analyse in chapter three of this book.

With practical activities, and education is one of them, there are always problems when combining theory and practice. Many students, for example, claim that universities fail to provide practical training while providing excessive theory, forgetting that all practice contains theory and that there are two types of person regarding this matter: those who know that theory guides their practice and those who do not realise that it guides their practice. This book sets out the idea that theories can be explicit or implicit and that anyone

who teaches, at any of the levels at which we work, must survive using a mix of the two. As the author acknowledges, everyone who is now a teacher has been a student, and we have unconsciously acquired pedagogical beliefs that are obscured even to ourselves.

The belief that we can teach without an educational theory provokes a certain disdain for this world that does not explain what we should do and can even confuse us. According to the people who believe this, it is possible to teach without pedagogical theory as teaching practice and knowledge of the subject would on their own suffice.

But this is not true; as is stated above, theories always exist, it is just that they are not always made explicit. It is precisely this character as a source of implicit ideas about education that Enric recognises in current antipedagogical literature: «it is not a matter of making these books anathema, but of knowing how to extract some of their main arguments and observe how in Pedagogy, in upper case here, for several decades now, we have been trying to break away from simple discourses that reduce reality to hard to digest categories» (p. 147). Indeed, reading these texts can allow us to rediscover or confront the practical problems with which the teaching profession grapples, now based on a systematic theory rather than *opinionitis*. However, these *antipedagogy* books also inadvertently show the reality of a knowledge which is not that of disciplines but that of their teaching, concepts that, as we have always known in pedagogy, are different. Nonetheless, this is not their only value.

However, to uncover this extra value, a more precise and rigorous dissection of the entrails of these *antipedagogy* handbooks would have been desirable, thus showing that they are not just of value because they make explicit what is implicit, but also because there are ones of different levels and because some of them can be right in some diagnoses. The general treatment of them in the text prevents us from sorting the wheat – and wheat there is – from the chaff, which is also abundant. To use philosophical terminology, current antipedagogical literature contains not just *doxa* but also *endoxa*. It is true that many of these books are reactive, they have an air of trench warfare and are written «from the trenches», and this origin greatly limits their possibilities and their value, but we should not be unwilling to recognise the valuable, and in some cases even brilliant, reflections contained in them.

Prats places two chapters ahead of chapter three. The first reviews the traditional paradigms used as the basis for theorising about education. This is an interesting chapter for anyone who wants to find out about the principal schools of educational theory, seen, above all, through the eyes of Catalan theorists, but it is of less interest for experts in the field. This chapter would have benefited from coming after chapter three, which is dedicated to sensationalist pedagogies, implicit pedagogical ideas and *opinionitis*, as it would have obliged the author to write it differently, making him update the interesting aspects of the theory of education.

The last chapter we will discuss is chapter two, called «The poetic view:

When fiction theorises on education». This is, in our opinion, the most interesting part of the book, for several reasons. First because it establishes a relationship between fiction and theory that, while not being new, is still fruitful. Fiction, when it is good, allows us to draw attention to the complexity of educational phenomena and has great possibilities for theoretical analysis. Prats analyses three works in this chapter and does so armed with a fourth one that acts as an interpretative key that makes it possible to extract pedagogical knowledge from works that are not strictly about pedagogy. The three works he uses are: *The professor* by Charlotte Brontë (1857), *I married a communist* by Philip Roth (1998), and *Wilt* by Tom Sharpe (1976), and the interpretative key is the autobiographic work *Chagrin d'école* (2007) by Daniel Pennac.

On the author's journey through the pages of the fine selection of books used in this chapter, we form our view of the classical problems of the educational relationship, school bureaucracy, the role of academic disciplines, the idealism of the teacher, the hypercomplex reality of classrooms, pupils and students, adolescence, authority, and many other classic themes from theoretical reflection on education.

This book concludes with a fourth chapter that is more of an epilogue that argues for the need for educational theory, as «without education there is no humanisation» (p. 168).

David Reyero ■

C. Segura Peraita (Ed.) (2017).

El método socrático hoy. Para una enseñanza y práctica dialógica de la filosofía

[*The Socratic method today: For dialogical teaching and practice of philosophy*].

Madrid: Escolar y Mayo. 180 pp.

The interest in the figure of Socrates as a model of an attitude to life and an intellectual attitude and analysis of the so-called «Socratic method» have been ever-present throughout the history of Western thought. The recent Spanish translation of *La muerte de Sócrates* [The death of Socrates] by Romano Guardini (Ediciones Palabra, 2016), as well as the publication of *Sócrates, hoplita de la polis* [Socrates: Hoplite of the polis] by Eduardo Esteban, *Eloge de Socrate* [In praise of Socrates] by Pierre Hadot, *¿Matar a Sócrates?* [Killing Socrates?] by Gregorio Luri, and *Sócrates. La muerte del hombre más justo* [Socrates: The death of the most just man], are proof of this renewed interest. The publication of this multi-author work, edited by Carmen Segura Peraita who is a professor of philosophy at Madrid Complutense University, is now part of this permanent commemoration of Socrates.

The nine contributions in this book coalesce around a common objective: studying the options for applying the Socratic method in the present day, in secondary-school and baccalaureate classrooms and at the level of university teaching, as well as in other areas of society (businesses, organisations, public bodies, etc.). It is, therefore, a matter of reconstructing and bringing up to date the practice of the Socratic method in a setting that,

in principle, appears to be openly hostile to it, given the utilitarian and pragmatic obsession that presides over the contemporary world.

When talking about the «Socratic method», we are not referring to specific techniques and procedures shaped by an agreed and exacting idea (indeed, there is no unanimous agreement about what it means and what it comprises), but rather an attitude, a way of seeing the world and understanding reality. Irony – the recognition of one's own ignorance – and *maieutics* – the art of drawing out an argument – would be the two fundamental moments in this existential inclination that leads teachers to commit themselves to the moral education of their students, fostering their intellectual maturity through dialogue, self-analysis and reflection.

In «Reclaiming the Socratic method in contemporary education», Astrid Acha describes her personal experience in a primary school when trying to implement the Socratic method as a teacher of the philosophy and citizenship subject. She starts by briefly explaining the two phases of the method in the context of the classroom: *irony* is a deconstructive, negative, or preparatory phase that involves asking students questions of the «what is X?» type, with the teacher refuting the answers (the objections are not based on saying the opposite of what the student states, but on saying it in a different way) with the objective being that the students become able to recognise that they are ignorant of something they thought they knew (the first true wisdom, similar to the *docta ignorantia* of the ancients,

would reside in this recognition of our ignorance or of the limits of our knowledge); maieutics, in contrast, is a constructive and positive phase of enquiry that «involves guiding the students' responses towards the universal definition through inductive reasoning» (p. 13), so that the teacher acts as a guide who teaches students to advance by themselves. If the first phase corresponds to the metaphor of the ray, the second is represented by the image of the midwife who helps the children to give birth.

The primary difficulties in implementing the Socratic method in the classroom are the large number of students, the limited closeness, and trust that exists between the teacher and the students, the supposed status of the teacher as an authority figure in full possession of knowledge, curricular requirements, and the need for evaluation of content and of a specific subject matter. Nonetheless, teachers must make an effort to take this desire for self-examination and examination of others, the search for the universal definition and the pedagogical aim of creating good people to the classrooms. Their ultimate goal must be to encourage independent and critical thought among their students, as well as fostering their intellectual and moral maturity.

From an eminently practical perspective, and in the context of philosophical consultancy or guidance, Dries Boele explains in «The benefits of Socratic dialogue» the success that Socratic dialogue has achieved in the Netherlands as a way for groups to consider topics such as responsibility, mutual trust, and ethical values, whether with individuals, in busi-

nesses or in the training of professionals. Boele starts by explaining what this practice entails and what its results are, then analyses the concept of philosophy on which it is based, and finally lists its principal benefits. The final conclusion he reaches is that Socratic dialogue, whose basic slogans are «know yourself» and «dare to use your intelligence», might be regarded as an exercise in personal ethics and an effective tool for developing the art of living.

In «The secret of the Socratic method: Successes and failures», Beatriz Bossi reflects on the maieutic abilities (and weaknesses) displayed by Socrates in some Platonic dialogues such as *Gorgias*, *The Symposium*, and *Phaedrus* to establish how they can act as inspiration in the task of teaching. She concludes that there is a need to consider not just the students' intellectual side but also their emotional side, so that teacher shows that they dominate their art of birthing a discourse but a new way of living.

Beyond its destructive character, already extensively studied by Martha Nussbaum, in «Old and new shame: The powerful recognition of powerlessness through Socratic dialogue» Laura Candi-otto analyses how Socrates uses the sense of shame to achieve the purification of his interlocutors, and questions whether we should reject the figure of the teacher inspired by Socrates, seeing it as a «bad teacher» who humiliates students. To do this, she focusses on analysis of feelings and the role that «emotional intelligence» plays in any shared knowledge-construction process. From the perspective of Socratic dialogue, compassion could even be

reinterpreted in light of the need to turn shame into a sort of love for one's neighbour.

In «The use of the Socratic method in the analysis of texts» Juan José García Norro suggests «developing a procedure that facilitates active learning and discovery by the students of some of the content that comprises a subject area» (p. 93). As a result of the large number of students usually found in classrooms, oral work must be complemented by work on written texts, which are often used as preparatory work for reflection and subsequent group discussion during the learning-teaching process.

Understanding the text is just the start of this task; students must link what the text discusses with phenomena and circumstances from their everyday lives, understanding that it is about something that affects them (despite the age of the author or the apparent distance of the content of the text); finally, the student has to adopt a stance towards the topic covered, that «argues for or against the proposals in the text, that finds new illustrations of what is said in it, that applies what it recommends to other similar situations, etc» (p. 99). The practical example developed step by step by García Norro concerning «The concept of democracy of Classical Athens» is very illustrative.

In «Question, purification, and state of mind», Carmen Segura tries to define the difference between training and education, sets out a reflection about the nature of dialogue, and ends with a proposal for practice based around commentary

on philosophical texts. For his part, José Sánchez Tortosa explains the launch of the «Telemachus Project», an attempt to apply new technologies to the development of the dialectic method among students. And in «How to direct a Socratic dialogue» Kristof Van Rossem sets out the specific case of his experience in managing and guiding Socratic dialogue with university students, defining it as «a conversation in which one or more participants investigate a) the truth of affirmations from one's own experience or from the experience of another person, and b) the value of the arguments that given in these propositions» (p. 140).

Finally, in «Asking about things you already know: Socratic process and teaching philosophy», Guillermo Villaverde López questions the viability of putting into practice the Socratic method in the classroom, while reappraising the figure of Socrates as a support for introducing important topics to students, such as «a) what is philosophy in general; b) what the theoretic/scientific attitude comprises, and what is the relationship between philosophy and science; c) what is the moral attitude, and d) in what way is rational dialogue (the «linguistic play of validity») related to b) and c)» (p. 173).

In conclusion, the Socratic method is shown in this joint publication as a powerful antidote to narrow visions that reduce education to mere technical instruction, as it aims to awaken in the students a true and permanent desire to know, in such a way that they themselves are the active protagonists in their own learning. So, following the classic image of the mid-

wife, the teacher becomes a mentor who accompanies and guides the students and is existentially involved in their all-round education and in their moral develop-

ment, personifying the ethical dimension of true education, since educating is ultimately teaching how to live.

Ernesto Baltar ■

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