

THE SCHOOL: A PLACE OF MEANING AND COMMITMENT

La escuela: lugar de significado y compromiso

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ABSTRACT

Current social phenomena related to children and young people have led to a growing scepticism of the capacity of schools to construct common meanings and to prepare students to participate in a democratic society. The aim of this article is to show how cultural transmission within schools is the basis of the humanisation process by which students are able to construct their own personal identity on solid foundations and to find meaning within their own lives through commitment to the social, cultural, political and economic realities of which they are part. We will present three pressures to which schools are currently subjected, driving them to renounce

their true mission and provide an education emptied of cultural references with all the pernicious effects this entails. Secondly, we will explain how schools can, through cultural transmission, create meaning and enable students to find meaning within their own lives and engage with others within a common space of understanding. Finally, the paper will show how schools foment three dimensions (narration, intelligibility, and responsibility) necessary to live in a democratic society. To conclude, we will stress the fundamental importance of teleological reflection as a guide for educational action, resisting an agenda that undermines the true purpose of education: to instill the kind of freedom that enables individuals to transcend mere appetite and engage in a genuine encounter with others.

Keywords: schools; humanities education; educational innovations; culture; identity; teachers.

RESUMEN

Distintos fenómenos sociales relativos a la infancia y la juventud parecen cuestionar la capacidad de la escuela para crear significados comunes y garantizar la preparación de personas capaces de vivir en democracia. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar que la transmisión cultural que se produce en el seno de la institución escolar es la base de los procesos de humanización que suceden en la escuela al fomentar en los alumnos la construcción de una identidad personal sólida, capaz de encontrar sentido a la propia vida y de comprometerse con la realidad social, cultural, política y económica de la que forma parte. Para ello, se exponen, en primer lugar, tres presiones a las que se encuentra sometida hoy la escuela para que, en aras del progreso, renuncie a la misión que le es propia y sucumba a la tentación de educar en el vacío cultural. A continuación, se defiende el valor de la escuela como generadora, a través de la cultura, de una realidad significativa, que permite hallar sentido a la propia vida y capacita para el encuentro y compromiso con los otros a través de la creación de significados comunes. Por último, se muestra cómo la escuela contribuye a la formación de tres dimensiones (narración, inteligibilidad y responsabilidad) necesarias para vivir en democracia. Como conclusión, se reclama la importancia de la reflexión teleológica como guía de la actuación educativa para resistir a una agenda que pone en riesgo la auténtica educación en libertad: la de la libertad que trasciende a la mera apetencia para comprometerse con el otro.

Palabras clave: escuela; humanidades; innovación educacional; cultura; identidad; docente.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing scepticism of the capacity of educational institutions to prepare young people for the increasingly digital and uncertain world brought on by the exponential development of technology (OECD, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2020). In fact, some have come to affirm that schools may in fact be hindering the learning of essential competences, such as creativity (Robinson & Aronica, 2016). In parallel, the perception of the quality of schools among families has progressively declined (Marchesi *et al.*, 2020; Marchesi & Pérez, 2005; Pérez-Díaz *et al.*, 2009; Orozco-Vargas *et al.*, 2022). Questions about school assignments or the parental PIN have been the subject of intense controversy, revealing the growing public mistrust of educational institutions (Contreras Mazarío, 2021). Additionally, teachers are facing numerous problems within schools themselves, especially regarding regulatory instability and excessive bureaucracy (Sanmartín *et al.*, 2016).

This pervasive discrediting of educational institutions has led to a growing popularity of anti-pedagogical trends (Gil Cantero, 2018), which for decades have denounced the failings of educational institutions (Holt, 1972; 1995), and ever greater interest in alternative education practices such as *home-schooling*, *world-schooling*, *unschooling* or eco-pedagogy, (Morales Valero & Amber Montes, 2021). Although the reductionist view of *home-schooling* insists that it impedes healthy social development of children, a number of studies have found *home-schooling* to be beneficial for socialisation (McCabe *et al.*, 2021; Ray, 2021) and that anti-authoritarian pedagogies have a positive impact on aspects related to self-esteem, emotional self-regulation or self-effectiveness (Ponce-León, 2021; Perpiñà *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to educational scenarios that have stimulated a great deal of interest in *home-schooling* (Portinari, 2020). Thus, “what is questioned is not the need for education, teaching or learning but its purposes, and, above all, its institutionalisation” (Morales Valero & Amber Montes, 2021, p. 113).

In parallel to a growing mistrust of educational institutions, a fever of pedagogical innovation has arisen as a way to defend and reaffirm the relevance of schools. Successful educational experiences in different parts of the world (Ahmed *et al.*, 2016; Lenz *et al.*, 2015) have suggested that new methodologies offer the solution to the pressing problems facing schools today. However, as Calvo (2015) has pointed out, the success of the most innovative schools does not lie in the simple introduction of new methodologies, but rather that this innovation is the result of a serious and profound consideration of “what, who, how and when to educate” (p. 18).

1.1. *Youth disorientation in a liquid world*

A number of studies have revealed data on children and young people which appear to question the success of these educational innovations in fulfilling their democratising goals in educating young people able to commit to themselves and

actively engage in society. Today, young people face formidable anthropological challenges to overcome a pervasive sense of disorientation and to construct their own personal identity.

The omnipresence of screens has led to a form of sensorial overload that distorts the relationship with the real world and produces a profound disquiet (Torralba, 2018). Vision substitutes touch as a vehicle to apprehend reality, losing the distance necessary for contemplation (Han, 2015). Attention is fragmented and the capacity for contemplation is obstructed; to this pervasive feeling of disquiet is added the progressive disappearance of solid anchors in an increasingly liquid context. The adulteration of adults (Recalcati, 2015), the loss of rituals (Han, 2020) or the evaporation of external parameters (Bernal Guerrero, 2011) leave young people at a loss, without references for which to live fully in reality.

The failure of education systems to address these anthropological challenges is reflected in the indices of youth violence both physical and online (Fundación Amigó, 2019); the increasing prevalence of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety or stress among young people (Brown *et al.*, 2018; Wan Ismail *et al.*, 2020); the rising trends in non-substance addiction (Roberts & David, 2020; Vannucci *et al.*, 2020); political apathy; or limited capacity for critical thinking among digital natives (Dumitru, 2020; INJUVE, 2017; Pattier y Reyero, 2022).

In the face of this data, one may ask what has happened to education systems and, especially, why an institution that has the capacity to produce the “moral practices that generate the foundational experiences that make possible a democratic life” (Thoilliez, 2018, p. 309) has failed to perform to its full potential. A look at the changes which have taken place in the last decades show a progressive weakening and even abandonment of the role of schools in the transmission of culture (Bellamy, 2018), generating a profound disorientation among today’s youth.

School contributes to the existence of the world because education, particularly during the period of physical maturation (so-called obligatory education), is not measured by the sum total of notional information it dispenses but rather by opening the door to culture as if a new world [...] If everything is driving our young people to be absent from the world, in an autistic retreat into isolated worlds (technological, virtual, symptomatic), schools remain a bulwark, safeguarding the human, encounter, exchange, friendships and intellectual discovery (Recalcati, 2016, p. 16).

1.2. *The transmission of culture versus the mere teaching of cultural products*

It may seem paradoxical to speak of the loss of transmission at a moment when, thanks to new technologies, students enjoy unprecedented access to cultural products. However, this overlooks the most important aspect of culture: its subjective dimension (Amilburu *et al.*, 2018) and the process of interiorisation it involves. Culture from this perspective supposes, above all, the cultivation of the self (Llano, 2017). This

requires an interiorisation of culture that goes far beyond the logic of possession (a logic that can be applied if culture is reduced merely to cultural products), and lies in the encounter with others (López-Quintás, 2009).

Transmitting culture in this dual sense, objective and subjective, enables the individual to enjoy presence in the world, comprehensively inhabiting reality rather than being merely in transit (Marín, 2019). Thus, the loss of cultural transmission reduces the person from inhabitant to a passer-by where the only criteria are utility and profitability (Bellamy, 2020). Hadjadj (2020) maintains that the modern approach to culture is in fact contrary to its true essence, and that cultural products are used to “flee from the hard work of education” (p. 16). An education based on this approach to culture condemns students to a form of “cultural anorexia” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 15), resulting in a loss of meaning and rootedness.

The transmission of culture as a form of self-cultivation supposes going beyond a mere knowledge of cultural products, involving the students in all of their dimensions. In addition to knowledge, transmission implies skills, experiences and habits that “are only assumed through the exercise of human faculties - feelings, understanding, will - towards one’s own perfection” (Amilburu *et al.*, 2018, p. 172). Cultural transmission is not only an intellectual exercise but is also an integral and integrating experience of various human dimensions and faculties that sets the individual on the path to plenitude and the construction of their personal identity:

Only if I in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial (Taylor, 2018, p. 76).

The aim of this article is to defend the principle of cultural transmission which takes place when school plays a fundamental role in the process of humanisation and construction of individual identity, a necessary pillar of democratic society. Thus, schools and teachers, through a profound teleological reflection, must resist the pressure of those who insist transmission is obsolete rather than the fundamental purpose of education. This article will explore the current pressures for schools to abdicate their mission and the risks should this take place. We will examine the manner in which cultural transmission through the creation of personal and common meaning is essential to both personal fulfilment and life in community.

2. INNOVATE OR PERISH?

Today, teachers and schools appear to be presented with a false dichotomy which systematically counterposes cultural transmission with new teaching methodologies. However, “transmission does not preclude innovation, change and creativity” (Amilburu *et al.*, 2018, p. 190). These pressures present the risk of three great

reductionisms: limit the student to a mere *homo faber*, shrink the role of the teacher to a merely technical function and inhibit the development of human freedom to a mere capacity for action. At heart, these three reductionisms overlook the fact that education “is not to inform about certain content or certain values but rather to create the subject from an interior truth” (Noriega, 2018, p. 23).

2.1. *From knowledge that liberates to the utility of knowledge: the reduction of the student to homo faber*

For centuries, three words have been closely related: truth, light and knowledge. In fact, many of the mottos of the oldest universities in the world continue to include the Greek words *veritas*, *lux* and *sapientia*; for centuries it has been understood that through knowledge people could illuminate the truth and that this was inexhaustible (Llano, 2015). However, in contemporary society, where technical-scientific knowledge is regarded as the only manner to comprehend reality, notions of the truth as a domain and reality as a mystery (Marcel, 1969) have lost their meaning and their credibility. We find ourselves in an era of post-truth, bringing with it grave consequences for learning, the education of young people and social progress (Ibáñez-Martín, 2015). The reigning relativism has resulted in the blurring of rules and regulations and the manipulation (Laudó, 2012) of education vacated of all moral purpose (Gil Cantero, 2008). According to Enkvist (2009), we are subject to a dictatorship of opinion, where the substantive criteria have lost all importance. “Schools no longer there to educate the uneducated, but rather to make the uneducated believe they are educated. [...] Everyone should be able to take part in any class without any prior knowledge” (p. 104).

In the midst of this relativist scenario, where all anchor points have vanished, an idolatry of technology has taken hold. Society has ceased to be based on performance, becoming one based on self-exploitation. Propelled on a wave of excessive positivity, many people have raised up work as an absolute value, becoming the *animal laborans*, (Han, 2017). This primacy of technology and scientific reasoning has entered schools through education in competences. When competences are decoupled from cultural transmission there is the risk that education becomes a mere acquisition of skills, reducing the student to the condition of *homo faber* (Luri, 2020) and dismissing the notion of the student as being, above all, *homo quaerens*: a seeker of meaning. The impossibility of imparting competences within a cultural vacuum is illustrated by the reductionism embedded in the term “learning to learn”, if competences are stripped of cultural transmission (Crato, 2020). Although new technologies offer the possibility of accessing vast stores of information with a simple click, “knowledge is required both to search for knowledge and to judge the value of the knowledge found. Above all, true knowledge is necessary to produce true knowledge” (Luri, 2020, p. 31).

Here then is the first pressure to which teachers are unconsciously subjected: behind the façade of teaching competences lies the risk of reducing the student to mere technical capacity, ignoring a fundamental aspect of the students as one “seeking transcendence and fulfilment, called always to go further beyond. To dismiss or to renounce this vocation is to mutilate their humanity and to frustrate their existence” (Abellán-García *et al.*, 2018, p. 800). It is essential that education policies do not reduce the notion of competences to a mere set of skills, but rather to reaffirm the humanistic and integral vision of the person. A number of international organisations have highlighted the importance that education does not simply develop a set of aptitudes but truly fosters “the capacities necessary for individuals to lead a life of dignity and meaning” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 37).

From this perspective, cultural transmission, far from being a constraint on acquiring competences, gives this type of education a much more profound and coherent meaning (Crespí & García-Ramos, 2020). Cultural transmission constructs the relation between competences and the great questions of existence which is where true meaning can only be found.

2.2. *From teacher as transmitter to teacher as facilitator: horizontality in the education relationship*

In recent years, the phenomenon of *burnout* has received ample attention. A systematic review of existing scholarship recently found that the majority of research has focused primarily on identifying a correlation between *burnout* and a number of socio-demographic, academic, professional, psychological and physical health variables (Pinel Martínez *et al.*, 2019; García-Gil *et al.*, 2022). Professor Santoro (2013, 2019) has highlighted the importance of regarding this phenomenon by considering the moral character of the teaching profession itself. According to her research, when the moral integrity of students, of teachers, or of education itself is perceived as under threat, teachers will often chose to abandon the profession. In light of these studies, it may be instructive to consider if the changes in the nature of the teaching profession in recent years is related to the significant growth of the *burnout* syndrome.

The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition (Arendt, 1996, p. 207).

The transition of teacher as transmitter to teacher as facilitator has three broad consequences: the distress of teachers, the increase in disruptive behaviour in classrooms and the loss of references. Firstly, new methodologies are oriented towards giving the greatest protagonism possible to the student. In the transition from transmitter to facilitator, the teacher gives up what had been the most logical answer to the question of their educational role. According to Ibáñez-Martín (2015)

this answer is: “My role is firstly to teach a subject. I am here because I have been charged with teaching certain knowledge” (p. 35). In a society which demands teachers educate without transmitting, teachers stand before their students with an “anguishing sensation of intellectual and moral defencelessness” (Barrio Maestre, 2008, p. 85). Under the guise of adapting to the needs of digital natives, “teachers are asked not to teach but to merely organise the conditions of their students’ learning” (Bellamy, 2018, p. 122). One may ask if the needs of these digital natives are so different from those of previous generations (Judd, 2018), since they, as with their predecessors, must make use of their freedom and when this freedom is drained of knowledge there is the risk this can lead anywhere (Luri, 2020).

This change in the role of teachers has undermined their authority in the eyes of their students, of parents and of society. The authority of the educator lies in the fact that the teacher is recognised as the person from whom the student will receive culture and the humanisation that it brings. Stripped of the moral authority transmission confers, the teacher is now obliged to win the respect of the student through the continuous dispensing of positive reinforcements, resulting in a horizontalization of the educational relationship and the loss of the symbolic difference between generations. This supposes “the absence of adults able to exercise their educational function and to present alternatives which is the basis of all education processes” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 42). Furthermore, by renouncing their role as transmitter, the teacher leaves the student adrift in a world without references, where students, subject to a constructivism emptied of any meaningful references, faces the challenge of constructing their own individual identity.

A pedagogical narrative centred on identity aspires to provide, if not light, then at least some human warmth and vitality; understanding of education as a pathway for each individual to find culture, within a context, in the wake of the Post-modernist critique, that assumes contingency and uncertainty of life in the world, and the increasingly subtle threat of convergence into a uniform and collective narrative (Bernal Guerrero, 2011, p. 299).

As is the case with competences, through the prism of innovation, teachers give up the essence of their role: to be teachers of humanity, a task which requires cultural transmission. However, the new methodologies and cultural transmission are not per se mutually exclusive. They can in fact be complementary, providing there is critical reflection on the aspects which allow the teacher to perform their true mission.

2.3. From autonomy as goal to autonomy as premise: limits as discovery of interior freedom

The third pressure schools are subjected to are those associated with the notion of student autonomy. The child must have autonomy to discover the world and

learn for themselves. The emphasis on student autonomy overlooks the fact that genuine autonomy is above all the ultimate goal of education, that is, to achieve self-mastery, necessary for personal maturity and the foundation of a democratic society (Ruiz Corbella *et al.*, 2013). To achieve this goal the transmission of culture and the central role of the teacher is paramount since “education is essentially a light on the next generation, within the tragedy of a life which, as Ortega said, is given to us but not ready-made” (Ibáñez-Martín, 2015, p. 63).

It is significant that, in an age of mass consumption, we dismiss the importance of making responsibility and autonomy the fundamental goals of education; both of which permit individuals to transcend mere appetite and to cultivate genuine human freedom: interior freedom (Frankl, 2016). According to Han (2020), companies have wrapped up consumption in emotion, and encourage us to indulge our appetites; for this, schools must renounce educating responsibility and discipline in favour of encouraging a mere desire to have. Educating the will is very difficult if an essential and co-substantial element of the person is lacking: limits. While limits can often appear as external, arbitrary restrictions imposed by institutions, such as schools, in reality these are inscribed in our ontological condition and constitute a unique opportunity to engage with the “most profound questions and aspirations of man, the need for salvation, the desire for a full and happy life and a response to the questions of the meaning of life and the origin of reality” (Larrú, 2018, p. 155). Thus, far from constraining the autonomy of the student, limits represent an ideal opportunity for their personal growth (Reyero & Gil Cantero, 2019), especially when accompanied by critical reflection in which they can understand and internalise certain norms.

To educate in freedom is to educate in responsibility: an educated citizen is one who, before acting, considers the consequences of their actions [...] Democracy is based on the strength of free and educated citizens who understand the values they defend and the long and arduous historic struggle it took to achieve a society based on justice, democracy and freedom (Esteve, 2010, pp. 182-183).

3. SCHOOL: A BASTION OF MEANING

The three pressures described above demonstrate the dangers of exchanging teleology for methodology as the guiding light of education action. Thus, as the new generation, through self-harm and violence, cries out for meaning in their lives (Restán, 2016), the great question facing teachers and schools is not methodology but rather meaning.

3.1. School: a place to find the meaning of life through engagement with culture

The principal challenge of schools is to help students to become truly themselves. “The path between myself and my true self leads necessarily through the

intermediation of others, through the mediation of the inheritance handed down by humanity which, in the work of civilisations, also leads towards others” (Bellamy, 2018, p. 102). Thus, the mission of education is intrinsically united to the transmission of culture, allowing the individual to expand their vision of themselves and construct their personal identity on solid foundations and in its various dimensions; and it is in this process of humanisation where the promises of the democratisation of education reside.

The person, although they live in the exterior world, in reality inhabits an interior world. Regarding the student as *homo viator* supposes the recognition that “the ability to construct narrations and to understand them is fundamental to the discovery of a personal world within the world of life” (Bernal Guerrero, 2011, p. 294). School contributes, through the transmission of culture, to the construction of these narrations through the understanding of the world, the learning of language and contemplation. Firstly, culture provides the knowledge necessary to situate and humanly inhabit the historical reality in which one lives. “To be in the world requires understanding, perhaps partial and fragmentary, but man needs to comprehensively inhabit their life in order to live humanly: no one is properly in a place (nor in a time) if they don’t know where they are” (Marín, 2019, p. 12). Secondly, thanks to language, not only can a person communicate with others but can also explore their interior selves. Given that language is a vehicle for thought and reflection, the broader a person’s vocabulary the better they can express their opinions, feelings or judgements and, perhaps more importantly, discern these in themselves (Llano, 1999, p. 151). By teaching grammar, improving handwriting or encouraging the habit of reading, teachers open the door to true critical thinking, providing students with the tools necessary for internal dialogue and reflection. However, in a world buzzing with the constant noise and overstimulation of new technologies, schools offer students the ability to discover something even more powerful than words: silence (Torrallba, 2005). Silence allows students to engage with powerful questions about their own personal identity, their life and its meaning.

Secondly, school permits the student to discover themselves as a being of encounter. “Man is, by nature, a being in need; and, among the primary needs that afflicts him is the need for culture” (Bellamy, 2018, p. 99). The discovery of the relational nature of the person is one of the fundamentals of a commitment to a democratic society, permitting the transformation of “what one *de facto* desires into what can *legitimately* desire – a transformation that can never be based on one’s own views or desires but requires the participation what is or who are others” (Biesta, 2017, p. 21). This transformation of desire is the key to the ability to commit oneself to the fundamentals of democratic citizenship. Finally, culture also opens a door to the discovery of one’s own biography and an understanding of one’s own history within history. This encounter with tradition provides meaningful relevance for the construction of one’s own personal identity: references.

Within our liquid world (Bauman, 2005), the mission of school as a transmitter of culture continues to be as relevant as in previous times, since it is through this that individuals can live in a truly human way: inhabiting and being inhabited by the world.

3.2. *School: a place for the construction of shared meanings*

Lipovetsky (1993) defined our age with a single word: emptiness. One of the spheres which has most suffered from this emptiness is language, the cause the current difficulties in creating common spaces of understanding.

Without the proper language we cannot think about ourselves nor our society other than through the inadequate concepts offered by a culture constructed largely on “quantum” and ‘ludens’ parameters, that is, on the mechanical-quantifiable and on play (Navarro-Valls, 2005, p. 5).

The disappearance of common frames of reference in which words take on meaning, combined with a dictatorship of opinion, brings with it a difficulty in recognising oneself, and dialogue and encounter with others. Teachers may restore the power of language to establish common frames of reference, while schools can show students that the most properly human experiences, such as suffering, love, freedom, justice, etc, are not relative realities but rather they are perceived through a form of reason that lies beyond mere technical know-how. “History, tradition, observation, trust, even poetry and literature have important insights to offer” (Ibáñez-Martín, 2015, p. 41). Through the Humanities, schools can offer the possibility of shared meaning, helping to reveal a truth in the concept of humanity through natural law and that questions about individual dignity and fulfilment are not relative (Ibáñez-Martín, 2015) and can be engaged within a common frame of reference. It can thus be affirmed that, in a world dominated by the pragmatic logic of technology, schools safeguard the usefulness of that which appears to be useless: “Knowledge in itself constitutes a bulwark against delusions of the omnipotence of money and utilitarianism” (Ordine, 2013, p. 15).

Thus, school can create common frames of reference where not only words take on meaning but also other human values and virtues. The cultivation of the humanities, denigrated by a runaway scientific rationalism has the capacity to reveal there are more important purposes in life, that individuals enjoy certain inalienable rights by virtue of their humanity and that human freedom cannot be reduced to the mere satisfaction of appetites but that achieves fulfilment in the service of the common good (Larrú, 2018; Brown & Ion, 2022).

Additionally, schools also contribute to the creation of meaning by providing the experiences that help overcome the barriers of social class, fomenting dialogue among people from very diverse backgrounds. This is one of the great democratising promises of education, the possibility to offer powerful and liberating knowledge.

Schools have the “capacity to open the door to culture as if a new world, a world other than that which sustains family relations” (Recalcati, 2016, p. 16). Education offers the promise that all students, regardless of their social background, can develop their full potential and exercise their personal liberty in a profound and meaningful way. Schools must not fall into the trap of a “false democracy of mediocrity” (Steiner & Ladjali, 2016, p. 119), but must recall that it is through cultural transmission that true social equality and commitment to shared values of compassion, care for others, tolerance and social harmony.

4. CONCLUSION: SCHOOL AS A PLACE OF MEANING

One of the most important psychological processes of youth is the construction of one’s own personal identity (Guardini, 2015). Responding to the question “Who are you” is of paramount importance and the answer will determine a multitude of life decisions a person will make over the course of their life in the future. Technology, mass production or the facility for consumption exalts the notion of personal liberty as an absolute, and what may appear as a great advantage: the possibility of limitless choice; poses a great risk of disorientation. The sensation of liquidity that surrounds the daily life of individuals impedes their ability to commit themselves, to make meaningful, permanent decisions while also undermining our democratic institutions. According to Esteve (2010):

At the moment, through carelessness in education, we produce individuals unwilling to defend their values so as to avoid problems, who are incapable of self-control and prone to aggression, who believe they have the right to decide on the lives of others, who consider others inferior, will demand a repeal of civil liberties to increase their control over others (pp. 182-183).

Today, schools and teachers are struggling to resist an agenda that aims to substitute teleological reflection as a guide to education for methodological changes based on the criteria of efficacy. In pursuing a supposed adaptation of educational institutions to the technological challenges of the new millennium, schools are pressured into three grave reductionisms which, under the guise of innovation, pose the hidden danger of producing individuals who are highly manipulable, believing themselves to be free while in fact they are enslaved by the tyranny of their appetites.

Nevertheless, as this article has shown, innovation and the transmission of culture are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary; new pedagogical methods can positively contribute to cultural transmission. The true dichotomy is found between those methodological changes that are the product of teleological reflection and those in which the discourse of innovation disguises a pedagogical relativism. Given this panorama, it is essential to rethink the purpose and goals of education, while providing teachers of these disciplines with the training necessary to better identify and achieve these ends (García-Martínez *et al.*, 2022). Philosophy,

History, Anthropology or Theory of Education are essential subjects within teacher training, both for initial and reinforcement training programs, in resisting the calls for schools to give up their true mission: to education individuals able to commit to themselves, to others and to their times.

These goals can only be achieved if students have the tools to construct a solid and well-founded personal identity. Narration, intelligibility and responsibility are essential elements in this effort (MacIntyre, 2013) and must be incorporated into school curricula. However, these three dimensions are embedded within and can only be taught through culture. Firstly, culture plays a primordial role in the narrative competence of the student given that, ultimately, it is “memory, constructed through personal and collective experience, that binds us to our biography, our history and our identity” (Bernal Guerrero, 2009, p. 138); secondly, cultural transmission makes reality intelligible, allowing young people to perform the action which is most properly human: contemplation. In a world dominated by scientism, it is through culture that school can offer fresh vistas and avenues to engage in the fundamental questions of existence.

A wisdom which aims to construct itself using only empirical reason is unable to respond to the great existential questions, which require drawing from that current of ethical experiences that constitute a historical wisdom that contains, both critically and passively, the wealth of knowledge human beings have acquired from all the possible sources at our disposal (Ibáñez-Martín, 2021, p. 40).

Finally, culture enables students to see themselves as contingent, as needing others: those that preceded them and those that surround them. Thus, the individual discovers their relational dimension, the importance of community and the responsibilities this entails. Thus, the discovery of the dialogic nature of the person (Yepes & Aranguren, 2003) is an essential remedy to the social ills of violence, radicalisation and extremism.

In an era when young people, with only a click, have access to vast amounts of information, online videogames and shopping or virtual relationships, providing an education in and for freedom is no doubt the great challenges of the new millennium. Therefore, education cannot be reduced to a “technical function or action based on formulas that seek predetermined ends rather than the personal fulfilment and growth” (Larrú, 2018, p. 158). We must stand for schools as transmitters of culture, defend an education that not only recognises the immense value of providing guidance to students but also that regards culture, understood as the cultivation of the spirit, as able to spur students to engage, through the experience of goodness, truth and beauty (Llano, 1985), in the deepest questions of existence. Schools must, through culture, create meaning in young people’s lives and the common shared values that make a democratic society possible.

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