

Beyond death education from preschool education: Towards a Radical and Inclusive Pedagogy?

Agustín de la Herrán Gascón

Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain

Correspondence: agustin.delaherran@uam.es

Summary: It is normal to live in an appreciable unconsciousness, caused by generalized egocentrism and immaturity. Education based on competencies and knowledge is completely insufficient and contradictory, if we are talking about full education. Our education has lost sight of education. It is a decaffeinated and existential action, which excludes human depth from its corpus. That is why it lacks essential evolutionary meaning. Education based on the ego-consciousness vector is a necessary and undemanded complement to evolve inwardly, both personally and socially. It is heir to the teachings of great radical pedagogues, such as the masters of the Tao (Lao Tse, Zhuang Zi, Lie Zi or Huang Di), or the first Buddha. It is possible to enter through the atrium, through the main gate. The beginning may be the apparent end: death. It is not possible to educate for life without including the awareness of death. Education that includes death is a branch of a larger tree: the education of conscience. Pedagogy and Didactics of death, as sciences of education for death par antonomasia, propose to move from taboo and invention to educational imperative, with a radical and inclusive approach, that is, starting with us. The field of Death Education is essential, but there is a certain epistemological stagnation. We propose its rooting in the education of consciousness from preschool or early childhood education, as it is suitable for all education to evolve.

Keywords: Death education, Preschool education, Pedagogy of death, Radical and inclusive approach to education, Radical and inclusive pedagogy

Research on Death Education dates back to the 20s of the 20th centuries in the socio-health field [1]. Its application to the education of children and adolescents in schools burst, mainly, in the 1970s. The predominant focus revolves around the death of a loved or significant one and the attention to the student in bereavement situations [2,3]. However, death and bereavement are only one of more than twenty meanings of death relevant to education.

Pedagogy of death is a discipline whose meaning is a more conscious life through education [1,4]. It includes four complementary didactic approaches [4,5]: (1) the curricular, which seeks the normalization of death in the

education demanded, from the teaching of disciplines and transversal themes; (2) the palliative, oriented to educational accompaniment, from tutoring, in situations of grief; (3) the phenomenal and evolutionary, referring to the fact that known nature is an evolving totality, where life is an exception and death an evolutionary imperative; from this point of view, there is no before or after, so that the concept of death is naturally transcended; and (4) the meditative, from which the control and death of the ego, foolishness and human stupidity are requirements of an awakening of consciousness.

A synthesis of the four approaches has to do with the fact

Received: Oct.4,2022; Revised: Oct.14,2022; Accepted: Oct.17,2022; Published: Oct.20,2022

Copyright ©2023 Agustín de la Herrán Gascón.

DOI:

This is an open-access article distributed under a CC BY license (Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

that each person can be conscious of being in evolution. From this point of view, we conclude that each human being can be a missing link of himself, or a possible path between the being that he is and the being that he could become. Therefore, Nietzsche [6] said that the human being is a transit and a sunset, a rope stretched between the animal and the superman. This ideal implies moving towards a humanity composed of well-educated, more lucid, competent, humble, wiser, and aware of their essential nature.

The only possibility to survive as a species is to evolve. And to evolve is to educate ourselves to form ourselves from egocentrism to consciousness, from generalized social immaturity to a paideia more and more aware that everything depends on our education. There is no other way but to start at the beginning. But in this challenge we find several possible beginnings, those which, ideally, can be undertaken simultaneously:

Interiorizing, attending to the interior over the exterior, placing the center of gravity of life in the non-being, as Socrates, Zhuang zi or Ramana Maharshi taught us from different cultures and moments in history.

Recognizing that our education is incomplete and eminently superficial. It is developed by taking as its cause and destiny the swell of life, and not its depth.

Deducing, perhaps, that educating for life is foolish, because life, socially perceived, is a disaster; therefore, it is contradictory to educate for its reproduction [7], for its continuity. It is prescriptive to educate to change life, and make it better, radically, and all its contexts, both external and internal. Because if it is evident that the social balance is unbalanced and unjust, on the personal levels the deep education is a desert and a not minor or unnoticed failure.

Warning that the student is not the center of education, it has never been. With the education of the pupils, it happens the same as when one travels in airplane and there is a loss of oxygen. Since the child or the person who is unable to look after him/herself is the priority, so who must put on the mask first? Precisely because of this assessment and awareness, we take care of ourselves first. Well, that is what is exceptional.

Differentiating between existential and essential life and education. Our education is not a full education. It is, above all, pseudo-education, or quasi-education, as Cebes [8], a disciple of Socrates, pointed out, which needs to be revisited and understood. Our peripheral education only strengthens the existential wing. The wing of the essential is weak, it is useless for flight. Therefore, the bird of education, of society and of each person, normally, cannot fly and when it tries, it will be damaged, frustrated and compensated with other socially and personally attractive claims.

Educating ourselves deeply, with meaning. The meaning of deep education goes, as already indicated, from the ego to the conscience. But consciousness is not enough. Behind it, lucid action is required. Only a few pedagogues, who were also educators - such as Lao Tse or Siddhartha

Gautama - reached the end of the educational path. Socrates' consciousness and teaching fell far short of the level of awareness and education of the first Buddha [10, 17].

Realizing that, therefore, most adults, seasoned with their attachments, greed, ideologies and pseudo-education, live in ignorance, unconsciousness and disorientation. And this permanent inadvertence and distraction have an educational nature, related to the incompleteness of the education that has been learned and internalized.

Deducing that, from all of the above, the great challenge of contemporary education is to discover what it called 'education' really is, it is not 'full education', or 'total education'. Our educational systems leave us all either the half-educated or poorly educated. There is no third possibility. It is a very serious scandal, it is a silent tragedy, unnoticed.

Current education is competency-based: it is based on and aims at competencies. Focusing education on competencies is a pedagogical contradiction [9], because it is both essential and insufficient. The transition from a competency-based education to an education based on awareness and competencies at the same time is fundamental.

The challenge of deep and superficial education at the same time, based on consciousness and competencies, has four precious auxiliary potentials. Two of them are possibilities and the other two are conveniences. We will comment briefly on them below.

The first possibility is to evolve from the current goals of education to the new, more complex and conscious goals. The current aims of education are shared by the international organizations that guide and condition education (UNESCO, OECD, World Bank, OEI, ALECSO, etc.) and education systems in general. They are compatible with competency-based education but not with consciousness-based education. In fact, they are based on learning and knowledge, do not include, in the foreground, loss or elimination, and do not serve to awaken. They do not address the deep dimension of the human being. Their educational result is a normality of unconscious lives. Some of them can become dead in life, and, at the same time, be educational and socially successful. The consensual ends of education are not for full education, but for the socio-economic health of national and international systems. They confirm, from the radical and inclusive approach [10], that education lost sight of itself a long time ago, and that it merely continues to make its way as it goes, without realizing that it is lost, that it lacks a compass. Because education is disoriented, society is also disoriented: it lacks direction, it does not know what it is doing, nor what it is doing for. The chaotic global educational and social symphony places the human species at high potential risk, being more akin to self-destruction than to its possible evolution. New goals are needed that, in the name of science (Pedagogy, General Didactic), to enhance the inner or educational evolution of the human being. These new goals of education must be pedagogically ambitious, and aspire and work for a full education. This is equivalent to focusing and aiming at the evolution from egocentrism to consciousness..

Therefore, concretely, they would have to refer to the loss of egocentrism or foolishness, to the advance in complexity of consciousness, to the awakening of consciousness, to the essential self-knowledge, to humanity, to inner or educational human evolution, etc.

The second possibility is to be able to move from two-dimensional curricula to radical curricula. All our curricula respond to social demands. Their education, teaching and learning respond, almost in their entirety, to socially required and demanded issues. But what sense does it make to identify what is demanded and what is needed? Is everything that is needed demanded? Our curricula are built on two dimensions: one disciplinary and the other transversal. Perhaps because they are two-dimensional, they are flat and therefore lack depth. The third curricular dimension was called "radical" [4,5] and responds to a metaphor: what happens to this dimension is the same as the roots of a tree: they cannot be seen, they sustain and nourish it and, although it seems that they do not exist, they are its most vital part. They are present in the whole being. It is not the other way around. Without them, the tree could not live. The radical dimension of the curriculum corresponds to a radical dimension of education and of the social and personal reality of the human being. It has two polarities: one 'negative' and the other 'positive':

The 'negative' is so called because education takes place with its loss. Its issues or challenges are like the ballast of a hot air balloon: their elimination and absence are equivalent to the elevation of education of individuals, groups, institutions, nations, etc. Some of these areas or challenges are egocentrism, stupidity, superficiality, immaturity, conditioning, prejudice, greed, hypocrisy, incoherence, mediocrity, indoctrination, planned or systematic lying, partial reason, intellectual myopia, duality, bias, etc.

Positive', on the other hand, focuses on desirable presences. We would highlight consciousness, the search for truth, the search for virtue, the search for awakening, death, essential self-knowledge, evolving humanity, love, prenatal education, meditation, etc.

The first convenience is not to confuse education with its opposite, indoctrination. To indoctrinate is to introduce into Plato's cave [11], to bind to the bottom of the cave, to do everything possible to immobilize and, once securely fastened, to amputate or stretch, if possible, to death, as Procrustes, son of Poseidon and psychopathic innkeeper, used to do. To educate is to open non-dually. That is, not only to share that one can go out, but to teach that outside the cave there is no bad smell, that one can feel the sun rise and set, that sometimes there is rain that wets the face, that one can walk on the grass and live in direct contact with nature. And also, to teach that, if you want, you can go back into the cave, interact with those who remain in it, eat with them or sleep there, if it is too cold outside. Today the normal thing is to educate and, simultaneously, to indoctrinate nationally, ideologically, religiously, militarily, culturally, economically, etc. The greatest teaching of the Marquis de Condorcet [12] has been forgotten. Today

education and educational systems serve to slurp and blow at the same time, within the framework, not of hidden curricula, but of blatant curricula [13]. Because it makes no sense to form and deform at the same time. Therefore, the second great task of education, and therefore of Pedagogy and General Didactic, is to discriminate between educating and indoctrinating, and to cleanse education of pollutants and sources of toxins, as proposed by the Marquis Marie-Jean-Antoine Nicolas de Caritat.

The second desirability is to anticipate the initial education as early as possible, in an appropriate manner, and to promote it as much as possible. If higher education were to be associated with any level of education, it would be preschool or early childhood education. Marta Mata, the president of the State School Council (2004-2014), the highest advisory body on education in Spain, said: "the first two years is the whole of life". Therefore, preschool, or infant stage teachers are the decisive professionals: it would be good for society if the best were trained and motivated in this teaching. Although we may initially agree with the spirit of the previous letters, it is necessary to qualify and discuss some of the previous statements, as inaccurate or false:

The first is that the condition of 'higher education', however much it is repeated, is not determined by any level of education. University education is not higher education [14]. But neither is preschool or early childhood education, by it is preschool or early childhood education. This level of education is distinguished, in the best cases, by its complexity, by the training of its teachers, by its didactic richness, by exporting methodology and didactic innovations to other subsequent stages. But there is only higher education when what is sought is a full, complete education, and that only happens when the educator is a particularly conscious being. It does not matter, then, whether didactic communication takes place in preschool, primary school, compulsory secondary school, high school, university, vocational training, formal or informal education.

The decisive educational period is not the first two years. Nor is it only the first year, nor the first six years of a child's life. The decisive educational period is the initial education, understood as that which takes place from before conception to the first 2-3 years of a child's life. After this period, all the others are still decisive, albeit in a different way. Therefore, before becoming children, before the beginning of childhood, before imagining pre-school or kindergarten pupils, one has lived a uterine period, first as an egg, then as an embryo, then as a fetus. It makes no pedagogical sense to omit this period in education, so crucial, so determinant [15]. The uterine being is, by definition, the 'great learner'. Currently, the 'prenatal education' is taken care of by Health Sciences (Medicine, Psychology, etc.). This is the time of Prenatal Pedagogy [16]. There is no educational system whose first students are pregnant parents, with children, if any. The training of professionals in prenatal education, from Pedagogy and

Health Sciences, is just beginning. When they are available, they should be, together with their colleagues in preschool or early childhood education, the best trained, the most motivated and the best paid.

Until that moment arrives, preschool or early childhood education has the honor of being the most decisive educational stage that educational systems are proposing. From here, two possibilities for educational planning, development, and evaluation open. The first is the one favored by a precompetential/competential, active, constructive, meaningful, relevant, transformative, integral, creative, critical, social and values-based teaching. It could coincide with the best versions of our teaching. The second, complementary to the previous one, is the one favored by a teaching for a full or radical and inclusive education [10]. The adjectives 'radical' and 'inclusive' mean deep, invisible, nourishing, pedagogically decisive, like the roots of a plant, and containing the previous one (competential, active, etc.). This teaching is both external or superficial and internal or deep at the same time. But its center is not meaningful and relevant learning, it is not even knowledge: it is education based on conscience, which synthesizes the areas of the radical dimension of education, curriculum and training mentioned above.

A final note is that radical areas or challenges, both 'positive' and 'negative', not need to occupy more curricular space. It is not necessarily a matter of proposing situations, projects or didactic units to deal with egocentrism, immaturity, love, meditation or death with three- or five-year-old students. It is a matter of preschool or infant educators being trained in competencies and awareness, and from this matesis or living, experimental synthesis, being able to communicate and share education with their students by example. The road to this other 'new education' is long. It can begin with death education, because death is almost always the first on the ladder that goes from the existential to the essential. Therefore, death education, yes, but, better, approached from the pedagogy of death and going far beyond bereavement.

Without the essentials, without including egocentrism, conscience and essential self-knowledge, education is not education, or anything like it. It is necessary to put an end to this fiction, to this farce around instrumental education, which barely amounts to fourth-division education. It cannot be called 'education' what has forgotten the depth of the person and of oneself, in favor of an externalized and externalizing society. Let us hope that it is not too late. Let us consider it is not too soon.

References

- [1] Rodríguez, P., Herrán, A. de la & Cortina, M. Antecedentes internacionales de Pedagogía de la muerte. *Foro de la educación*. 2019; 17 (26):259-276. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/fde.628>
- [2] Berg, C. D. Helping children accept death and dying through group counseling. *Personal and Guidance Journal*. 1982;57(3): 169-172. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1978.tb05135.x>
- [3] Cordell Perkes, A. & Schildt, R. Death-related attitudes of adolescent males and females. *Death Studies*. 1978;2(4): 359-368. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187908253319>
- [4] de la Herrán, Agustín. *¿ Todos los caracoles se mueren siempre? Cómo tratar la muerte en educación infantil [Do all snails always die? How to deal with death in early childhood education]*. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre; 2000.
- [5] Herrán Gascón, A. D. L., Cortina Selva, M., & González Sánchez, I. La muerte y su didáctica: Manual para Educación Infantil, Primaria y Secundaria. [Death and its Didactic. Manual for preschool, primary and secondary education]. 2006. Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/11162/61361>
- [6] Nietzsche, F. *Así habló Zaratustra [Thus Spoke Zarathustra]*. Alianza. Penguin Clásicos. 1972.
- [7] Bourdieu, P. *Contrafuegos 2. Por un movimiento social europeo [Firewalls 2. For a European social movement]*. Barcelona: Anagrama; 2001.
- [8] Cebes. *Tabla. Disertaciones. Fragmentos [Table. Dissertations. Fragments]*. Gredos. 1995
- [9] Herrán, A. de la. Formación y transversalidad universitarias. *Tendencias pedagógicas*. 2005;(10):223-256. Available from: <https://radicaleinclusiva.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/formatrans.pdf>
- [10] Herrán, A. de la. Enfoque radical e inclusivo de la formación. *REICE. Revista iberoamericana sobre calidad, eficacia y cambio en educación*. 2014;12(2):163-264. Available from: <http://www.rinace.net/reice/numeros/arts/vol12num2/art8.pdf>
- [11] Platón. *La república [The republic]*. Alhambra. 1987
- [12] Condorcet, M. J. A. de C., Marqués de. *Cinco memorias sobre la instrucción pública y otros escritos [Five memoirs on public education and other writings]*. Madrid: Ediciones Morata; 2000
- [13] Herrán Gascón, A. de la & González Sánchez, I. *El ego docente, punto ciego de la enseñanza, el desarrollo profesional y la formación del profesorado [The teaching ego, a blind spot in teaching, professional development and teacher training]*. Universitat. 2002.
- [14] Herrán, A. de la & Sabbi, C. R. ¿Por qué la educación universitaria no es la educación superior? Una mirada radical e inclusiva. *Imagens da educação*. 2021;11(2):30-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4025/imagenseduc.v10i3.55815>
- [15] Hurtado, M., Cuadrado, S. & Herrán, A. de la. Hacia una Pedagogía Prenatal. Una Propuesta Educativa. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*. 2015;67(1): 151-168. Available from: <https://rieoei.org/historico/deloslectores/6809Hurtado.pdf>
- [16] Herrán, A. de la. Educación prenatal y Pedagogía prenatal. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*. 2015;69(1): 9-37. Available from: <http://www.rieoei.org/deloslectores/7195.pdf>
- [17] Herrán, A. de la. Fundamentos para una Pedagogía del saber y del no saber [Foundations for a Pedagogy of Knowing and Not Knowing]. *Revista Boletín Redipe*. 2018; 7.(3): 25-28. Available from: <https://goo.gl/owwaW4>