

## A HOLISTIC VISION OF EDUCATION BASED ON THE COMPLEXITY AND HARMONY OF THE HUMAN BEING

*The education of each student, considered from his or her radical dignity, and subject of an integral educational action, should aspire to interweave all the constitutive dimensions of the person: the biological dimension, from which starts the awareness of care, commitment and environmental preservation; the cognitive dimension; the affective-emotional dimension; the aesthetic-artistic dimension; the social and civic dimension; and, the ethical-moral and spiritual dimension*

A human being is not the sum of different completely profiled and independent dimensions. Rather, those parts all make up an indivisible, interrelated whole in practice. Education "in and of" those dimensions is complex and they are rarely independent from each other. Furthermore, they do not take shape in isolation but in as connected. Although we try to define them as differentiated, we cannot forget to also think of them as interconnected, because this is how they are developed and they work. They are wholly integrated in the person as an inseparable whole.

The six dimensions we have identified as constituent of a person, subject to a whole child educational action, are described below:

### Physical dimension of the person, centre of an integral ecology

*The school is a suitable place not only to generate healthy and safe living habits, but also to become an area particularly inhabitable, respectful with the environment and endowed with meaning.*

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A human being is a corporeal being with a biological life to take care of and to develop. Care of this dimension is not independent from care of the environment in which we live. This "culture of care" includes the same man, from the idea of integral ecology, and understands the book of nature as one and indivisible. School is an ideal place not only for generating healthy, safe life habits, but to shape it as an especially inhabitable space, respectful with the environment and filled with meaning, that is, able to conjugate, as regards an experience of care for nature or care for oneself, the dimensions that describe so-called "environmental awareness": affective, cognitive, conative, individual action and collective action (Chuliá, 1994).

It is a dimension that educators must consider and bring about reflection in their students, as it is the subject of intervention on many occasions, for example, in programming specific disciplines such as physical education, when we intervene in things as simple as in the way of students sit down or in proper food in school dining rooms. But it is also a dimension that gives rise to problems in our society and which requires attention. The fact that the human being has a body, a physical dimension, is obvious and does not seem problematic, as we have just seen, when we refer to their care and development of a healthy life. It is another thing to approach, from education, matters such as acceptance of body, of its sexuality or how to feed it.



### Cognitive dimension

*Thinking must be educated in order to achieve its purpose, which is the adequate knowledge of reality.*

A human being is, additionally, and to follow the classic terminology, a rational animal. Thinking must be educated in order to achieve its purpose, which is appropriate knowledge of reality. Training in habits like rigor in study, care for work well done or, among other things, actively listening to the best arguments, without a doubt contribute to giving shape to thinking. Teachers committed to the value of knowledge as a means of personal and social improvement take into account the particular characteristics of students as a horizon of possibility, in which to integrate cultural contents. Their professional commitment aims to establish in each one of them high expectations, to consider each student's singularity, personalizing academic development, and to offer high quality learning opportunities.

In this training, cultural contents are crucial, not only because the school has been developed around them, but because these contents represent essential components for understanding the world. In fact, whether through the most scientific disciplines or through the most humanistic or social, we learn the successes and errors in the historical pathway to knowledge of reality. Furthermore, through the learning of these contents, we develop and exercise the necessary skills (communication, creativity, critical thinking, personal autonomy) for a professional future, to lead a personal life project and to participate actively in society.

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We will therefore defend, from this project, a skills-based approach to the teaching-learning process, though not in the purely formal sense of the term; that is, we will not consider skills as a substitute for contents, but as a pedagogic action that allows students to understand the world and to better understood themselves in order to act within it. The skills-based approach will also let us not only give sense to the contents learned, but strengthen the integral nature of human education. In fact, skills allow a consideration of the contents that students live and not only in relation with an exam. For example, teaching history is not just instruction to pass a test, but teaching to live and understand the city one inhabits, which one enjoys, because we enjoy what we understand more, mainly, in order to think about participating politically in its development.

### Affective-emotional dimension

*The education of the cognitive dimension, more traditionally inherent to the school, cannot be understood separately from the emotional sensitive sphere.*

A human being also has a domain that we acknowledge as volitional and related with desire. Why do we want what we want? Is it rightful, good or valuable to feel what we feel? Reality causes different emotions in us: unknown darkness, fear, a festive welcome, happiness, etc. This whole affective field that is no more than a reaction to the world; it is, as the cognitive domain suggests, the goal of education. As we can teach to think well, we can also teach to feel well. We can educate to live emotionality in a way well-adjusted to the reality that produces it. Firstly, because it cannot be reasonable to feel fear or happiness with regard to what should not produce



fear or happiness. Secondly, because it is necessary to educate a reaction caused by a certain emotional experience.

Without a doubt, education of the cognitive domain is more traditionally characteristic of schools, although it is a knowledge that cannot be understood as separate from the sensitive-emotional domain. These domains are connected more than we might think.

Whoever does good because they rationally discover it is good is not more perfect, but whoever also feels enthusiastic about it and pursues it despite the difficulties. This capacity for achievement is characteristic of "resilient" people who, without ceasing to be sensitive to the problems, have found out how to develop the skills necessary to face adversity positively. As Martha Nussbaum also says, sensitivity is not a crutch for knowledge, but a constituent part of it. Teachers very well know the relationship among pleasure, interest and learning. Clearly, our society is eminently emotional and correct education in the necessary balance and in the judgement required regarding emotion is, without a doubt, also essential in not transforming desire into the final criteria of judgement.

### Aesthetic-artistic dimension

*The effects of cultivating an aesthetic sense go beyond the artistic sphere and bring benefits in all areas of learning, contributing to the integral development of the human being.*

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The English writer Herbert Read asserts that aesthetics is a fundamental part of the whole development of human beings, contributing to channelling feelings and emotions, and education in an ethical sense (*Education through Art, 1948*). Our openness to reality is not only structured around what is true or desirable, but also around what we recognise as beautiful or harmonious. Openness to beauty, recognising the aesthetic domain of education, and educational potential of sensitivity contained in aspects of this dimension.

Aesthetic care of the *educational habitat* is not a useless addition, because somehow through aesthetics, it also expresses care, order, respect and acknowledgement of others. Nor is it only education of the senses so they can feel surprised by beauty. The capacity to appreciate beauty is educated, it is the result of constant exposure to a certain type of stimuli, that have to do with experiencing pedagogic activities and practices related with dance, music, theatre and the plastic arts in general. The effects of cultivating the aesthetic sense go beyond the artistic domain and contribute benefits in all domains of learning, contributing to the whole development of humans.

### Social and civic dimension

*Growing in sociability and civic formation in order to experience the characteristics of community life are constitutive aspects of the whole child development.*

The human being is relationally constituted. Interpersonal considerations are not an addition to individuality. It is not that first we form ourselves as individuals and then form relations, but



rather we are the way we are due to the depth of our constituent relational domain. This sociability is structured in several aspects. Some have to do with the way we treat each other and require the development of empathetic virtues. Others relate to the way we treat ourselves under a rule of law. We call this dimension citizenship. This second dimension has to do with the first, the capacity to relate with one another, sociability, which is the basis. Without the development of these empathetic virtues that MacIntyre calls virtues of dependence, truthfulness, or trust, it is impossible to found a civic community. The school is a privileged place for this education, for a first contact with a broader environment, that is, it is a window onto the adult world because it acts as the first public space where others are no longer connected to me through affectionate family ties. Therefore, to grow and to mature in that experience, natural and inherent human beings, of sociability and to be educated civically so as to experience the characteristics of community life form constituent aspects of students' whole development.

### Ethical-moral/spiritual dimension

Ethics for the Greeks was the art of good living. The art that allowed them discover the mechanisms for living a life in accordance with our dignity as free beings. The human being is a being whose behaviour is not instinctively certain, but rather must be chosen and, therefore, we can consider it. All human beings should be educated and grow in the task of meditating upon themselves and upon the characteristics and the effects of their free, responsible decisions. Ethics affect a person's domain, both in terms of their physical care and education, and those that have to do with their other aspects, whether interpersonal, intellectual or emotional.

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Openness to the last questions is specifically a human feature, as these questions certainly come up at any stage of life, and, certainly, during the school period, as school requires truth and also reason, but a reason that knows its limits and its different planes, a reason that does not self-mutilate, but rather faces knowledge of what is most important, the individual destiny. Once the last questions have a place in schools, and in public schools, respect should be guaranteed for their possible, free and varied answers.

*In summary, each student's education, throughout their time at school, should be based on the aspiration that their domains as a person are related in the teaching-learning process; and, furthermore, on placing high expectations on all of them, whatever the conditions or difficulties attributable to their social or cultural origin, their race, sex or religion.*

