

The Educational Philosophy of the Spanish Philosopher Leonardo Polo: Implications for Teachers' Self-Reflection and Classroom Management

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From an anthropological and ethical perspective, the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo always defended the thesis that the task of the teacher is the activity that is most directly involved with the human being. In this vision, the classroom is perceived as an exceptional space in which one can grow into a better human person and, hence, the educational task requires that teachers fall in love with their mission, and that they be firmly convinced of the transcendence of their role.

Thus, what is required of the teacher is not only expertise in his/her respective subject matter, but above all, that he/she be formed in such a way as to discover and value the potentialities and capabilities in each student in order to enable their personal growth. In this view, the student is thus taught to project such potentials into the future so that he/she is enabled to discern the transcendence of every action and conduct.

Therefore, this educational philosophy views the educational task as a simultaneous learning—on the part of both teacher and student—to grow into better human beings, with special emphasis on interior growth. And since there is no limit to interior growth, the good use of time by the teacher is of utmost importance for human life. Ethics, then, comes to the aid of the educator in the task of ensuring that everybody—teacher and learner alike—grows.

On the basis of the ramifications of this educational philosophy of Leonardo Polo, this paper draws implications for teachers' self-reflection. It likewise draws up recommendations for classroom management as well as for the guidance that teachers are to give to pupils for their integral human development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the educational task has taken on a critical importance: almost all governments devote substantial resources to improving their educational systems: personnel, funding, institutional resources, etc. that promote and monitor the operations of our educational centers. Political programs are filled with proposals related to education: many countries hope that education will enable them to lift up the quality of life to a higher level and can bring happiness to a wider sector of society. But the question

remains: is this happening? Is our current way of teaching and learning really making us *better* people? Specifically, are the efforts that societies are exerting bearing the desired fruits in what relates to the formation of boys and girls, of our youth and adolescents? As Víctor García Hoz pointed out many years ago: “never have nations invested so much resources and money in education as now, yet never have we experienced so much dissatisfaction in the quality of education as now”. We are far from the humanizing ideal with which education ought to be imbued. Without neglecting the advances in the pedagogical arena, given the globalization of education that has taken place, we still observe substantial *lacunae* in the field of education (Izaguirre & Moros, 2007).

The educational task requires that teachers fall in love with their mission, and that they be firmly convinced of the transcendence of their role. Thus, what is required of the teacher is not only expertise in his/her respective subject matter, but above all, that he/she be formed in such a way as to discover and value the potentialities and capabilities in each student in order to enable their personal growth.

2. THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF LEONARDO POLO

From an anthropological and ethical perspective, the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo always defended the thesis that the task of the teacher is the activity that is most directly involved with the human being. In this vision, the classroom is perceived as an exceptional space in which one can grow into a better human person. Quite fundamental to the educational philosophy of Leonardo Polo is the radical place and role of the *family* in the education of the children. The faithful love between the father and the mother of the child is crucial: once this is broken, the *affective education* of the child gets broken. Normalcy in the *affectivity* of the daughter or son is of primary importance. If it is lacking, then there shall be an absence of the foundation upon which to build the education of the intellect and the education of the will, the two faculties of the human soul.

In any case, whether or not this affective education in the family has been solidified, the teacher takes over the education of the child in school. The posterior task of the teacher is the formation

in *good habits* or *virtues*. Education ought to help the learner develop himself and develop all of his potential with a view, ultimately, to giving of himself in love and service.

This educational philosophy views the educational task as a simultaneous learning—on the part of both teacher and student—to grow into better human beings, with special emphasis on interior growth. Polo views education primarily as *learning*, departing from his notion of the child (in the family) as *child first of all*. This learning makes the child acquire self-awareness over time. This view—that the child is primarily a child—enables him to be cordial, understanding, and capable of keeping in mind the interests of others. Polo identifies the source of this ability in classic *humanitas*, followed immediately by *christianitas*. The Latin word *humanitas* corresponded to the Greek concepts of *philanthrôpía* (loving what makes us human) and *paideia* (education) which were amalgamated with a series of qualities that made up the traditional unwritten Roman code of conduct (*mos maiorum*). Both *humanitas* and *christianitas* will have to be the object of the education of our times. According to Polo, it “would be good to introduce them little by little to rational elements, so that the kids learn to exercise their will and not simply be led by egocentric impulses.”

Ethics, then, comes to the aid of the educator in the task of ensuring that everybody—teacher and learner alike—grows. Ethics, in the philosophy of Polo, substitutes neither the economy nor medicine nor any other thing, but without ethics, it is impossible to aspire to make all this consistent. Man is an ethical being because he is free. Ethics is the manner by which to reinforce the maximality of human tendencies. To be ethical is to *be more*, understood as *more human*, i.e., *greater human flourishing*. From here, one deduces many implications for the teacher.

There is no limit to interior growth; thus, the good use of time by the teacher is of utmost importance for human life. In one of his chief works on Education, *Ayudar a crecer* [‘Helping the other to Grow’], Polo insists on the need for educating the *imagination*, but above all education of the imagination for the *education of the intelligence*. Polo asserts that “the education of the imagination is one of the most basic keys to intellectual learning. If not for his imagination, man cannot create; he would not be able to produce, since everything artificial requires imagination. The

education of the imagination begins with the *eidetic* imagination [*eidetic* = relating to or denoting mental images having unusual vividness and detail, as if actually visible.], which is a type of imagination that is disorganized, quite close to *perception*, but since it is not exactly perception, it is quite capricious. Its images are not organized in a fixed or stable manner. Almost all persons are able to develop the imagination to the level of *proportion*, which is an ability that includes *association*. The proportional imagination can identify the whole on the basis only of a part. The associative imagination permits comparing objects. Beyond proportional imagination, there is the *representative* imagination, where one is able to objectify *isochronic time* and *isomorphic space*. Space and time are imagined equal and infinite. Polo has always insisted on this development of the imagination because, if it is unable to reach its maximum, then the intelligence is unable to function well. Note that the intelligence depends on what the imagination provides it for the sake of *abstraction*. The intellect begins to abstract on the basis of images. When the child is unable to transcend disorganized imaginings (as, for example, because of too much television), then the intelligence gets malformed.

An important task for the teacher is the formation of pupils (and themselves) in good habits or *virtues*. Since nowadays education for kids begins at a very early age, teachers have had to introduce **games** into the school curriculum. Three- or four-year-olds are taught, for example, to set/build up pieces (puzzles, castles, etc.), to resolve geometric problems, as if these were play. These, however, clearly represent formation of the intelligence, of their constructive imagination, but not of their affectivity; that is, what is being trained is their irascible appetite, the passion for winning, which means to say education in fortitude. Winning, keeping in mind that one cannot play outside of the rules, already implies an initiation into **ethics**. The same happens in losing: a kid who loses and is not used to it does not learn how to **play**. The same thing happens to two adults when they have never learned to play as they ought: when they lose, they are unable to accept it; in short, they don't learn to win or to lose. Kids' games ought to be such that they can win or lose: they can't be too difficult that they're unable to win (Polo, 2006).

The convergence of reading and game playing in the schooling of youngsters, enabled especially by new digital formats has raised concerns and misperceptions among adults. For parents belonging to an older generation, print books provide an educational experience, while iPads and similar devices are viewed as being strictly for entertainment. 'Screen time' has been something parents and caregivers have been warned against, given its adverse impacts as shown in some studies. However, despite the risks, multiple research studies show that children's interaction with enhanced digital books supports early literacy development and diverse learning styles (Martens, 2014). In any case, the primary function of games is to educate the irascible appetite: teaching kids to win and teaching them to lose. He who wins and loses is able to take risks and failures: that child is a strong person. A strong man is he who has had his affectivity and emotions well trained. Learning the sentiments of hope and of fear is at a higher level (Polo, 2006).

3. TEACHERS' SELF-REFLECTION AND FUTURE CONSCIOUSNESS

In Polo's educational philosophy, the subject of education is a *person*, not just merely an *individual*: as such, education cannot be limited to mere transmission of knowledge, but rather to the development and growth of the person as *person* (Ahedo, 2012). In this view, the student is thus taught to project such growth potential into the future so that he is enabled to discern the transcendence of every action and conduct. For this, research into "future consciousness" is called for. Future consciousness is multi-dimensional and involves all the major capacities of the human mind. A set of different forms of future consciousness has evolved over time, encompassing practical and social intelligence, mythic narrative, rationality and emotionality, science fiction, and future studies. Psychologically, future consciousness involves human emotion and motivation, learning and memory, all major forms of cognition, and self-identity. Psychological processes that contribute to expansive, optimistic, and creative future consciousness can be effectively taught. The development of virtues necessary for enhanced future consciousness can be facilitated through future-focused self-narrative activities (Lombardo & Cornish, 2010).

In the typical classroom, the teacher transmits both theoretical and practical knowledge. Specifically, practical knowledge is said to be action-imbued as well as oriented toward action. But this, in turn, requires *reflection*: thus, the educator's reflection on his experience ought to be constant and permanent. In effect, he who lives or practices a given science has all the right to reflect on it, as Rafael Alvira would say (Izaguirre & Moros, 2007).

Technologies of the Self include systematic techniques of self reflection and regulation of emotions and behavior. *Technologies of the Self* can be seen as strategies and techniques that allow a person to establish a dialogue with him or herself, in German: **Zwiesgespräch**, which includes a critical discussion of one's own relevant cognitive representations. The core argument about the use of Technology of the Self in the teaching profession can be found in research on **stress and strain**. In particular, burnout, depression, and psychosomatic diseases are the main causes of premature retirement in the teaching profession. The urgency for teachers to become familiar with techniques that allow them to identify and reduce stressors has repeatedly been emphasized. Another supporting argument for a systematic implementation of Technologies of the Self in the teaching profession involves the methods of interacting with adolescents. A caring and friendly but simultaneously demanding method of interacting with adolescents is considered to represent a mature teaching and parenting style. To practice the so-called "mature style of education", an above-average ability to reflect on one's own emotions and beliefs is required. Technologies of the Self explore the processes that allow individuals to perceive reality adequately, to act appropriately, and to recognize and manage their own negative emotions (Steins, Haep, & Wittrock, 2015).

4. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become *good*. Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning and practice. It is developed through character education.

The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society since our youth face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations. They are bombarded with many more negative influences through the media and other external sources prevalent in today's culture. At the same time, there are many more day-to-day pressures impinging on the time that parents and children have together.

We said above that the subject of education is a *person*, not just merely an *individual*: thus, the educational task is to contribute to the growth of the person as *person*. This implies, above all, the acquisition of the virtues by the pupil.

Further, this objective of growth refers to his growth in the anthropological transcendentals, viz.: (1) Personal Co-existence, (2) Personal Freedom, (3) Personal Intellection, and (4) Transcendental Love (Gift of Self). In Leonardo Polo's anthropological philosophy, personal freedom is not the freedom, which is manifested, say, in the will, when it chooses, e.g., between one thing and another, but rather the transcendental and unrestricted openness of the human person (Sellés, 2013; Racelis, 2017).

The implication is that, since the subject of education is a human *person*, and not merely an individual, true education should aim at perfecting the student as a human person, that is to say, should aim at integral personal growth (Ahedo, 2012).

Tom Lickona (1989), world-renowned character educator, said: A comprehensive model of classroom character education is described in terms of nine components: the teacher as caregiver, model, and mentor; creating a caring classroom environment; moral discipline; creating a democratic classroom environment; teaching values through the curriculum; cooperative learning; the conscience of the craft; ethical reflection; and teaching conflict resolution.

Teachers have a wide array of Character Education books/materials to choose from and to incorporate into the young pupils' curriculum. For example, Young, Hadaway & Ward (2013) analyzed scores of ***International Children's Trade Books*** that make for perfect building blocks for Character Education.

Likewise, there are a good number of online resources for this purpose: for example, the *Knightly Virtues programme*, run by the

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, which offers a new teaching resource to schools. It is an inspirational teaching programme that is easy for teachers to integrate into the curriculum and it is having a significant impact on the young people who experience it. It has also been immensely popular with primary schools across Britain with hundreds signing up over the last few years to deliver the programme.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When one goes through the educational philosophy of Leonardo Polo, one cannot but be challenged by the ideas of: 1) life-long learning, especially in growth in character and the virtues; 2) self-reflection; 3) strategic design of games for pupils; 4) future consciousness; and 5) character/moral education.

In summary, on the basis of the current state of research, it can be argued that *Technologies of the Self* are important for preventing early exit from the profession and the occurrence of mental disorders. They also support a useful context that can benefit both teachers and students.

The mastery of a systematic *Technology of the Self* can, thus, be of great benefit. In addition, since the subject of education is a human *person* and not merely an individual, the proper place of human education is in the human essence, which is capable of acquiring virtues, thanks to which the human being grows. And since the human being is one unitary whole—although composite body and soul, that is, matter and spirit—, authentic education is achieved when it helps the student achieve fullness and the four anthropological transcendentals as proposed by Polo (Izaguirre & Moros, 2007).

The personal optimization of the pupil is rooted in his *self-gift* in growth. Education in freedom ought not to be merely teaching in order to make the students learn to use his freedom to choose; rather, true education in the sense of transcendent freedom implies that the pupil comprehends the meaning of his life and his destiny, and his self-propulsion towards it (Ahedo, 2012).

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