



Marta Blanco Navarro

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4979-9055>

University of Vigo, Pontevedra, Spain

e-mail: marta.blanconavarro@ceu.es

“Learning to Learn” as a Way of Making the Most of Experiences of Failure

Abstract

This article focuses on the educational principle of action as a means for personality development. In a climate of self-improvement and reflection, well-prepared educators can guide children and young people to be able to learn from the experience of failure in their lives. In particular, we analyze the extent to which the doing-doing methodology proposed by Tomás Morales in his work *Forja de Hombres* [Forge of Men] can contribute to the development of the key *personal, social and learning-to-learn competency*, incorporating the Sustainable Development Goal of Health and Well-Being.

Keywords: comprehensive education, active methods, personal, social and learning-to-learn competency, Sustainable Development Goals, self-improvement

Introduction

The sociocultural context and the health context in which we are currently immersed means that “people are faced with constant changes, many of which generate stress,” as described by the Spanish Resilience Institute (n.d.). These stressors include changes in social relationships; parental job instability, which affects children; lack of motivation to find

meaning in life; family conflicts; and the pressure for social success, which determines who is deemed valid and who is not. These factors place a greater burden on those who, for various reasons, are in a situation of vulnerability, such as minors or young people who have not yet developed a strong and secure personality. Therefore, contributing to the development of a mature and balanced personality is once again one of the main challenges for education in all its spheres: family, school, informal, and state. As the Spanish Resilience Institute (n.d.) again points out, “equipping children and young people with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills leads us to strive for more holistic education.” This is not a novel idea, as many educational efforts and options have already been generated to this end; however, it may serve to reinforce or update its position as a priority, helping to balance the value we place on other objectives, such as the mastery of technical advances or the acquisition of new virtual realities and languages. We can all contribute to the promotion of the right to health and well-being, what is nowadays called *healthy living*, and we can start by adopting lifestyles ourselves that are more respectful of human nature. While not touching on the efforts that the competent state authorities will rightly need to take – in our opinion, especially in terms of investment and financial support – we would like to focus on the important aspect of personality formation and the role of educators – mainly families and teachers – in the formation of learners’ characters.

1. The development of skills to better manage life:

Learning to learn

Where to start? Social changes require support, as recommended by the European Council (EU, 2018), so that everyone can achieve the key competencies for their personal and social development, with all the implications that entails. Furthermore, in Point 3.2 of its recommendations, it commits to “supporting teaching staff, as well as other stakeholders who support learning processes, including families” (EU, 2018), and it is therefore appropriate to help these institutions to comply with these

recommendations. Among all the key competencies, this study can highlight *personal, social, and learning-to-learn competencies* for improving life management.

The development of personal potentialities – which are not identical in everyone – offers the person a vocation and calls them to leave the initial point where they currently are in order to, in the expression of Domínguez (2007, p. 9), “go further.” This personal process involves a journey that respects each person’s unique nature, resulting in the most original version of each person. This process of maturing leads to each person developing the ability of learning how to learn. In exploring the core competencies for the development of a full and happy, and therefore healthy and balanced, personality, this work pays close attention to learning to overcome adversity in life. For what real life has no adversity? In other words, we see the importance of learning from failures in order to emerge stronger from them, to grow as a person, in a word, to mature along with life’s realities. This will not happen by merely reading about concepts of resilience or listening to lectures on resilience – which can certainly help – but rather it is something that requires *action*. As such, we focus on two elements that foster the development of these skills and personality: action and the relevant role of the educator.

1.1. Action as a means of personality development

The process of personal maturation referred to above requires self-education and self-empowerment as its fundamental resources. This means that this process cannot be replaced by another person. For example, a mother, father, or educator cannot take their child or pupil’s place in the process; if the child or young person is not given sufficient space in this process, they will not mature. The protagonist of the action is an autonomous, self-regulated subject who does not limit themselves to merely acquiring knowledge, but drives it, and along with procedures and attitudes, gives rise to the acquisition of competencies.

The need to view the learner/pupil as the protagonist of their own learning, in which personal experience plays a central role, became a central educational approach starting in the 19th century. From authors

such as Dewey, Kilpatrick, and Bovet himself, who coined the term *active methodology*, to modern study plans, there have been and there continue to be many initiatives and methodologies working towards this, though with unequal success, it should be acknowledged. The reality is more complex than it may seem at first sight: a certain natural resistance appears in the person (Blanco-Navarro, 2020, p. 151), a tendency toward passivity, especially when energy needs to be expended in a cooperative way, so it is also necessary to educate in this sense of *activeness* and *working with others*. Properly understood, activeness could mean students active in reflection and thought construction, or attempting to produce a scientific text. On the other hand, it could also involve people merely moving from one place to another, driven by an active form of laziness, avoiding a task that is in fact a priority for them because at first it seems tedious or boring. We refer to *activeness* not as the production of external works, but in the sense of “operation,” of “building oneself in the inner forge of one’s own consciousness” (Titone, 1981, p. 53) as a guiding educational principle that emphasizes the cultivation of inner individuality centered on the experience of the subject.

Over the centuries, the combination of this educational element of action and various anthropological conceptions has resulted in the emergence of various pedagogical forms and new methodologies that seek to take it on board. These include the more personalized conception of education put forward by García Hoz (1989), which highlights the *person’s* capacity for *action* through *reflection* and involves two principles, *thinking* and *acting*, united and committed to one another, going beyond mere activity. We recognize that these proposals are very much in keeping with the reality of the human being understood as an open being (see Blanco-Navarro, 2021) with the capacity for transcendence, called to go beyond oneself and confront reality: things, ideas, circumstances, *others*, and history.

1.2. The role of the educator as a motivator and driver in self-improvement

It may seem contradictory to insist on the importance of developing learner autonomy while emphasizing the relevant role of educators:

parents, teachers, or other responsible persons; however, we should not forget the initial protective role they play at an early age, during infancy and childhood. Faced with this reality, the question is to what extent and in which aspects this protection should be continued without being overly protective. Overprotection results in a high degree of immaturity in coping with difficulties, which makes the child more vulnerable and less able to develop resilience in the event of a traumatic situation. Strengthening autonomous development is key in these situations and it is here where educators can make use of other key factors: the transmission of values such as reflection, constant daily work, and learning how to prioritize fundamental objectives for each individual. The existence of "empty spaces" in a child's life, spaces in which not everything is decided about what they must do, in which they have time to be left to their own devices, will allow them to develop creativity, which in turn will allow them to face the adversities that arise in their day-to-day life.

From this perspective, the intervention of educators as children and young people grow up is more a matter of transmitting incentives than of giving directions. It consists of motivating the learner to carry out certain activities that they would not undertake on their own initiative, such as those related to the world of culture – reading books and listening to or playing music. At this point, we should mention the influential role played by the mother figure of neurosurgeon Ben Carson in the film *Gifted Hands* (Carter, 2009), since it is based on real events. The woman had no education, yet was able to transform her children's school habits in such a way that they act autonomously, with the positive results that this entails in their schooling process, to the point that one of them achieved excellence.

Any experienced educator will confirm that this balance is not easy to achieve: the tendency to dominate by coercion ("do this because I tell you to") or to supplant ("I'll do this for you so we can get this over and done with more quickly"), leads us to consider that eliciting collaboration, or getting others to do it, is an art. We often find among educators and authorities (family, school, and society) that people are more willing to "give it their all" than to take a step back and encourage others to take

responsibility or delegate work. The consequence of this situation is expressed graphically by Tomás Morales in one of his works: “untapped potential” (Morales, 2003); a youth and childhood devoid of resistance, we might say. This educator was able to integrate what he had experienced so many times in dealing with the young people he was leading or training into a pedagogical principle called *doing-doing*, helping them to integrate more actively into society. This is a case that we will explore in more detail as an experience of how it is possible to carry out personalty development with learners.

2. Teaching to think by doing – how a few were forged and how many more can be forged

As indicated above, this section will focus on the experience of Jesuit pedagogue Tomás Morales (1908–1994) with the intention of looking at the methods and tactics he used with the young people he trained, given that his actions stemmed from a deep conviction about the value of youth and the priority of character formation in education.

What will become of a world comprised mainly of young people with no one to guide them, without educators to shape them, living role models in whom they can see an ideal of life reflected? Only truly educated people, educators who are not afraid to make demands of themselves and others, with a strong ideal in their hearts that drives them in their lives, can answer this worrying question. And those people are none other than the young people of today, the young people whom we, as their educators, have to train for the enormous task that awaits them. (Morales, 1987, p. 7)

Their educational action is non-formal and falls within the current of Christian personalism. It is linked to an active methodology based on “teaching to think by doing once the subject reflects on lived experiences” (Gómez, 1998, p. 277). The author did not intend to develop a theory of

learning or to create an alternative system to the one proposed in his time, but he started working in the 1950s with the young people he was leading, and time proved him right. One of his works, *Forja de hombres* [Forge of Men], first published in 1966, was inspired by the experience of those years (1946–1960). It was expanded and republished several times along with the experience of the following years (1987) until 2008, when it was presented in a compendium, "Pedagogical Works," as the second part of the collection *Life and Work of Tomás Morales, S.J.* It has been translated into English, German, Italian, French, and Polish.

It presents the educator as a compass, with four cardinal points that can guide their actions: I) Mystique of demand, II) Fighting spirit, III) Cultivation of reflection, and IV) School of constancy. All of these are involved in the tactic of *doing-doing*, which consists of allowing the young person to act, guiding their action to be orderly, fruitful, and for the good of others; to do this, it is essential that the educator knows the young person. Logically, if we apply this to childhood or adulthood, the degree of delegation or responsibilities must be commensurate with their reality. Experience shows that people who are included in or delegated a task or responsibility – even a simple one – feel like they are part of that activity, company, community, or family and they contribute their best. This is what some of these young rebels experience in today's secondary school classrooms, when their teacher – still trained directly by Morales – gives them "secretarial" tasks in the classroom, giving them the confidence from which they can begin to propose challenges to overcome themselves. More latent energies are given the opportunity to surface, and in most cases, unknown potential is awakened. This global approach is discussed in more detail below.

2.1. Action as a competence – the doing-doing methodology

After looking at the need to prioritize the promotion of harmonious personality development, we proceed to pointing out a concrete way to help achieve this: action, going beyond mere theory or discourse about the value of knowing oneself, of developing one's own potential, or how important it is to appropriate new resources in the face of difficulties.

The aim is to confront the subject with reality in such a way that they are forced to intervene, and in this way, to put into action their personal resources. Morales is clear about this, and when he brings the children together to propose an objective, they must first organize and then act. Learners are discouraged from finding problems with everything and encouraged to work using proposals and initiatives. Each of them leaves the meeting with a task and, in this way, all the young people involved will have to do their best and will feel like members of a team. Over the years, this approach would become, with experience, a methodology of its own. Let's take a closer look.

The title Gómez (1998) chose for a study on the pedagogy of Tomás Morales, in which he presents the methodology, is significant: "Article one. Doing-doing. A response to a problematic reality" (p. 302). The author explores the historical context in which this mode of action is proposed: young people infected by a trend for convenience and minimal effort, the consequence of the poor education received with these approaches, which leads to a lack of thinking and a tendency to refuse to work. This is the logical and repeatedly demonstrated consequence of these principles, and we can therefore question the substantive validity of such a policy proposal. These approaches are contrary to the effort that generates joy, the self-improvement that leads to personal development, and the discipline or rules that allow a person to exercise their freedom in safety.

Faced with this problematic situation, but also confident in young people's potential and aware of the disastrous results that authoritarianism had led to in those environments, Morales proposed a practical alternative through educational action in groups, as a means of encouraging collaboration. "The aim is to stimulate others at work, distributing tasks, controlling needs, and exercising discreet and paternal authority" (Gómez, 1998, p. 302). Pre-planning and a long-term project are necessary, as is simple but practical programming on the part of the educator to enable people to manage their own work. It is about allowing them to do, to take initiative, to take responsibility, to fail, and to succeed. If we are afraid of this, we run the risk of settling into infantilism, of succumbing

to the idols of consumerism, of a comfortable, convenient life without finding meaning. Morales offers this methodology in the non-formal sphere, while calling on the relevant social institutions to promote educational models that teach people to think. Currently, some research projects related to the training and involvement of future teachers are inspired by this methodology. One expression of this is the work coordinated by Ramos (2020) which offers educational workshops for schoolchildren. The workshops are carried out by trainee teachers in cooperation with the research group *Innovación y Metodologías Docentes para la Enseñanza y Aprendizaje (Fray-Innova) (Innovations and Methodologies for Teaching and Learning)*.

The starting point for this pedagogue by trade, therefore, is reality. The young person or child in question must be taken as they are in order to lead them patiently to the comprehensive development of their potential. And from there, they launch into action: an action that is thought-out and proportionate to their strengths, in which they are the protagonist and will have to be held accountable. This is certainly a risk, the risk of relying on inexperienced youths to galvanize them into action for the common good. However, it must be considered that the key to the success of this procedure – validated by experience and still used to train teachers through the annual Pedagogical Classrooms – lies in the confidence that the educator places in the potential of the learner, overcoming first impressions and employing a great deal of patience. It is not a question of disengaging once it becomes clear what needs to be developed; it rather consists of the educator choosing a discreet place from which to keep track of the person to whom they have been delegated, encouraging them when necessary, getting to know each of them in more and more depth, and guiding and, if necessary, correcting them. This requires the educator to *forget about oneself* and to allow others to shine. Experience taught this character builder that if you act with tact and patience, young people become involved in the action, so that they acquire responsibility and thus enhance their qualities, while they themselves will influence other young people, multiplying the action. This is still the experience of those who, having personally assimilated this style

of self-improvement, do not allow their students to complain in class and guide them to see the positive aspects of situations; the initial expressions “what a drag” and “why do we have to do that” before a task are corrected with “that’s good, that way we learn more” – or in their student jargon, “cool, that’s great, that activity is great.” Progressively, the young people themselves assimilate this disposition, so that intervention from the educator is less and less necessary in this aspect. The children even transfer it to their family environment, to the surprise of their relatives.

Having accepted this method of action, we analyze the work in which our author’s experience was collected through various tactics, as we believe we are analyzing an example of acting while bearing in mind the reality of the situation.

2.2. *Forja de Hombres*, a mature work and the age-old question of *how*?

“How some men were forged” (Morales, 1987, p. 15) is the inspiring idea with which Morales’s work begins in its dedication. The age-old question of *how* already seemed to be intuited by the author himself, who continues the sentence by adding “and how many more can be forged.” In order to understand this work, it seems necessary to consider some preliminary information regarding its conception, its audience, and the historical context of the time.

2.2.1. Some preliminary aspects to understanding *Forja*

As we have already indicated, we are not dealing with an *a priori* reflective writing, in the form of a program or action plan to be implemented later on. “*Forge of Men* is a book that matured in the heat of a passionate experience made the object of constant reflection,” writes the prestigious pedagogue García Hoz in the prologue to the book (Morales, 1987, p. 11). As the ripe fruit of the tree, we enjoy in this book the *a posteriori* reflection on the author’s work with hundreds of young people in an ecclesial apostolic movement. Thus, one characteristic that requires consideration is that the training had an added benefit for both the educator and the learner related to the life of grace, i.e. that which is specific to a person who has

been baptized. However, the basics are inherent to the person, and this is a common denominator for every human being. Therefore, it is possible to transfer most, if not all, of the person-oriented training. Finally, we should bear in mind the historical context of the experiences narrated in the original work, as some realities may be shocking in our times or may no longer exist; likewise, we may find that some examples related to the reality in which children and young people live today are lacking. One of these elements, for example, refers to his constant use of the term "man/men," due to the fact that at that time he only worked with men, though it was gradually extended to include women as time went on. However, this should not cause any problems in understanding the meaning of the work. What is most important is the person; the experiences of other educators show that the procedures are still valid and relevant (e.g., Abilio de Gregorio, 2007).

The written work brings together many experiences with young people under the apostolate and character formation, detailing the commitments that the young *militants*¹ or sympathizers of the movement had to take on, how they had to overcome the human aspects, what to do in the face of apparent failure, the repercussions that this action had on their own lives, etc. As García Hoz points out in the substantial prologue to the fourth edition, a multitude of experiences are described "with varied ways of doing things: study circles, youth missions, marches and camps, spiritual exercises" (Morales, 1987, p. 11), arranged according to the four cardinal points of the compass described above. We leave it to the reader's curiosity or interest to read them consecutively, or to choose them from the table of contents; in this way, we are applying the principle of not supplanting the personal process of each individual. The following is an analysis focused on some of the aspects that are characteristic of the realist pedagogy proposed by the *forger of men*, Tomás Morales.

¹ This is the name given to those involved in the youth movement called *Militia of Saint Mary*.

2.2.2. Effort brings about joy and this requires a *fighting spirit*

Together with the group methodology of *doing-doing*, which necessitates the educator giving up the spotlight, we highlight the spirit of self-improvement, which in Morales we can identify with what he calls the *fighting spirit*. It has nothing to do with violence, harm, or destruction. It is an inner disposition, "an inner attitude that pushes the soul to be in continuous and serene tension of will, constantly fighting a great battle with itself" (Morales, 1987, p. 103). He then goes on to specify where he believes young people need to face tension: "The young person must be educated in the fight against laziness, sensuality, fear, curiosity, vanity, the pressing desire to always look good, [and a] lack of control of the imagination and sensitivity" (Morales, 1987, p. 174). Undoubtedly, it is a "battle" that cannot be won by an educator who is not equipped with the courage to make demands of himself and others, avoiding two opposing and equally paralyzing poles: perfectionism and paternalism.

A central idea in Morales's pedagogy thus emerges: "effort begets joy" – the natural spontaneity in education contrasts with the joy gained by the effort of a job well done. We must accustom them to courageous and daring action, to swim against the tide so as not to be swept away by their own passions and by the dehumanizing environment, which invites us to renounce our values. It should come as no surprise to readers of this article that some of these educators impose the obligation to arrive at the school half an hour before the morning start time for those who, for the third consecutive day, have arrived late for class; in addition, they will have to carry out social service tasks for the school itself during this time. Or that a management team frees the tutors of children from the age of 10 upwards to have several hours a week in which to carry out personal tutoring. During this tutoring meetings when faced with tasks performed incorrectly or with a certain laziness, when faced with unachieved objectives, they dedicate personal time to these students, one by one, so that they can repeat the task, looking at how to improve it, or encouraging them to try again, setting achievable goals, extending – as Blanco (2009) indicates – "the exercise of tutoring to all aspects of the teaching/learning process" (p. 115) and of personality formation. These

tutoring meetings encourage those who feel they have failed or made mistakes to start again with the inspiration that apparent failures can become a springboard for improvement.

So important is this aspect of overcoming failure that one of the headings of the cardinal point of the fighting spirit is entitled "knowing how to fail." In it, Morales alludes to the fact that the first battle must be fought above all against the fear of failure, as a primary objective for the educator, which requires a great deal of serenity. In our opinion, this is a very interesting section, since it first warns of the consequences that failure can have on a superficial soul, such as apathy, distrust, lack of motivation, or discouragement. In this case, the educator will have to expend greater energies than in the case of more profound spirits who know, on their own, how to discover new challenges in the face of negative or unexpected results. And he dares to take his proposal one step further: Not only should they not be surprised or discouraged by failure, but they should come to rejoice in such situations, which will enable them to grasp the value of failure itself. This disposition will allow us to discover with objectivity, and without blaming others, the reasons that led to this situation. It may be a poorly defined objective, having used the wrong means, being carried away by improvisation, working without a method, excessive theorizing, not having left a wide enough margin of responsibility and initiative, etc. On a personal level, failure makes us more humble, docile, cautious, and aware of reality and this provides a greater capacity for empathy in social relations with others.

The book shows in its experiences how young people are sometimes successful in their goals and sometimes not; the difficulties and fears that arise are not omitted, but the prevailing spirit is that of victory, which is found not in success but in the trying. The simile of the fountain is used to explain this: "The fighting spirit is like a fountain; it springs spontaneously if it bubbles up inside me" (Morales, 1987, p. 104). Curiously, the term *resilience* cannot be found in the text; this is a term coined in the field of mental health, based on research from the late 1980s, in which – as Morell, Barrero, and Martín (2017) point out – interest arose from the fact that people and families who had suffered extreme difficulties (abandonment,

domestic violence, abuse, or others) overcame these vicissitudes. Subsequently, research in psychology, child protection, and even social skills has led to a general interest in this term, considering that all people experience stressful situations of varying degrees of difficulty, ranging from everyday events to life events or truly traumatic situations. In all of them, personal strength-building elements can be discovered that prepare the person to be able to respond successfully. This is as old as humanity itself.

In particular, we can recognize that many of the experiences in the *Forge of Men*, before these issues were described, allowed young people to reflect on themselves, forced them to manage their time effectively, made the work collaborative, and led to the development of resilience in these boys. Good training was combined with action, in which they had to creatively develop ways of initiating or guiding a conversation, taking a critical stance, and making decisions from that stance – all in an atmosphere of joy and self-improvement, which left them feeling good at the end, despite the fact that at times they had to struggle or experience moments of tension. All this was accompanied by a positive, understanding, encouraging attitude toward apparent failures when things did not go as expected or when complications and even persecutions arose. Hence, the analysis of *Forge of Men* can be approached by identifying some of those empowering elements that, in the words of Kateb (2019) create “a protective shield to resist and overcome the obstacles of existence” (p. 11). This is the task we will carry out next.

3. Action helps us to emerge stronger from adversity – some techniques

We are all surrounded by the realities of the flow of life, like the pilgrim who stumbles several times along the way and may even fall on occasion. Who has not experienced this? Tripping up, getting confused, forgetting an appointment or an order, spilling coffee in a hurry – these are all everyday experiences of every *homo viator* on their way through life. The driver who goes over a bump while driving, or the novice speaker

who experiences stage fright – there is no end to the experiences in life that place us between success and frustration, which commit us to making a personal decision of either giving up and backing out or putting more energy and serenity into the next opportunity, or why not, even laughing at ourselves, at our own errors. As Bártoli (2020) points out, "not only are the realities we face in life not good, but often they are simply bad, contrary to our desire and happiness" (p. 130), referring to the need to develop patience on life's journey. For all these reasons, the overprotective environment that sometimes develops in the family or at school, preventing children and young people from having to face the difficulties inherent to their daily lives and proportionate to their current developmental stage, is contrary to this. And it is not only in the face of difficulties that these children and young people are sometimes even prevented from taking on tasks or responsibilities. A kind of goodwill seems to envelop parent-child relationships, as if they were fragile children to be protected from any attack. As a result, they do not know their own potential and are not prepared for the hard knocks of life.

Morales's experience with his students takes a different approach. One of the central objectives of the educational action carried out will be to empower the learner. This cannot be achieved without discovering the potentialities of each of them and helping them to develop that potential to the fullest, like someone who manipulates the switch to turn on a light. This will require the human techniques of irradiation and influence, which the educator must master. We highlight some of those found in the work and how they develop elements that enhance resilience.

One of the most characteristic working techniques was *meeting* as a school for launching and landing action. Finding fault was prohibited here; instead solutions had to be positively proposed with the results borne in mind. This is important in order to avoid two serious dangers that hinder the maturity of the personality of those who attend: destructive criticism – a sign of weakness – and excessive verbosity, due to deficient integral education. This also prevents personal limitations from acting as a brake on group action. Each individual has to learn to own themselves and to be in control of their actions, so that they can cooperate with

others. It requires integrity and the ability to be problem-oriented, applying what they have learned in the past. "Not lamentation, but action" was the *leitmotiv* of these meetings. By learning to live together, we reflect; this encourages us to work together, reviving the ideal. The role of the educator here is of great importance in order to generate the confidence and security needed to continue in the action, analyzing beforehand any obstacles that may arise and interfere with the process.

These life experiences were an impetus for the protagonists and, not infrequently, served as a testimony for others, when they listened to the experiences of their peers in another of the techniques used: *assemblies*. In these large group meetings, at the end of an activity or before starting it, experiences were shared and, once again, it was necessary to excel in public speaking and overcoming desire and fear. An underlying idea was held in the face of the desire to complain or give up, when discouragement reared its head: "Never tire of always starting." We do not know the origin of the phrase, but given Morales's broad culture he would probably have read it somewhere. What is certain is that he taught it as a way of life and lived it, which is why today it is recognized as being uniquely linked to him. What was the result of these experiences? The young people were excited to have done something for others, surprised and very happy to discover their own potential, encouraged to start a new task in the face of goals – achieved or not achieved – and reflective as they used difficulties as a springboard. Along with this impulse, the educators in these schools proposed stories of sportsmen, musicians, explorers, young people, or characters in general who had to face very difficult situations in their lives and managed to overcome them. An example of this for older children is the book *No Excuses* by the weightlifting champion Kyle Maynard, or the story of the eagle who did not want to be a chick for younger children. At the same time, these educators avoid using songs or stories that incite sentimentality or withdrawal into oneself.

The main techniques include an *examination of conscience* at the end of the day, as a key element of reflection. This is an individual action of introspection, in an atmosphere of silence, in which each person takes stock of the fundamental aspects of the day's events, becoming aware of the

positive aspects that deserve gratitude and the failures (in terms of the intentions set for that day), especially with regard to the reform of personal character or dealings with others. This technique is essential for self-knowledge and to find the roots of difficulties one faces, from which all other failures tend to spring. As a final point of this stock-taking at the end of the day, which should take about 15 minutes a day at a fixed time, learners try to devise self-correction or a resolution for improvement for the following day, which keeps the person not in a spirit of defeat, but in one of overcoming each day as a new opportunity. This element is key in the educational proposal of Tomás Morales and Gómez develops it further in his study on the pedagogy of this author, defining it as "detail of personal improvement related to the root of the failure" (1998, p. 200) and including it in the method of learning by personal discovery.

Marches and open-air camps stand out among the actions proposed in *Forge of Men*. Camps with a profoundly educational purpose are still held in Spain, Germany, and the United States, annually in the summer or holiday months, following the book under study. Contact with nature brings multiple benefits in terms of a physically and mentally healthy life, which in a way forces us to live more austere (we cannot carry everything in our backpacks) and in which the possibility of overcoming a goal together with our companions promotes the spirit of collaboration and altruism. The recreational activities most commonly used to foster resilience, according to Barquero and Enith (2015), are sports, outdoor activities, artistic activities, adventure activities, problem-solving games, dance, singing, community volunteering, performing dynamic arts, and evening recreational activities. Through these types of activities, due to the constancy and dedication they require, different aspects come into play and interrelate, such as the emergence of new challenges, the acquisition of new skills that can strengthen self-confidence, socialization with peers in an uninhibited way, the clearing of the mind, the capacity for self-expression, critical thinking, conflict resolution, cooperativeness and discipline, the development of coordination skills, empathy, mobility, creativity, and many other valid tools for the development of resilience. Joy is often one of the most highly prized goals in overcoming

the proposed challenge of hiking, or climbing a peak, without it becoming an athletic competition, but rather an experience of friendship. Singing, silence, and good humor play a fundamental role in these activities, which we highlight below as elements of strength in the face of adversity.

The demand for *silence* at certain times does not at all refer to keeping quiet about whatever negative thing might have happened, or taking refuge in not exposing it so as not to complicate one's life. On the contrary, this silence is for the brave and requires and forges the capacity for personal self-control to understand that on a daily basis there is a time for silence and a time to speak. It is more about acquiring the ability to *know how to behave* and to create the necessary atmosphere for calm reflection on what is happening or the possible consequences of one's decisions. Silence allows us to look at reality objectively, to listen to others, and to discern the signs of the times. After prolonged silence, the person is better prepared to communicate more profoundly, and even to ask for help in a way that is more appropriate to their needs. From silence we can discover the beauty of so many realities that haste and superficiality do not allow us to appreciate.

Interestingly, the times of silence, prayer, and examination of conscience are combined with singing and good humor. *The songs* that are interspersed at different times reflect this spirit of joy and self-improvement. From the mountaineering song "¡Ánimo, pues, ánimo pues, que la montaña es mantequilla!" to songs of their own composing, or the more frequent custom of modifying well known songs with their own lyrics. All this is an exercise in creativity and initiative, as well as the ability to reach agreement and the possibility of discovering qualities in some that are not only intellectual. Undoubtedly, there are many anecdotes that, while camping, challenge the young people who participate in these training experiences to get away from themselves and overcome simple actions such as a small intervention in public, in a group, or on their own. In addition, this develops the capacity for empathy, as experiencing difficulties first-hand allows the young person to be more sympathetic to possible weaknesses in others.

As a complement, *good humor* is not only expressed with the songs and jokes at youth evenings, where everyone can participate more or less successfully, but as an accompaniment that adds extra flavor to the action in general. The spirit of self-improvement also means being able to keep smiling in the face of adversity. Sandrin (2018) argues that "humor maintains strong links with resilience ... to cope with difficulties and to grow well as people even in the midst of deeply painful and highly traumatic experiences" (p. 101), which reaffirms the idea proposed here. We know that smiling is universal, that it allows us to establish good relations anywhere in the world, regardless of language. A smile has liberating and positive effects for the person who expresses it and for those around them; smiles make pain more bearable and convey calmness in difficult situations. They have a direct positive effect on one's physical state and increase one's enjoyment of any activity; it is even considered by experts such as Viktor Frankl (as cited in Sandrin, 2018) to be a "weapon with which the soul fights for its survival" (p. 85). The benefits of good humor are therefore many and there is every reason to take fun seriously. This has been considered by some companies in the world of work that have abandoned the *serious business* model to adopt a spirit of professionalism with good humor, obtaining notable results; such is the case of *Yahoo Iberia*, *Southwest Airlines*, and *Pike Place Fish*, where they have found that laughter reduces anxiety and stress and the positive mood helps to prevent depression and other illnesses. In addition, they emphasize the promotion of creativity in solving situations, well-being and a sense of belonging, and even the economic benefits of such enterprises (see Jáuregui and Fernández, 2004).

We can recognize a significant contribution of the experiences narrated in the *Forge of Men* to the competency of *learning to learn* in failure, which leads to a healthy life for the subjects of these experiences. In this regard, Sustainable Development Goal 3 on Health and Well-being (UNESCO, 2017) can help in the ideation and practice of education as human development, especially with regard to prevention strategies, the development of empathy, and the ability to demand, through the expression of ideas and the promotion of policies for health and well-being. Perhaps there are

differences here with regard to what is understood by *well-being*, and we also consider that the proposals made by international organizations for their development do not take into account certain aspects which, from the perspective of this work, we consider to have produced good results. In the establishment of daily routines, for example, references to creating spaces and times of silence, the enjoyment of music and nature, the freedom to be found in austere living and temperance, and the desirability of abstinence at appropriate times are missing, to name but a few elements that stand out in the experiences of the written work and which are undoubtedly a cause of inner joy, the main objective for good health and personal well-being.

4. Conclusions

Education cannot and must not lose its bearings, so let us use the compass. Whatever contributes to the humanization of a person, to their holistic development, to bringing the person to fulfilment with a view to their happiness, must be the aim of education. And it cannot be reduced to other, more partial objectives. In the sociocultural and health context in which we find ourselves, we can identify important stressors that influence people, especially the most vulnerable, among whom we include children and young people, as they have not yet developed a mature personality. As a consequence of this situation, we can identify in the different areas the priority educational challenge of focusing on holistic education that aims to form a strong, balanced personal character.

A contribution to the development of this healthy personality can be found by supporting the development of the key competency of *learning to learn*, so that the learner is able to manage their emotions, decisions, and even life's challenges. In this personal development, we can highlight two educational elements as enablers: action and the role that the educator can play as a motivator. Action puts us to the test and provokes in the person the development of capacities in order to overcome the situations in which we find ourselves or to creatively seek new ways

of dealing with them if previous attempts have failed. If, in addition, this is done in collaboration with others, the experience is more enriching and the forces are multiplied, while the subject gets a clearer idea of their own personality. Letting learners take responsibility is not an easy task, partly because of the educator's desire to be a protagonist and partly because of the learner's own resistance. Only those who have a clear idea of the contribution this makes to the development of their personality, as well as the ability to make loving demands, will be able to involve them in their own development.

As an experience of those who have been able to carry this out, this proposal to strengthen people, especially children and young people, through the educational action of Tomás Morales, as reflected in his book *Forja de Hombres* [Forge of Men], narrates multiple experiences that proved to be valid in the training of young people in non-formal education and which are still valid in families, projects, and individuals – most of which are linked to education. Based on the analysis of the book, we are encouraged to use procedures such as *doing-doing*, action techniques such as assemblies or marches in the mountains. Above all, we learn how to achieve, through various training actions, the objective focus on the learner's gradual self-improvement and the acquisition of a spirit of commitment to oneself and to others. We can recognize various elements involved in this education, complementing with current authors and using the language of the moment, as enhancing the capacity for resilience. These include the capacity for reflection, patience in the face of difficulties, and a sense of humor. All of this is wrapped up in a spirit of self-improvement that is marked from the first moment of the educational action, without having to wait to be confronted with dramatic situations, and as a preventive action in order to be strengthened in the event that they arise.

For this reason, we can recognize a significant contribution of the experiences narrated in the *Forge of Men*, through social competencies, particularly that of *learning to learn in failure*, that leads to a healthy life for the subjects active in these experiences. As we have already seen, by being thrown into the action with more or less experience, young people – and today children with whom this lifestyle is still practiced – develop

a self-awareness that leads them to accept themselves and others, enhance their qualities, become more self-confident, and go out to meet the needs of others and society. These approaches can be strengthened by the institutional proposals made by the major bodies; specifically, the Sustainable Development Goal of Health and Well-being can help to achieve these goals of mature personality development.

We close these conclusions and the article by returning to the initial idea of the current difficulties that our society faces in the socio-cultural sphere. We are committed to the value of forging, little by little, children and young people in the development of a strong personality, through methods, strategies, techniques, and lifestyles that promote personal improvement in small daily habits, which allow them to assume responsibilities at the psycho-evolutionary level of each one. This will be the best preparation for living a happy life, in spite of the sometimes traumatic difficulties.

References

- Barquero, R., & Enith, C. (2021). La recreación en el fomento de la resiliencia. *Revista Ciencias de la Actividad Física*, 16(1), 63–80.
- Bártoli, M. (2020). Resistir con alegría: el valor de la virtud de la paciencia en tiempos de pandemia. In M. Kazmierczak, M. T. Signes, & C. Carreira (Eds.), *Pandemia y resiliencia. Aportaciones académicas en tiempos de crisis* (pp. 117–138). EUNSA.
- Blanco, A. (2009). *Aprender a enseñar*. Paidós Educador.
- Blanco-Navarro, M. (2020). Problem based learning y portafolio como una oportunidad de crecer científicamente para alumnos de grado. In M. P. Bermúdez (Ed.), *Avances en Ciencias de la Educación. Investigación y práctica*, (pp. 151–157). Ed. Dykinson.
- Blanco-Navarro, M. (2021). The dimension of the teacher–student relationship: Frequent language and its conditioning factors. *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education*, Vol. 10, No. 1(19), 83–99. <https://doi.org/10.35765/mjse.2021.1019.05>
- Carter, T. (Director). (2009). *Manos Milagrosas* [Film]. FILMAFFINITY S. L.
- de Gregorio, A. (2007). *Por las huellas de la pedagogía del Padre Tomás Morales, un idealista con los pies en la tierra*. FUE.
- Domínguez Prieto, X. M. (2007). *Antropología de la familia. Persona, matrimonio y familia*. BAC.
- European Union. (2018). Council Recommendation 189/01 of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. *Official Journal of the European Union*. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=SV](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=SV)
- García Hoz, V. (1989). *La práctica de la educación personalizada*. Ed. Rialp.
- Gómez Sierra, M. E. (1998). *Una pedagogía para el hombre de hoy*. Fundación Universitaria Española.
- Spanish Resilience Institute. (n.d.). Retrieved November 11, 2021, from <https://resiliencia-ier.es/resiliencia-y-educacion/>
- Jáuregui, E., & Fernández, J. D. (2004). Los beneficios del humor. *Capital humano*, 182, 38–46. Wolters Kluwer.
- Kateb, E. (2019). *Resiliencia: cómo vencer la adversidad*. Iberia, D. L.
- Kyle, M. (2007). *Sin excusas*. Ciudadela libros.

-
- Lucas, Y. A., & Marcillo, C. E. (2020). Lecturas motivadoras para fortalecer la resiliencia en los estudiantes de Educación General Básica. *Revista científica Dominio de las ciencias*, 6(3), 832–851.
- Morales, T. (1987). *Forja de hombres* (4th Ed.). Cruzada de Santa María.
- Morales, T. (2003). *Hora de los laicos* (2nd Ed.). Encuentro.
- Morell, J. M., Barrero, E., & Martín, I. (Coordinators). (2017). *Programa FORTALEZA. Programa para el desarrollo de la resiliencia familiar*. Pirámide.
- Ramos, M. (Coordinator). (2020) *Enseñar a pensar. Talleres educativos*. EUM Fray Luis de León.
- Sandrin, L. (2018). *La resiliencia. La fuerza para caminar con el viento en contra*. Sal Terrae.
- Soler, D. (2020). Aprender a vivir con los cambios y retos: de qué hablamos cuando decimos resiliencia. *Revista Sobre ruedas*, 114, 29–32.
- Titone, R. (1981). *Metodología didáctica* (8th Ed.). Rialp. S. A.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Educación para los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Objetivos de aprendizaje*. https://web.unican.es/unidades/igualdad/SiteAssets/guia-de-recursos/responsabilidad-social-universitaria/EdS_ODS.pdf