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Classical Vision and New Methods of Enhancing Student Engagement in Education

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Editorial

In this new issue a number of different methodological approaches to the matter of engagement and motivation in the field of education is presented. The starting point for these reflections is established by the world-renowned educational scholar, Professor David Carr of the University of Edinburgh, who, in spite of his basically neo-Aristotelian background, offers a broad and innovative revision of Plato's ideas on education which allows him to question the IQ theory on (arguably neo-Platonic) post-WW2 British selective state education in order to consider the more egalitarian educational reaction to such selection from the nineteen-sixties onward. Finally he envisages the advantages and drawbacks of this proceeding from the point of view of the students' engagement strategies of the future.

The present issue owes its international and multidisciplinary character also to the theoretical papers by such authors as Lindsay Davidson, Maria Oporto Alonso and her co-authors, Marta Gràcia et alia, Jaime Vilaroig Martin, and it is completed with a book review by Izabela Przybylska.

Marcin Kaźmierczak
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Thematic Articles

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The World is Too Much with Us: Apparent and Real Platonic Views of Intelligence and Knowledge for Education

Abstract: From Plato onwards, notions of intelligence and ability – and of their implications for human flourishing – have had a chequered educational history. Following some attention to the influence of IQ theory on (arguably neo-Platonic) post-WW2 British selective state education, this paper proceeds to consider the more egalitarian educational reaction to such selection from the nineteen-sixties onwards. However, while appreciative of the individual and social benefits of such greater educational equality, the paper proceeds to ask whether the notions of individual growth, fulfilment and flourishing that they may seem to entail are entirely appropriate for the human world of tomorrow.

Keywords: intelligence, knowledge, Plato, selective vs egalitarian education

Education and intelligence

The notion of intelligence has a prominent place and vexed history in modern western education and schooling. For much of the twentieth century, psychometry – the project of identifying and measuring intelligence – seems to have been a large preoccupation of academic psychologists and educationalists. However, the assumptions and purposes of psychometry were and are highly controversial (White 2006). This view

largely held that human intelligence is innate or genetically determined and the prime purpose for which psychometric tests were employed was the sorting, grading and selection of human agents for various social, professional and educational purposes. Psychometry was therefore invariably linked to politically conservative ideology and sometimes to racism. Still, it was educationally influential throughout the twentieth century, not least on the British system of selective education that followed the post-WWII 1944 Education Act (Ministry of Education, 1944). One of the advisors to this 1944 legislation was the famous or notorious British psychometrician Sir Cyril Burt and it sanctioned a tiered system of secondary schooling based on selection – via something like IQ testing – at the age of eleven years. This provision was abandoned as inequitable and socially divisive in most of the United Kingdom in the nineteen-sixties and replaced by a common entry system of comprehensive schooling. The reputation of Professor Burt was also badly tarnished by the charge that he had faked his research on the innate and inherited nature of intelligence (see, for example: Ticker, 1994, 1997).

That said, this much-maligned system of early post-war selective education was far from ill-intentioned: on the contrary, it sought to promote wider educational access – guaranteed at least up to the minimum school-leaving age of fifteen years – to young people who had hitherto lacked such opportunity. However, it would also appear that the classical influence of Plato's *Republic* (1961) – which haunts much British educational theorising and policy making from the earliest nineteenth century reflections on popular education – looms large over the 1944 legislation. Although, as we shall shortly see, there is need for caution in interpreting Plato's *Republic*, the apparent theses of that work that society should be governed by the most intellectually able, that such ability is unequally distributed and that any system of public education or schooling ought therefore to be selectively organised or stratified in order to accommodate such intellectual difference, were fairly well reflected in the British 1944 Act.

In this regard, Plato's apparent proposals for the just ordering of the state could not be regarded – at least on the face of it – as egalitarian. For Plato, people should not be considered equal, precisely because they

are not equal. Of course, Plato held that it is not a bad or regrettable thing that people are not equal: on the contrary, the healthy functioning of human individual and social affairs and economy depends upon such inequality – more precisely on the division of labour necessary for a flourishing economy: Plato's idea of justice in individual soul or political state is that these are in good order insofar as their different constitutive parts are performing their proper functions. Thus, the sense in which Plato's view is less than egalitarian is that a complex (economic or other) functioning whole requires diverse properly operating constituents needing different and/or separate development. That said, such Platonic inequality was not inevitably a matter of unequal interpersonal or social regard, status or benefit: indeed, this is rather belied by Plato's insistence that his ruling guardians would not be those destined to enjoy the greatest material advantages or comforts.

Moreover, Plato would seem to have conceived the various qualities of intelligence or ability of different parts of the social whole more in terms of aptitude for different tasks. While post-WWII British selective schooling also aspired to something like this notion of differentiation by aptitude and ability, it was also regrettably infected by psychometric commitment to the measurement of such capacities by means of a common IQ-based test at the age of eleven years. Thus, fatally compromised by a psychometric ideology that generally correlated high and low IQ scores with greater and inferior human worth, the 1944 provision pre-determined the social, educational and vocational destinies of a generation of young people from an early age on the basis of a single simple assessment snapshot, making no allowances for differences of socio-cultural background, individual affective state on the test day and/or longer-term potential for late development.

Moreover, even if Plato might be disassociated from the evils of modern psychometry, any attempt to build a system of education or schooling according to the blueprint of Plato's *Republic* could not nowadays be considered other than educationally, if not also socially, inequitable, unjust and ill-considered. The basic problem here – largely in line with Plato's own view that justice is best done when all citizens properly perform their

diverse socio-economic functions – is that education is effectively conceived in instrumental or utilitarian terms. Indeed, the main mistake is that to which public educational policy-making has ever been prone: precisely of supposing that the sole purpose of education is to cultivate or promote the kinds of knowledge and skill that would fit citizens for this or that economically productive role. In line with this, the 1944 British legislation largely assumed that social and educational justice was best served when all citizens were enabled – on the basis of a simple aptitude test – to find their professional, vocational or other employment feet as doctors, lawyers, nurses, salespersons, accountants, electricians, typists, hairdressers, joiners, plumbers or builders.

While the so-called secondary (as opposed to 'grammar') schools to which eleven-plus failures were consigned did not entirely abandon the task of instruction of such pupils in elementary knowledge of English, mathematics, history, geography and natural science, such instruction was elementary, much tailored to such utilitarian ends as competent literacy and numeracy and inevitably lacked the depth and specialization available to those admitted to the academic grammar schools. One could not in secondary schools study classical languages (as required for entry to professions) or sciences to any serious level of professional practice and the mandatory school leaving age was fifteen (though later raised to sixteen) years. Hence, whereas the grammar school curriculum was often a prelude (following advanced sixth form studies) to university, or at least (for earlier leavers) to 'white collar' clerical work, exit from secondary schools inevitably meant transfer to unskilled labour, trade apprenticeships or further 'blue collar' vocational training. In sum, the 1944 Act effectively reduced the education of compulsory state schooling to *vocational training*.

Intelligence, reason and knowledge

The prime concern of this paper is not with ideological controversies regarding the pros and cons of selective versus common schooling, or even with the issue of intelligence testing: rather, it lies with a more general

issue of the relationship of human intelligence to such other human qualities as reason, knowledge and wisdom and with the moral, spiritual and educational implications of such qualities for any future world. In this light, while the psychometric intelligence of post-war British legislation was an unhelpful artifice, it evidently has a pre-theoretical analogue in ordinary Anglophone usage whereby we commonly describe some species or specimens as more intelligent than others. Thus, we speak of one animal species (dolphins) as being generally more intelligent than another (sardines), or of this specific sheepdog as more intelligent than that one. What we generally mean by this is that the creatures in question can learn or perform better than others in much the same circumstances. In more common usage, we speak of this dog, dolphin or child as being cleverer or 'brighter' than that one.

Still, such questions as 'how intelligent is A?' or 'Is A cleverer than B?' evidently cry out for greater specification via the further qualification: 'at, or with respect to, what?' – to which the apparent psychometric response of 'at passing intelligence tests' seems less than helpful. However, in the case of arachnids, one spider might be judged cleverer at spinning webs; in the case of sheepdogs, Rover might be smarter than Spot at herding sheep; in the case of plumbers, Jim might be handier than John at changing washers. Moreover, in the human case, matters are further complicated by the fact that being cleverer than another person at something usually involves reason, knowledge and/or rational skills, which opens the possibility of distinctions unavailable in the case of sub-rational brutes. Thus, we might say that while John has greater knowledge of plumbing than Jim, Jim is still cleverer at this (faster, tidier, more dexterous) than John; whereas it would make little sense to say that this spider has more knowledge of web-spinning, but that one is better at it. Such distinctions also allow us to say that whereas Jim is brighter or cleverer at the skills of plumbing than John, the latter is smarter than the former at evading VAT.

At all events, being cleverer or more intelligent is not at all the same – though it is not infrequently confused with – being more rational, reasonable or knowledgeable. Indeed, it might seem that this confusion

is precisely that identified by the 'multiple intelligence' response to psychometry of Howard Gardner (2006) and others. But this is not obviously so: for while the psychometricians seem to have confused or subordinated reason, knowledge and other rational ability to more brute intelligence, the multiple intelligence movement no less unhelpfully reduces cleverness to reason, knowledge or other ability. But while human agents certainly have different rational or other abilities, we may yet need to compare or contrast individual competence in such abilities: hence, whereas A and B are both mathematically gifted (or have 'mathematical intelligence'), A is still cleverer at maths than B. To distinguish between different human abilities is not therefore to offer an alternative account of intelligence, but merely another way of confusing the two. Moreover, while we can hardly talk at all of non-human animals – intelligent or otherwise – in terms of reason, rationality or knowledge, we readily speak without contradiction of human agents as intelligent but not very rational; or as knowledgeable but not very clever; and so forth.

Nevertheless, human intelligence is still apt to be revealed in this or that specifiable ability or activity – and, as such, is not well captured by psychometric tests purporting to measure some innate all-purpose form of this endowment. Indeed, while psychometricians may correctly suppose that the intelligence needed for success in some distinctively human activities (such as mathematics, music or chess) is innate or genetically inherited, experience shows that the musical progress of even unmusical pupils may (if not actually hearing impaired) be improved by coaching or training, and it is notorious that performance on the IQ-related tests of eleven-plus examination was often much enhanced by private tuition. More significantly, it does not follow that because children are not conspicuously gifted or able at mathematics or music, they should be *denied access* to such skills or activities: to suppose this would be to miss the entire point of human education which is precisely to equip agents with valuable knowledge, capacities or skills that they did not previously possess. As one latter-day British philosopher of education shrewdly put the point: the abilities that education serves to promote are 'not a given thing but a goal' (White, 1971: 275).

Liberalism, equal opportunity and liberal education

More in tune with such insights, a rather different educational perspective from that of the 1944 legislation virtually transformed British education around the sixth decade of the twentieth century. To be sure, the nineteen-sixties are now remembered as a landmark of cultural revolution, not least in the spheres of popular music and other arts – though such novelties were more than likely particular spin-offs or side-effects of a general shift of western sensibility in an era of new post-war prosperity and affluence, as well as of some reaction to inherited social divisions and hierarchies. But the more optimistic, egalitarian and opportunistic mood of nineteen-sixties Britain was also undoubtedly reflected in significant changes and reforms to elementary and higher education. Thus, whereas the major development at the level of higher education involved wider extension of college and university access to students who had not formerly enjoyed this, the major change to (most UK) elementary schooling was the abolition of eleven-plus examination in favour of common entry to a comprehensive system of secondary schooling.

However, the new comprehensive system of schooling required a new common programme of study to replace the divided curricular fare of the old selective system. In this regard, curriculum policy-makers and planners drew much inspiration from significant modern revival of a broadly liberal conception of education owing much to such nineteenth century philosophers and theorists as Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman. In this spirit, the new British liberal educationalists distinguished vocational training more clearly from education as concerned with the development of human reason and rational agency through the acquisition of intrinsically worthwhile human knowledge and understanding (see mainly, for this perspective: Peters, 1966; Hirst and Peters, 1970). On this view, some broader understanding of the world through such traditional school studies as history, geography, science (in its diverse forms), mathematics, art and literature were to be considered of real human significance as crucially formative of mind and agency. In the words of the nineteenth century spokesman for liberal education, Matthew Arnold,

education should be conceived as initiation into human culture conceived as 'the best that has been said and thought in the world' (Arnold, 1967: 150). In a new British climate of comprehensive schooling, it was argued that such liberal education should be available to all. On this view, it should not be assumed that because Sean was destined for a career as an auto-mechanic he could not be interested in ancient history, or because Sharon was later to be a hairdresser, she could not enjoy poetry.

Still, while the new curriculum initiatives of late twentieth and early twenty-first century British educational policy-making did reflect the more egalitarian drift of such liberal educational thinking, these were (as ever) devised by politicians and civil servants and not by educational philosophers and theorists. In consequence, even in locations where the influence of academic educational philosophy on curriculum policy was more apparent (notably in Scotland), the key liberal idea of education for its own sake was hard to discern in UK national curricular policies and the content of school syllabuses remained more evidently utilitarian. Hence, while educational opportunities were undoubtedly extended by comprehensive schooling, the prime educational concern lay much as before with the overall enhancement of local economic interests rather than with development for its own intrinsic worth of the minds or souls of individual citizens. In this light, better or more knowledgeable school or college graduates might be expected to contribute more effectively to national economic growth. Sean might not be a better auto-mechanic for any interest in ancient history, but he might be so for more theoretical instruction in science.

In this light, whether the more egalitarian or inclusive policies of recent educational legislation have served to promote the classic liberal educational ideal of appreciation of knowledge and understanding for its own sake among British comprehensive school pupils may be doubted. All the same, it may be that some comprehensive school Sharons of hairdressing destiny have been placed in a position to appreciate poetry as would not have been open to the eleven-plus failing Sharons of former secondary schools. Indeed, it may also be that some comprehensive Sharons have gone on to be English literature graduates or even best-selling novelists

as their mothers could hardly have dreamed of doing. All the same, we might ask whether these more inclusive, enabling or liberating latter-day educational developments have engendered a society of better citizens for a better world than the more socially divided or less equal British society that preceded it. Well, insofar as it has been more enabling for many than ever before, it would be churlish to deny that this as a social gain and good. By the same token, such enablement seems also to have engendered – as its advocates had indeed hoped – a more ambitious, enterprising and affluent society. Is this, then, not also to the good?

Problems with liberalism and competitive intelligence

In response to this question, one might first note that the political liberalism (as typified by Rawls, 2005), with which ideas of liberal democracy and liberal education are closely associated, has often been castigated – particularly by recent communitarian philosophers (for example, MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1992; Sandel, 1998) – as the source of a peculiarly modern malaise of self-focused and divisive individualism: on this view, liberalism encourages us to assert our own rights above those of others and to look after number one at others' expense. However, this might not seem a very well-aimed criticism. Of course, if it means that individual agents are at liberty to make their own moral and other choices and decisions in the light of personal conscience, then that seems true enough. But liberalism also insists that individual choices should be morally principled and neither of the two ethical theories with which it is closely associated is in the least individualistic: utilitarianism is a highly demanding ethics of other-regard in which individual agents are at all times required to put the interests and welfare of others before their own; and (Kantian or other) deontology explicitly emphasises the primacy of other-regarding duties over rights and insists (in the spirit of the Christian 'golden rule') that we cannot require of others anything that they might not require of us in return. Both deontology and utilitarianism are ethics of strong social conscience and other-regard. Moreover, the associated idea of liberal

education advocates some distance from personal concerns in favour of rational commitment to objective knowledge and truth as well as principled moral regard for others.

That said, to whatever extent the communitarian critique of liberalism misfires at the level of ethical theory, there may be more to it in actual practice. While a broadly liberal outlook has yielded clear benefits in terms of greater social justice, equality and opportunities for many previously denied these, it has also fostered other more morally ambivalent human ideals, attitudes and expectations. In practice, liberalism does endorse personal ambition of an overtly competitive and accumulative kind: indeed, at least since its first clear seventeenth century formulation, it has been linked to a free enterprise economy that encourages individual acquisition often at the expense of others, and the worst excesses of free market capitalism have long been the target of Marxist and other radical social and economic critiques. On the other hand, insofar as latter-day liberal theorising has appreciated and sought to safeguard against the worst effects of such enterprise, one may also hesitate to reject the undoubted moral, social and economic benefits of liberal democracy and economy as such.

Still, it seems much the same qualities of competitive and opportunist liberal initiative and enterprise, encouraged among the young in our homes and schools – albeit not necessarily expressed in incentives to what the poet calls 'getting and spending' (Wordsworth in Nichol-Smith, 1921: 146 – that fuel more excessive and ruthless forms of adult competition. In the apparently laudable spirit of the Gospel parable of the talents, caring parents encourage their children to develop this or that academic, technical, artistic or sporting ability or potential with a view not only to becoming good at this or that, but to outshining or distinguishing themselves as better than others. In this manner, the more widely enabling liberal or egalitarian climate of latter-day schooling differs little from its more exclusive and selective predecessor – apart from the fact that more young people than ever are driven by such competitive goals: ambition and competition have been democratised. But what is wrong with such desire for achievement or with good parental incentive

towards success? Do we not rightly regard people as good parents insofar as they work to assist their offspring to worthwhile and personally fulfilling goals with a view to the rewards of personally successful life? Can there really be any case for thinking that parents should *not* encourage their offspring to succeed or do well?

While it can hardly be denied that good parents should encourage their children to have ambition and to succeed in life, there is also success and success and ambition and ambition. More precisely, though it is all to the good that young people direct their talents and energies to personally life-fulfilling and enhancing enterprises and goals, it seems that such personal ambitions are nowadays beset by hazards and temptations that are less obviously conducive to complete moral and spiritual well-being. While some of these dangers and temptations have been ever with us, it has become more recently evident that we now inhabit a culture – particularly in the affluent west, but increasingly globally – that is increasingly conducive to self-regard of an unprecedentedly narcissistic character. Moreover, as contemporary communitarians have suspected, the moral, political and economic ground for widespread modern celebration of such individual self-aggrandisement – particularly in the affluent west – has doubtless been assisted by the exaggerated liberties and material affluence that liberal-democratic association and free enterprise have enabled.

Moreover, one significant by-product of modern liberal economics that has greatly reinforced contemporary deification of the individual and celebration of celebrity for its own sake is a technological revolution that has virtually transformed human communications, association and sense of identity over less than a century. In the first half of this period, the invention of and popular access to cinema, radio and television encouraged widespread celebration of some agents as 'stars' of a media world beyond the sphere of common humanity – a status much reinforced by the machinery of mass advertising also fostered by such technology. In early and prescient critical appraisal of this development, Marshall McLuhan declared that the medium had become the message (McLuhan, 2005; McLuhan and Fiore, 2016), that style had now triumphed over substance

and form over content in a brave new world in which show, conceit and vanity were virtually ends in themselves. In the closing decades of the twentieth century to the present, however, citizens of McLuhan's 'global village' have witnessed the bewildering explosion and dissemination of personalised technologies of computing, internet communication, mobile telephony, electronic mail and social media that have served only to tighten the hold of media message and extend such self-absorption to the masses.

The vice-like grip of this revolution is by now universal, it is oblivious to traditional human barriers of class, gender, race and geographical distance and only the technically incompetent aged (like the present author) have any hope of avoiding its influence. If one travels nowadays by public transport one can hardly fail to notice that most other travellers are glued to their mobile phones or tablets. Moreover, while the enormous human benefits of this modern gadgetry should not be denied, the downside of all this – especially for up-coming generations who are habituated or addicted to its use – is by now also well-documented. Notwithstanding that the communication enabled by such technology is unhindered by traditional divisions of class, race, gender, culture and distance, the social media of preponderant youthful use has greatly increased the power of peer pressure, so that on-line persecution, ridicule and bullying – with sometimes fatal consequences – has become one common side-effect of its employment. Indeed, social media encourages a level of virtually (often enough actual) pornographic self-exposure apparently immune to the inhibitions and censure of traditional shame. What seems to have effectively replaced such shame is the threat of embarrassment over loss of face or popularity among one's peers or those one is virtually compelled to try to impress.

The significantly negative effects on human identity, consciousness and interpersonal association of the addictive use of internet and social media have been imaginatively explored by media itself in the impressive popular American TV series, *Black Mirror*, and in a number of fine feature films (such as *Disconnect* and *Her*). The movie *God Bless America* also presents a savagely satirical picture of a society, not too far removed from

the present, shaped by reality and talent show television wherein genuine artistic or intellectual merit has been largely replaced by trivial exhibitionist and populist entertainment and in which a performer attempts suicide, not because he has been subjected to ridicule and humiliation, but because he has been denied further TV appearance. Much the same reaction might well be expected from present-day teenagers from whom parents might try to confiscate their mobile phones, and it is clear that the most devastating form of damage to self-identity that a modern young person can experience is social media ostracism via face-book account deletion. Reinforced by intense school pressures to succeed in a competitive economy wherein employment prospects are also often bleak, such anxieties only serve to compound the personal insecurities of young people. Indeed, dog-eat-dog anxiety to distinguish oneself by any means is probably the contemporary name of the game and even in the cloistered groves of academe the urge to make one's mark at all costs is all too often manifest in preference for questionable novelty over reason and truth.

However, the unfortunate economic and environmental consequences of such ego-reinforcing technologies should also not go unremarked. There can be little doubt that the global drive to national economic competitiveness and prosperity, in which the main imperative (in especially western developed nations) is to consume and out-consume, is recapitulated at the individual level whereby the imperative is not just to keep up with the Jones's, but to out-do them as conspicuously as possible. This inevitably means larger living spaces, more impressive (private) transportation, (often obscenely) large bank accounts. more expensive holidays entailing more (polluting) international air and other transport, more (increasingly inessential) durable or disposable personal commodities and accessories, and so forth. While human insatiability and aspiration to such conspicuous consumption has always been with us, the effects of such avarice were doubtless formerly much less environmentally damaging than they are nowadays and its agents less well-placed – as people are today – to appreciate its hazards. All of this is exponentially reinforced by the propaganda of commerce and entertainment that encourage ordinary citizens to think that they have as much right to

wanton consumption as the most self-indulgent media celebrities. One might also consider the insidious effects of endless popular action movies featuring further large-scale frivolous waste of the natural resources already exploited by extravagant modern technological production (such as, for example, the reckless and frivolous car pile-ups in the popular comedy film *Blues Brothers*).

Intelligence, reason and wisdom for tomorrow's world

Thus, as indicated to date, while more recent educational policies and practices in Britain and elsewhere have indeed widened opportunities and done much to reduce the pernicious social inequality and elitism of former days of selective schooling, they have done little to curtail human competition or the ambition to outdo others in the game of life as such. On the contrary, latter-day schooling and parenting have increased pressures on pupils and offspring towards relentless competition with their peers. As also noted, such competition and ambition have been exacerbated by global development of a modern technologically-driven culture of mass media and advertising which reinforces dubious forms of narcissistic self-absorption and fear of failure or loss of face, now widespread among today's young. All this widespread pressure, not just to succeed but be seen to succeed – via any notice or notoriety – is also operating in an increasingly overpopulated world in which the price of personal aggrandisement is all too often the globally unprecedented consumption of ever-diminishing natural resources.

Moreover, such self-promoting competition, ambition and appetite is – and has always probably been – widely regarded as human virtue. Does not the Christian Gospel parable of the talents enjoin us to develop our God-given abilities and, as previously noted, do we not naturally regard it as the duty of good parents to assist their offspring to develop themselves to the full in this or that personally fulfilling endeavour? How, indeed, might human life and progress be otherwise conceived? It could also be said that whatever is at issue here – if, indeed, there is just one

issue rather than several – might be helped by distinguishing between (morally) good and bad forms of self-assertion, competition and ambition. In the current climate of Aristotelian virtue ethics, we might therefore be urged to distinguish more or less acceptable 'means' of such mindsets from their unacceptable or damaging extremes. In the first place, however, this advice may seem less than illuminating, since it is far from clear how – or by what criteria – more acceptable forms of self-assertion, competition and ambition might clearly be distinguished from those less so. (Of course, some latter-day virtue ethicists are also inclined to jettison the doctrine of the mean: but it then it may be less clear what is especially helpful about the Aristotelian practical wisdom of *phronesis*.) Indeed, it is far from evident that such qualities are precisely 'morally' objectionable on any conventional understanding of this term. It is not that self-assertive, competitive or ambitious agents are necessarily amoral, immoral or wrongdoers in any very significant sense: on the contrary, as good liberal-democrats they could also be acceptably pro-social, caring and considerate of others. What then is the root objection, if any, to such qualities?

The title of this paper contains a quote from the English poet William Wordsworth (Nichol Smith, 1921: 146) which captures a central theme of eighteenth and nineteenth century romantic literature: precisely, that of modern post-industrial concern with material human goals of 'getting and spending' and consequent human failure to perceive and appreciate the world (especially of nature) and its natural wonders for what they really are. However, this paper then proceeded to a critique of post-war British selective education – with its emphasis on intelligence as a measure of human success and worth – which it traced to the influence of both modern psychometry and Plato. Still, despite any and all contrary appearances, there is strong intellectual connection between Plato and the modern romanticism of a Wordsworth. First, modern literary romanticism owes much to the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1977) who traced the root cause of human injustice to a kind of socially conditioned 'false consciousness' (to use a term of Marx no less appropriate to the thought of Rousseau) that deludes agents about their true (natural) importance and status relative to others. But this key theme of Rousseau

was itself influenced by his own acknowledged reading of Plato, precisely by Plato's own image of the false consciousness fostered by human imprisonment in the cave of misleading sense experience. To be sure, this idea has been liable to different precise interpretation along the way: whereas Plato appeals to non-empirical reason to free us from the delusion of sense experience and Rousseau appeals to reason to free us from social prejudices, the romantic poets appeal to sentiment and emotion to help us appreciate sense experience more keenly. But a common theme of the need for human liberation via wise liberation from ignorance and delusion runs nevertheless throughout here.

Moreover, despite the previously noted impact of Plato's *Republic* on later political and educational theorising, it is arguable that much of this influence rests on a mistake, insofar as the account of the ideal political constitution presented in that work is meant primarily (as the dialogue itself makes clear) as an allegory or metaphor for the moral constitution, structure and health of the soul. Further, in the present view, while his *Republic* makes significant contributions to Plato's moral psychology and epistemology – especially via the images of the cave and the divided line – his dialogue *Gorgias* provides much better entry into Plato's ethics and educational thought, insofar as this work directly confronts the key educational and existential question of how one should live one's life. As in his *Republic* and *Philebus*, Plato's *Gorgias* is concerned to resist the view, defended primarily by the ancient Greek sophists, that a good, worthwhile or successful human life is to be measured in terms of the achievement at any price of all one's primarily self-serving ambitions and desires. On the sophists' view, even the wicked tyrant who successfully subjugates others by violent means was to be regarded as the happiest or most fortunate of men.

Against this view, Plato's Socrates argues that far from the happiest of men, the tyrant is the most wretched and miserable. Still, for present purposes, the main Platonic point is not the more obvious one that that since wickedness is morally bad and harmful it is not therefore to be envied or admired – though this clearly true and a significant implication of Socrates' argument. However, the main Platonic point clearly cuts more

deeply and concerns the state of soul of all those who are unduly overtaken or consumed by the vain and vaulting ambitions to which humans are inevitably inclined in the cave of false sensible and sensual experience. From this viewpoint, the wealthy philanthropist may be in no less difficulty than the wicked tyrant. Indeed, this may be the main moral of the story of the rich but virtuous and God-fearing young man in St Luke's Gospel who approaches Jesus to know what he should do to gain eternal life: when he is urged to sell all that he has and give it to the poor, he turns sorrowfully away. The key point here is not so much that the rich are necessarily without generosity, but that they are too much – like the rest of us in our more modest way – in thrall to the attractions of this world, such as possessions, prestige and reputation.

The deeper point of the *Gorgias* therefore warns against the attachment of all human souls – the good, no less than the bad or ugly – to the false idols and priorities of sensual pleasure, riches, reputation, ambition, celebrity and downright egotism: these are the distractions of the cave that impede that knowledge of the good which is a matter of unclouded and impartial vision of what is truly worthwhile. As Plato also makes clear in the *Symposium* such worldly distractions are essentially forms of ignorance to which humans are all too fatally attached by that egoism identified in his *Laws* as defining the human self or personality in the cave of sensual experience. If this was a serious moral and spiritual hazard in the time of Socrates and Plato, it can only be yet more so in our modern age of self-focus, narcissism and celebrity wherein it is the ambition of every human ego to be famous for a day (there are actually internet websites that advise people how to achieve this) or much longer if possible.

This is clearly not just what the world and modern media preaches, but what schools, universities and educational institutions also teach in their own ways. In the cave of the world, the cultivation or exercise of human intelligence seems primarily directed towards exploiting one's abilities, looks, personality or natural assertiveness so that one may be noticed or stand out from the crowd come hell or high water. But what alternative might there be in a world in which success is so measured? As already noted, is not the successful expression of such talent or intelligence

something that all parents – indeed, those we describe as good rather than bad parents – precisely desire for their offspring? It is this, however, that Socrates and Plato would regard not as intelligence – and certainly not wisdom – but as a kind of delusion from which the soul needs to be liberated. The more one sees of TV and internet, the more one may be persuaded that there is a serious point here. To be sure, human agents need to succeed in the life that we are given to live and to serve that life – as Socrates and Plato would have wished – as best we can. But their point was that we may not serve it well if the world is too much with us. In this light, and for the sake of tomorrow's world, it may be one urgent task of contemporary and future education to reflect better on how we might encourage the young to serve it in a more Platonically self-effacing and wiser way.

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Engagement and Philosophy

Abstract: This article explores these two keywords through the approach of placing "school" on a continuum between the two extremes of a transactional, instrumental organisation and an aspirational and transformational community. The variety of stakeholder groups are redefined to include personification of abstract concepts and the model of community is considered including these stakeholders. The hypothesis proposed here is that school as a community can be seen as a verb rather than a noun and the extent to which school must by definition be, or have the form of, an organisation, is seen as a manifestation of the Schopenhauerian will of the community, with the levers of transaction pulled by the Head on behalf of the community. The 1994 UNESCO international conference on education provides a framework for discussion about culture and the purpose of education, which is reconciled with the evolving model described and envisioned in this short essay.

Keywords: school, engagement, community, organisation, philosophy, parents, pupils, stakeholders, 'school as a verb', Schopenhauer, socially constructed knowledge, orthodoxy and orthopraxy

Introduction

This short essay grew from a presentation given during an international seminar hosted by Akademia Ignatianum in Krakow in June 2018 where these two concepts were the theme under discussion, hence the focus here is limited to these two ideas. The writer is essentially proposing

a school paradigm which follows on from Sergiovanni (1994), going further in defining how such a model may look, not unlike Jim Collins' hedgehog model, where abstract ideas such as 'the future' and 'the past' are overtly transformed into stakeholders with a voice in guiding the school's decision processes and culture. The author acknowledges that as this paper was originally designed for a themed international seminar, this is only an attempt at provoking thought around two words, "engagement and philosophy", and that further considerations need to look at areas such as the balance between scholastic learning and vocational learning as well as these areas and moral/cultural learning (or indoctrination). Likewise, pragmatic issues concerning curriculum development and approaches to assessment and reporting, not to mention themes around identity and even those of political and broader societal engagement arise as result of a paradigm that goes beyond the here and now of an instrumental approach to education. This concept of school as a community is already active in a start-up school currently in its third year. In the school in question, the pupils initiated a series of broad school discussions (from year 5 to year 13) on the theme of 'eudaimonia'; they also petitioned the Head directly to recognise their achievements in creating a school culture in the face of substantial and rapid growth of pupil numbers and requested partnership in finding strategies to prevent the established culture from being swamped. The school is not an experiment and therefore any review of the situation cannot go beyond a case study, but nevertheless, it is hoped that this paper will encourage more practitioners to consciously define the position their schools occupy on the organisation-community continuum and to go further and apply a similar approach to reviewing more concepts than the two discussed here and practical questions such as those mentioned above.

Some basic definitions are necessary in order to clarify the limited scope of this essay's considerations.

An online dictionary states that "Engagement" is a noun defined as "the act of engaging or the state of being engaged […], a pledge; an obligation or agreement […], an encounter, conflict, or battle," or "the act or

state of interlocking," and its synonyms are "contract, promise". The same dictionary defines "Philosophy" as "the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct […], a particular system of thought based on such study or investigation […],the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them […], a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs [and] an attitude of rationality, patience, composure, and calm in the presence of troubles or annoyances".

Source http://www.dictionary.com/browse/engagement (accessed 3/06/2018) and http://www.dictionary.com/browse/philosophy?s=t (accessed 3/06/2018)

In a model where a school is more community than organisation, the stakeholders may be defined as follows:

> pupils, host community, cultures and histories of community members (past, present and potential), intellectual achievement and designed/intended change, values (such as morality, humility, openness etc.), school sponsors (politicians, owners, governors) and their assumptions (sovereign states and ideology).

Abstract ideas have been personified and included here; they are created collectively by people and as such constructs have malleable will and nature, they are manifestations of the collective will of stakeholder groups who can only be defined through the evidence of their effects.

School – organisation or community?

Sergiovanni (1994) suggested "changing the root metaphor for schools from organization to community". He defines the two extremes of the organisation-community continuum (OCC) as follows:

Organisation	Community
– Members there for self-interest – Members subject to rewards and reprimands – Hierarchical structure – Based on contracts	– People united through commitments – Governed by fluctuating interdependent relationships

The writer proposes that the dialectical synthesis of these extremes is that 'school' is expressed as a verb, with teachers and classes and Heads of Department, and all the trappings of 'organisation' merely manifestations of the will (in the Schopenhauerian sense) of the community, brought into existence through the inherent need for the abstract stakeholders to influence the physical stakeholders.

What should schools do? Where do we find school philosophy?

The 1994 UNESCO international conference on education gives a list of aims for education (UNESCO report page 24). These points are discussed in depth and reduced to four essential elements by Hill (2007):

- understanding cultural identities across national frontiers
- knowledge about global issues and the interdependence of nations
- critical thinking skills applied to trans-national issues and world cultures, and
- an appreciation of the human condition around the world.

(Hill, 2007)

Kelly also has something significant to contribute here:

> The claim that it is the task of the school to transmit the culture of the society, so that the curriculum must be designed to convey what is worthwhile in that culture to all pupils… the best that has been thought and said. (Kelly, 2004: 195).

Van Oord (2005) puts forward a view of culture described by Balagangadhara which is striking for its simplicity:

> a culture is a tradition that can be identified in terms of a specific configuration of learning and meta-learning. In each configuration, one particular kind of learning activity will be dominant: it will subordinate other kinds of learning activities to itself. Such configurations of learning processes can be seen as 'culture-specific ways of learning'. (Balagangadhara, 1994: 446 cited in: Van Oord, 2005: 181)

This definition can be reconciled with the Hofstede Cultural Orientation Model [originally four dimensions: Individual versus collective (IDV), Power distance index (PDI), Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), Masculinity (MAS)], or by Keesing (1976), or that suggested by Chowdhury (2014), and when discussed further identifies two broad ap-proaches to understanding culture: orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Van Oord, 2005). These two concepts basically state that we create configurations of learning either through concepts and abstractions, or through doing.

In an extreme representation (dialectical simplification), this would reduce all cultures to points on a continuum between the two extremes of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This would give us a point of entry to investigate the question of what is philosophy.

Seen in a community paradigm, schools can be said to exist in order to facilitate transfer of ideas and habits between stakeholder groups in a controlled and defined manner, leading to desired and predicted change in the stakeholders, evolution of their individual and collective 'culture'. This is a collective transformation based on free will and by definition requires self-awareness of the participants and consequently a capacity for interaction and change.

This demands that each stakeholder group is able to define itself and alter its position along this orthopraxy-orthodoxy continuum. The abstract ideas here evolve through research and debate and interaction between the physical stakeholders, they evolve through and depend upon the production of socially constructed knowledge.

In their discussion, Bernstein, Elvin and Peters (Bernstein, Elvin and Peters, 1966) explain the significance of passing through the differentiating

ritual (entrance test) for both pupil and parents and so joining a group separate to the rest of society, and in going through the test accepting subservience to the regime that administered it, which then demands absolute obedience, and rejects those who do not reinforce the authority relationship. Subservience is essentially loss of individual autonomy and therefore an act of disengagement. The writer proposes that the implication of this is that schools should define their philosophy with ever-increasing strength and clarity and accept those who freely wish to join, based not on a centrally created 'interview' or entrance test, but on a free discussion whereby values are made as explicit as possible, and all participants acknowledge awareness of this. Mutual acceptance and recognition should be the criteria for joining a school/community.

Hayden's (2012) paper highlights how a mission statement can contribute to the cosmopolitanism of the school, and here this means the growth of the school based on expression of ever-increasing diversity of details in viewpoints.

Communities of Practice

As a verb, 'school' is a manifestation of a highly complex Venn diagram; a result of a series of overlapping communities of practice representing stakeholder groups.

The community paradigm is based on the dialectical principle and functions through distributed transformational leadership, and thus several leaders are required to persuade members to transform their viewpoints.

Marsh and Hau, quoted in Sullivan (2009), argue that selective schooling lowers academic self-concept; selection of membership of each community of practice based on ritualised roles would reduce member diversity and thus academic self-concept, potentially creating a direction of decreasing engagement. This can be countered by regular change of leadership and membership, in different rhythmical cycles, and potentially visitation from other groups or guest interlocutors.

Warries (1982) highlights an inherent weakness in the process of selection without absolute, universal criteria, but only using comparison between children as a distinguisher – he argues that this potentially dilutes the future capacity for the teacher to bring about maximum and most appropriate (targeted) educational change in the pupil and compromises the scope for absolute achievement as the teacher may become embroiled in measuring rather than educating. Analogically this suggests that participation in school through identifying with openly stated values, but not on tests centrally created and administered, should lead to deeper engagement collectively and a sense of being able to achieve as a group and thus ever more engagement and through this active participation, evolution of those values.

Furthermore, this construct of distributed leadership based on equality between stakeholders logically creates a periphery to centre model of curriculum (both formal and informal), granting the child (and all other stakeholders) a greater individual role and place in creating the programme of learning and allows them to take possession of and control their position as learners within the overlapping communities of practice (Borzillo, Aznar and Schmitt, 2011) and logically leads to increasing engagement and through the dialectical process, greater clarity and detail in the values.

Kelly highlighted the risks of the opposite stating that educational theorists "having set out their educational principles, have immediately translated these into prescriptions for subject content, and have thus failed to recognize that education consists of learning through subjects rather than the learning of subjects." (Kelly, 2004: 201), creation of nouns rather than adding adjectives or indeed adverbs to stakeholders and their actions.

The implication of Boylan (2010) is that the teacher interacting on a one to one basis with a child plays a huge role in liberating and empowering that child, giving them a sense of belonging with the result that said child becomes the primary agent in the situative aspect of learning. This assertion is reinforced by Morais (2002). This of course depends upon the professionalism and effectiveness of the teacher themselves, as noted by Kelly, "Education is an interactive process, and the quality of

that interaction must always depend on the professional capability of the individual teacher." (Kelly, 2004: 209). Centralisation of curriculum planning and prescription of content is noted to suffocate the system and deskill teachers (Nikolakaki, Dossa, Moraiti, 2012) and therefore the Venn diagram image of school can only be considered a strength. Here, for increased engagement and growth of collective philosophy we should also consider the question of who is the teacher and who is the pupil – indeed we need to see each stakeholder as both teacher and pupil and create many constellations of teacher-pupil combinations.

If communities of practice are formed by discussion and debate (Busher et al., 2007) then clearly a platform for this needs to be created. Debate occurs when one or more thesis is presented to a discussion chamber together with an antithesis; the community of practice arises as a consequence of the process of synthesis. Organisational structures are ultimately the responsibility of the Head of School, and should be altered if the working groups identify a need for this.

In a paper that discusses community of practice in more depth, based on a wide review of literature, Busher et al (2007) note that studies frequently focus on the role or position of middle leader without referring in depth to what is experienced by the person filling that role. In a small school, the experience of the people involved, the *transformation* of their practice and understanding, their reflection and their transformational leadership of the children and each other must be important. Rotation of the role of lead facilitator throughout working groups will contribute to empowerment, breadth of skills, affect (noted as vital by James and Connolly et al., 2006) and personal development.

As Rathod (2013) points out in a brief but clear article, concept mapping is is an effective method to improve cognitive skills, and from a constructivist perspective it can allow each community of practice to explore the fundamental concepts regarding their 'culture' held by members prior to building upon them, including aspects of the values that support them. This therefore facilitates ordered exchange between communities of practice and definition of self-awareness and through recognition of increasing diversity can build engagement and represent a manifestation

of what the school is. Concept mapping can lead to a kind of artificial intelligence.

Concepts of knowledge vary across cultures, and so the fundamental assumptions concerning a major part of what the school aims to transmit (and how) should ideally also be subject to examination by the stakeholder groups. This is discussed in depth by Zhong (2012) in a fascinating article about Socrates and Confucius comparing their respective concepts of 'knowing'.

Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss in more depth learning as social and situated, commented on also by Boylan (2010); combining Vygotsky and these writers with the Venn diagram model of 'school as a verb' and the assumption of meaningful, multi-directional interaction between stakeholder groups, supported by management (as the instrumental realisation of the 'will' of the school community) we can see a potent recipe for engagement and philosophical development for all participants.

However, as Leithwood et al., (Leithwood et al, 2006) point out, distributed leadership, particularly in a small school, can bring about change; a view supported by Rost's (1991) discussion of leadership and management and further strengthened if we consider the issue through Sergiovanni's (1994) metaphor of school as a community more than an organisation. Hence, it can be asserted that active change in respect to the experienced curriculum can be brought about in the school/community through the concerted action of convinced individuals; where leadership is distributed it is coupled with empowerment of those individuals who have appropriate responsibility.

Dimmock and Walker (2003: 71) define culture as "the enduring sets of beliefs, values, ideologies and behaviours that distinguish one group of people from another". In their chapter, they are careful to cite strong empirical evidence from multiple sources supporting their assertions. Within schools there will be several cultural sub-groupings – industrialists, intellectuals, national groups, teaching staff to name a few. As Dimmock and Walker show, organisational cultures can be consciously manipulated by a leader over the short term, whereas societal cultures change more slowly. Influence between the leader and the organisational culture

is mutual whereas the community (societal) aspect of the cultural group is essentially beyond the direct individual influence of the leader, requiring sustained input over time by several leaders. In this regard, it is commented (Dimmock, Walker, 2003) that the organisational culture of the community surrounding the school is unlikely to lessen the effect of the societal cultures of the individual families that constitute this community, rather more to highlight this (citing Laurent, 1983). Sergiovanni asserts that in communities empowerment goes from individuals to the group, whereas in organisations it goes in the opposite direction – in effect delegation rather than initiative taking. This is logical, and helps us understand where any school is located on the Organisation-Community Continuum.

The 'school as a verb' should also have a defined person to lead discussion around philosophy (probably not the Head, as this would be representative of authoritarian structure and drive the school towards the organisation end of the continuum).

Conclusions – practical summary of how to support philosophy and engagement

A concept map should be visible in school stating a summary of the concepts understood to date regarding what the 'school/community as a verb' is (its philosophy), and created through discussion based on consensus and equality between all stakeholder groups. These concepts should be explicitly shared with all joining the school. This should include concepts of learning, knowing, creation and transfer of knowledge.

Schools need an evolving vision and mission statement, a definition of stakeholders, communities of practice which change shape and leaders cyclically, involving ever expanding spirals of participants and a forum for regular interaction between these groups in order to create an action zone ('school as a verb') where engagement and philosophy exist as two active and 'conscious' aspects of each complex individual in the school community and where each stakeholder group and participant is self-aware and empowered to both contribute and change.

As a result of this short essay, investigating only two words, the writer calls to school leaders who are seeking to revitalise their school paradigm to consider using these ideas as a foundation for action research to formally investigate the ways in which this way of thinking brings changes to measurable aspects of 'school as a community' and as a 'community with aspiration' as well as the very down to earth issues of reducing parental discontent and teacher-parent conflict and ensuring pupil engagement and self-esteem. It is also hoped that this paradigm can be deployed to further inform and explore issues not touched upon here, such as curriculum, teaching/learning for intercultural awareness, teaching for identity.

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Academic Engagement in Students of Secondary and Bachelor Education: Towards a Complete Understanding of the Term

Abstract: The objectives of the paper are: 1. To offer a brief exposition of the origins and the definition of the concept of academic engagement. 2. To describe some of the manifestations of academic engagement in different school stages: from secondary education to bachelor education. 3. To suggest some direct implications of the term in the work of the educator.

Keywords: academic engagement, global academic performance, educational implications

1. The concept of academic engagement: origins and definition

One of the permanent paradigms within the educational field is investigating the factors that have an influence on school performance. Defining the elements that influence and promote academic success is at the same time an ambitious and relevant objective that may lead to the definition of theoretical contents that are difficult to apply in practice. "Engagement" is the factor that we propose to study. This concept

has appeared within a very specific practical context: the business field and more specifically the study of the so-called "burnout" (Salanova, Schaufeli, Llorens, Peiró and Grau, 2000).

The engagement concept is proposed as the opposite of "burnout" (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004), defined by Casuso (2011) as: "in general terms we can say that the daily connotations of engagement refer to the connection, implication, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, effort and energy in relation to what are you doing" (Casuso, 2011: 55). Operationally, the engagement would be framed within the motivational factors that factors divided into three dimensions related to each other: vigour (high degree of vitality and effort in undertaken tasks), dedication (enthusiasm, inspiration and elaboration of goals and challenges at work) and absorption (concentration and compliance of tasks) (Manzano, 2004; Salanova et al., 2000).

From this point of view, the engagement would be composed of: a behavioural element (vigour), an emotional component (reference to dedication) and a cognitive element (absorption). As Salanova and Llorens (2008) pointed out: "for these reasons, engagement is a clearly motivational concept as it has components of activation, energy, effort and persistence and is aimed to achieve objectives" (Salanova and Llorens, 2008, p. 2.3). It is in that sense that it has been proposed as an indicator of psychological well-being in workers (Salanova et al., 2000; Salanova, Martínez and Llorens, 2004).

To bring this concept from business to education field, the first research on student engagement was conducted. The students performed a psychological activity similar to a worker in the company: to carry out tasks to achieve objectives (Abouserie, 1994; Finn, 1989). From this point of view, the students were supposed to put into practice some theoretical knowledge and acquire a commitment with the objective to incorporate it into a constant performance (Lisbona, Morales and Palací, 2009). The commitment, in some way, "overpasses" the academic field, for example while they are doing academic activities outside school journey (Shernoff and Hoogstra, 2001).

The first definition of academic commitment, as Finn stated in 1989, exposed that engagement include two indicators: participation (including

response to the work request, initiative in class, participation in extracurricular activities and making decisions regarding the academic field) and identification (the sense of belonging and the appreciation of the school). Both indicators would be measured as "academic commitment".

Later, Newmann et al. (1992) defined academic commitment as: "the psychological investment and the effort directed to student learning, understanding the knowledge, skills or work tools that are intended to be promoted" (Newmann et al., 1992: 12).

The current definitions are more operative. For instance, the ones proposed by Appleton, Christenson, Kim and Reschly (2006). These definitions include three indicators of academic commitment that explicitly emphasize the influence of contextual variables that are related with the school and also include parents or teachers:

- Behavioural Engagement: it would be observed when students take part in academic, social or extracurricular activities. The main idea is the participation, including academic, social and extracurricular tasks. At the behavioural level, the student's performance can be observed in three directions. The first variable referred to as "positive behaviour" would refer to the absence of disruptive behaviours such as school absences. The second one, would refer to learning and academic tasks that include behaviours such as effort, perseverance, concentration, attention or asking questions Finally, the third variable includes participation in sport activities or collaboration in the school council.
- Cognitive Engagement: refers to personal investment, self-regulation and the self-control in complex situations. This takes into account the investment needed and the will to understand complex ideas. This also considers complex teaching skills.
- Emotional Engagement: refers to the affective component by the interaction among classmates, teachers or tasks demanded in school. It refers to positive and negative reactions to such interactions, as interest, boredom, happiness, sadness or anxiety. It is the basis for

creating links with an institution and directly influences in the academic performance.

In conclusion, engagement is a concept applicable to the school context with a multitude of characteristics that can be assumed by research with the aim of increasing the levels of involvement, passion and responsibility of students for their studies.

2. Manifestations of academic engagement in Secondary and Bachelor Education

2.1. Initial considerations

Throughout the evolutionary progress that the child experiences, there is also the development of academic commitment or engagement. In this way, there are connections between what is observed in general progress in children and adolescents and the level of engagement development. However, these connections are not transparent (Mahatmya et al., 2012).

The "evolutionary tasks" will be taken as a conceptual paradigm, defined as participation in specific academic tasks inside and outside the school. These are tasks that point to the main changes and challenges that occur during a certain stage of development, that is, what is expected to be carried out by a child of a certain age at a physical and social level (Mahatmya et al., 2012).

2.2. Academic Commitment in Secondary and High School Education

This is the period in which there are more studies on engagement, since both success or school dropout can occur (Finn, 1989). From the beginning to the end of adolescence, stable scores of engagement at behavioral, cognitive and emotional levels are observed.

Behavioral engagement

In adolescence, engagement at the behavioral level is manifested in the tasks, study behaviors, attention and participation in class discussions.

With regard to the family, it was found that those adolescents who complete the tasks with their parents and are helped by them have better grades (Mahatmya et al., 2012). The classmates in this stage play a fundamental role. Various studies confirm that those classmates who help others with daily tasks show a greater effort during the classes (Mahatmya et al., 2012). It seems that class attendance is related to teachers creating structured environments and involvement in extracurricular activities.

Cognitive engagement

It is defined as attention to the task and the teacher (Mahatmya et al., 2012). Students with high academic engagement tend to prefer changing tasks. In adolescence, tasks that imply a greater challenge, curiosity, interest and dominance with respect to primary school are generated (Mahatmya et al., 2012). Although the intrinsic motivation decreases, there are external conditions that cause it to increase, such as the promotion of critical thinking at home, or access to books or museums (Gottfried, Flemin and Gottfried, 1998, cited by Mahatmya et al., 2012).

The teachers' support perceived is a predictor of engagement during primary and secondary education, as well as some characteristics of the group of peers, such as the fact that they are oriented towards achievement and are intrinsically motivated. It should be noted that these last two elements explain the adolescent's academic engagement to a lesser extent than the feeling of belonging to the school (Goodenow and Grandi, 1993, cited by Mahatmya et al., 2012). The teacher's enthusiasm is also an element related to a strong score in intrinsic motivation (Patrick, Tisley and Kempler 2000, cited by Mahatmya et al., 2012) and as a consequence of a high degree of cognitive engagement.

Emotional engagement

With regard to emotional engagement, fear, anxiety, boredom or enthusiasm of the students are studied in relation to the school and the

tasks proposed there. In adolescence, emotional engagement is the type of commitment that decreases the most (Eccles et al., 1993, cited by Mahatmya et al., 2012). Fear of failure significantly predicts the decrease in grades, although it does not seem to be significantly related to academic engagement (Mahatmya et al., 2012).

Studies show that those students with greater degrees of connection to their school attend with greater assiduity, and report better grades (McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum, 2002, cited by Mahatmya et al., 2012). It also seems that in smaller schools students are more identified with their values and need fewer disciplinary warnings.

Finally, emotional engagement seems to be influenced in adolescents by the feelings of challenge and importance that they attach to an activity (Shernoff and Hoogstra, 2001). In the same way, the support of parents for autonomy and emotional regulation when carrying out homework influence the emotional engagement of adolescents, for example in terms of motivation. Later research found that emotional engagement is a key element in the transition to adult life and the adoption of adult roles (Mahatmya et al., 2012).

3. What implications can the study of engagement have for educators?

The study about the academic commitment helps teachers to perform the following areas (Finn and Zimmer, 2012):

- To detect commitment behaviours on initial phases of the learning process, as well as these are essential to learn. Thereby, academic commitment and performance are repeatedly related on scientific research.

- To find the nature of commitment behaviours and how they can be seen at the same time on the first and last years of schooling. As a result, school dropout could be detected on early years of education and prevented in the future.

– To confirm that the same academic commitment is an important educational result itself. For example, those students who display persistence in the resolution of a class problem are found to be able to complete post-secondary studies too.

– To convince educational communities that they are important factors in the promotion of the academic commitment, which allows the chance to improve the achievement capacity of students that experience some difficulties along their academic life.

In summary, academic commitment is a concept with such theoretical depth that it is an endless source of research. That research should help design activities that will result in the well-rounded education of our students, considering that the students are committed when the teachers help them find anwers to their real questions.

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EVALOE-DSS as a Self-Assessment and Decision-Making Tool on the Teaching of Oral Language in a School Context: Results of a Pilot Study[1]

Abstract: School is a natural context for development in which the communicative strategies used by teachers when interacting with students are essential for the development of communicative and linguistic competence. The objective of this study was to construct, implement and validate the first version of a self-assessment and decision-making tool on the teaching of oral language at school. It is an adaptation of the Oral Language Assessment in the School Context Scale (*Escala de Valoración de la enseñanza de la Lengua Oral en contexto Escolar-EVALOE)* (Gràcia et al., 2015) based on the

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use of the Conversational Methodology. This is a multiple case study focusing on four teachers (1 from an ordinary school, 2 from a rural school and 1 from a special education school). For six months, the teachers self-assessed their teaching practices with the tool, made decisions to improve it, and introduced changes in their classes. The researchers observed five class sessions of each teacher, assessed them with the same tool and each teacher-researcher pair conversed and reflected on the classes in five meetings throughout the semester. The results show that, in spite of the fact that there were important differences between teachers, the EVALOE – Decision Support System (EVALOE-SSD) is a useful tool that facilitates self-assessment, decision-making and the introduction of changes in the classes in order to promote the development of communicative and linguistic competence in the students. The analysis identified elements that can be improved and that will be considered during the review of the tool.

Keywords: self-assessment; communicative and linguistic competence; Decision Support System (DSS); school; reflection; decision-making.

Introduction

Although computers have been integrated into fields related to educational management in many countries since the 1970s, the integration of Decision Support Systems (DSS) is still recent (Kalay, Chen, 2002) and during the last 35 years, these systems have become a key element in information and decision-making processes (Kivijärvi, 1997). A DSS is an interactive and dialogic system based on computers which helps and supports management and decision-making, especially by making semi-structured or semi-intelligent decisions (Silver, 1991). The emphasis lies in the functionality of decisions and the widening of the decision-making capacities of those who take them. The present study analyses the implementation of a first version of a DSS in the teaching and learning oral language skills by four teachers.

Interaction in natural contexts and language development

The socio-historical (Vigotsky, 1981), socio-interactionist (Bruner, 1983) and ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1987) approaches to psychological development defend the importance of the characteristics of the context and the social interactions in which the child participates during his/her early years, as well as the relations which are established between those contexts (Bornstein, 1989; Gràcia, 2003; Gràcia, Ausenjo, Porras, 2010) in the development both in general and in particular of language.

Children develop communicative and linguistic competence in natural contexts and with significant adults through the use of language in appropriate situations, which occurs through help and the process of accompaniment (Gràcia, Galván-Bovaira, Vilaseca, Rivero, Sánchez-Cano, 2012).

Schools represent a microcosm of interpersonal relations in which communicative and linguistic development is based on numerous situations between peers and adults. The adult communicates with the child through oral language and, thus, the child changes his or her way of seeing the world, of speaking and behaving (del Rio, Gràcia, 1996). In the classroom, the teacher uses certain educational strategies in order to foster the acquisition and development of language (Gràcia, Galván-Bovaira, Sánchez-Cano, 2017; Jones, 2017; Marinac, Woodyatt, Ozanne, 2008).

Catalan legislation on education (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2007, 2009) places special emphasis on linguistic competence (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Specifically, it stresses the need to teach children to produce oral texts that are appropriate to particular situations, and the need to organize the course content in a way that allows children to express their thoughts and opinions, to respond to those of others, and to expand their knowledge. These oral texts must be constructed in a context that encourages interaction and dialogue. Although since the 1990s a succession of laws had aimed to develop linguistic competence, the inclusion of these aims in everyday teaching practice has been an arduous process.

Gràcia, Galván-Bovaira, Sánchez-Cano (2017) have descriptively reviewed a total of eight study perspectives which address this topic. They identified the strategies and activities that each one of those perspectives prioritizes for teaching and learning the use of oral language in the classroom. As a result of the study, they highlight that teaching strategies are diverse and that the most frequent activities in classrooms are oral presentations and debates. They provide a comprehensive overview of the current situation and state that a programming and definition of the systematized teaching-learning objectives of oral language is needed.

Evaluation of communicative and linguistic competence at school

The need to evaluate language competence has led to the development of different types of tools. Some of them have been designed in order to evaluate general aspects of the classroom context, essentially focusing on the skills, knowledge and experience of the teaching staff and the atmosphere at school (Marshall, Lewis, 2014). However, other scales have been designed in order to evaluate the emotional and interactive support in the classroom (Harms, Clifford, Cryer, 1998), the quality of the classroom, taking into consideration variables such as space, activities, interaction, the teaching program and syllabus, the learning environment, safety and health. There are also some key elements in the classroom which promote the development of oral language, such as the organisation of activities, the type of reasoning and the strategies used by educators. Nevertheless, most of the above-mentioned tools do not focus on the interaction between educators and students, understood as the way in which teachers involve students in activities, the strategies used in order to encourage them to self-regulate their participation in conversations or other important elements of the instructional design of linguistic content.

Assessment of the Teaching of Oral Language in the School context Scale (EVALOE)

The Oral Language Assessment in the School Context Scale (*Escala de Valoración de la Lengua Oral en contexto Escolar*, EVALOE) (Gràcia et al., 2015; Gràcia, Vega, Galván-Bovaira, 2015) was created on the basis of the great importance of linguistic interactions in the school context and the need for teacher awareness in the pragmatics of language. It was designed with the aim of providing language development professionals (speech therapists, counsellors…) with a tool so that they could assess the skills and strategies used by teachers in order to promote the development of oral competence in the classroom.

EVALOE is a tool that allows professionals to explore the interaction between the teacher and students and between students in the classroom and has been developed from a socio-pragmatic and eco-functional perspective of language acquisition. It consists of two parts. The first is an observation scale of a total of 30 items grouped in three dimensions (Context and Management of Communication, Instructional Design and Communicative and Strategic Functions). The second includes a set of questions to develop a semi-structured interview for teachers, with the purpose of evaluating their teaching practice, taking into account aspects which are included more thoroughly in the first part. EVALOE has been adapted to be used in the context of special education schools (Gràcia, Benítez, Vega, Domeniconi, 2015) and has also been translated into Portuguese (Vega, Gràcia, Domeniconi, Benítez, 2017). The methodological proposal at the core of the creation of EVALOE is the Conversational Method (CM), which sees classrooms as communicative spaces in which teaching and reflection on oral language takes place, as well as providing a tool to help students learn content related to all subjects (Gràcia et al., 2015, 2017).

Decision Support Systems (DSS)

Currently, the figure of a professional who reflects on and/or questions their practice is emerging as a part of curriculum competence in any discipline and especially in education (Shön, 1983). Reflection with other professionals and individual reflection allow teachers to build knowledge of their practice, which promotes a better understanding of their practice and transforms it and their environment at the same time (Farrell, 2007). Through reflection, teachers will be able to make many subjective and implicit aspects visible, as they are not always aware of them even though they have a great influence on professional conduct (Korthagen, 2011).

With the purpose of establishing new paths to solve the already-mentioned difficulties, the use of technology and DSSs raises a new challenge in the world of education. In recent years, DSSs have gained importance as a supplementary measure to traditional assessment provided by professionals, aimed at improving their empowerment and, thus, helping to define and clarify which decisions are most important and their consequences (Arnott, Pervan, 2016; Eom, Kim, 2006).

The use of DSSs in education is still at an early stage and recent research has highlighted the advantages and potential of their use for the planning of teaching processes and content learning (Kalay, Chen, 2002) and decisions related to structural and organisational changes in the school (Sadahiro, Sadahiro, 2012). Nevertheless, some studies already point out that it is possible to use them to help the decision-making process in the field of special education (Gregg, 2009) or in the context of virtual learning (Xu, Wang, 2006).

This article highlights the usefulness of DSSs in education and, more precisely, the intention of empowering teachers and helping them in their decision-making regarding their educational practice, their communication management as well as their adaptation to the environment, with the purpose of contributing to the development of the linguistic competence of students. In this context, the research purpose was, firstly, to assess the efficacy of a first version of a DSS, based on EVALOE, in helping

four teachers to self-assess their teaching practice and decision-making with the purpose of introducing changes, thereby contributing to the progress of the communicative and linguistic competence of their students. Our second purpose was to detect elements to improve this first version of the instrument in order to develop a more effective one.

Methods

This is a multiple case study with a number of components of action-research due to the fully participative role of the teachers (Latorre, 2003; Riba, 2009). The strategy used can be placed within an approach of mixed methods in that the study gathers and analyses qualitative and quantitative data (Burke-Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner, 2007).

Participants

Four teachers and their students participated in the pilot study. The Case 1 consisted of a teacher and 26 students from the third course of the second cycle of kindergarten education (3-6 years old) at an ordinary school, whose mother tongue was Arabic, except for one whose first language was Spanish. Case 2 consisted of a teacher and 8 students from the first (3 students) and second course (5) of the second cycle of kindergarten education at a rural school. Case 3 consisted of a teacher and 9 students from the first (4 students) and second course (5 students) of the third cycle of primary school education, at the same rural school as in Case 2. Finally, Case 4 consisted of a teacher and 9 students from an adapted secondary level in a special education school. The families of all the schools were of a medium-low socio-economic status. The vehicular language used at all schools was Catalan. All teachers were female.

Four researchers -females- participated in observing and assessing the classes and discussing with the teachers during the meetings.

Instruments

The tool used was the first version in digital format of the Oral Language Assessment in the School Context Scale – Decision Support System (EVALOE-SSD). It allows teachers to self-assess their teaching practice in relation to the students' communicative and language development. The first part of the tool consists of 30 items that can be evaluated according to a scale comprised of three levels (0-1-2) (0 means that the action does not occur during class; 1 means that the action occurs, but not in the expected form or frequency; and 2 indicates what is expected). The 30 items are grouped into 5 dimensions: Instructional Design (6 items); Conversation Management by the Teacher (6 items); Conversation Management by the Students (3 items); Communicative Functions and Strategies of the Teacher (8 items); and Communicative Functions of Students (7 items). For each item, there is the possibility of adding a written comment or reflection. In the second part of the tool, the teacher is encouraged to make 3 decisions for improvement, that is, to select three of the 30 items of the first part that were evaluated as 0 or 1. Table 1 shows one example of an item from each dimension.

The version used in special education schools has the same 30 items of the original tool and 10 additional items: five items in the Communicative Functions and Strategies of the Teacher dimension and five in the Conversation Management by the Students dimension.

Table 1. Example of an item of each one of the 5 dimensions of the EVALOE-DSS.

Dimension	Item
Student communication management	During the conversation, discussion and/or debate activities, we adopt a format of networking interaction.
Teacher communication management	I give the students time to take their turn.
Functions of the students	The students self-regulate their communication activity.
Functions and strategies of the teacher	I try to clarify the unintelligible linguistic interventions of the students.
Instructional Design	I propose activities that allow us to work on objectives of oral language.

Procedure

Once the families and the teachers signed the informed consent, each researcher carried out one observation of one of the teacher's class sessions with her students and assessed it with the EVALOE-DSS tool. Later, each researcher sent the recording of the class session to the teacher so that the teacher could also self-assess it with the same tool. The researcher created a comparative table with the scores of the teacher and the researcher for each item. They met in order to compare the scores and so that the teacher could share her doubts regarding the tool, the changes she could start to introduce in her classes according to the content of the items and her perception of the tool. They agreed that the teacher would self-assess one class session each week, trying to vary the type of class (maths, language, arts and craft…) and, once a month, the researcher would observe one of the class sessions and that class would be assessed by both. After that session, they would meet and compare the scores, following the same procedure that they had used during their first meeting. After 17 (Case 1), 6 (Case 2), 6 (Case 3) and 12 (Case 4) self-assessments by the teachers and 5 observations and assessments by the researchers, they met one last time to evaluate the use of the tool and the participation of the teachers, as well as the progress that the teachers had detected in the students. All the meetings were audio-recorded and the class sessions observed by the researchers were video-recorded.

Results

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 show the evolution of the scores for both the self-assessments of the teachers and the assessments of the researchers obtained with EVALOE-DSS.

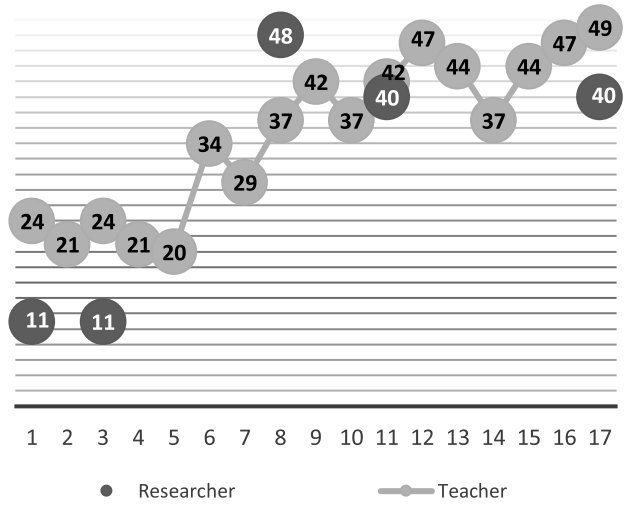

Figure 1. Evolution of the scores of the teacher (17 self-assessments) and the researcher from Case 1 using EVALOE-DSS, from November to May.

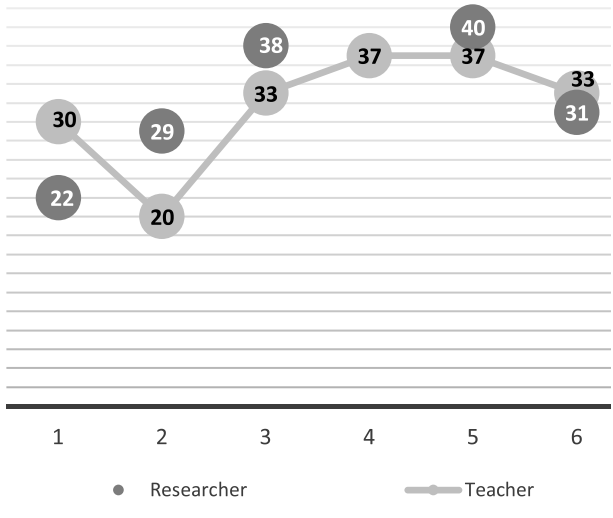

Figure 2. Evolution of the scores of the teacher (6 self-assessments) and the researcher from Case 2 using EVALOE-DSS, from November to May.

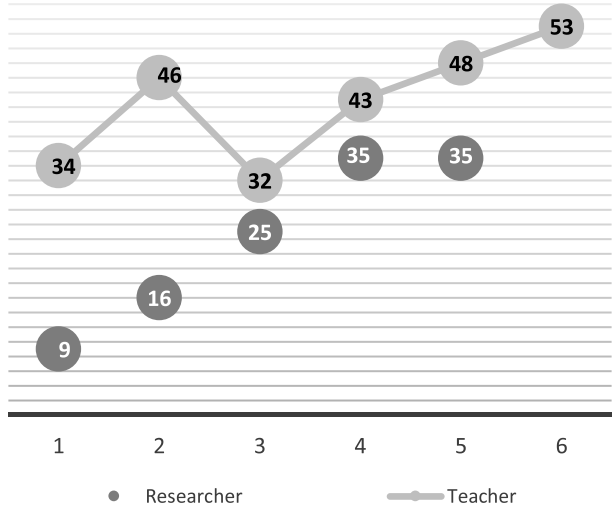

Figure 3. Evolution of scores of the teacher (6 self-assessments) and the researcher from Case 3 using EVALOE-DSS, from November to May.

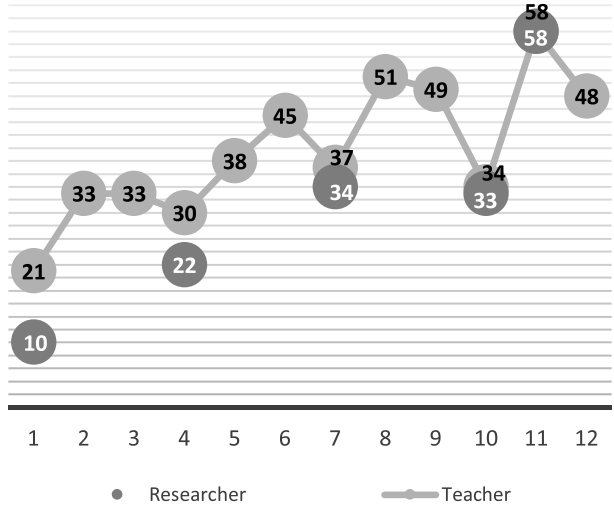

Figure 4. Evolution of scores of the teacher (12 self-assessments) and the researcher from Case 4 using EVALOE-DSS, from November to May.

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 present the decisions made during the self-assessed sessions by the teachers. In all cases, the choice was made between the 30 possible actions of the tool. The items chosen by the teacher throughout the self-assessed sessions were different in each case. In Case 1, the three items most chosen by the teacher were item 1 (*to propose activities allowing the children to work on the objectives of the oral language*), item 26 (*to give the students the time to take turns*) and item 30 (*students adopt an active role during the activities of the oral language*).

Table 2. Items linked to the decisions of the teacher and evolution of the scores of the items more frequently selected (1, 26, 30) in an ordinary school.

Case 1						
Session	Decisions			Scores		
				1	26	30
1	29	22	**26**	2	1	0
2	**1**	3	6	1	0	0
3	**30**	25	27	1	0	1
4	**30**	0	**1**	2	1	0
5	**30**	**26**	**1**	1	1	0
6	**30**	**1**	8	1	2	0
7	29	**26**	28	2	0	0
8	**30**	**1**	5	2	2	1
9	**1**	**26**	0	2	2	1
10	**1**	**26**	0	2	2	1
11	6	**1**	22	2	2	1
12	22	**1**	6	2	2	1
13	25	15-16	**1**	2	2	1
14	**30**	14	16	2	1	1
15	14	15-16	17	2	2	1
16	7	8	22	2	2	1
17	29	**1**	2	2	2	1

In Case 2, the three items most chosen by the teacher were item 1 (*to propose activities allowing the children to work on the objectives of the oral language*), item 4 (*the students and I refer explicitly to the communication rules to regulate the intervention*) and item 6 (*students self-evaluate their communicative behavior during oral language activities).*

In Case 3, the three items most chosen by the teacher were item 2 (*to explain the oral language aims*), item 6 (*students self-evaluate their communicative behaviour during oral language activities)* and item 19 (*Students use social formulas for interaction*).

Table 3. Items linked to the decisions of the teacher and evolution of the scores of the items more frequently selected (1, 4, 6) in a rural school.

Case 2						
Session	Decisions			Scores		
				1	4	6
1				2	0	0
2	4	8	11	2	1	0
3	1	6	0	1	2	0
4	4	6	0	2	1	0
5	4	6	0	1	1	0
6				1	2	2

Table 4. Items linked to the decisions of the teacher and evolution of the scores of the items more frequently selected (2, 6, 19) in a rural school.

Case 3						
Session	Decisions			Scores		
				2	6	19
1	2	29	22	0	0	1
2	2	29	14	1	2	2
3	22	6	19	1	2	0
4	2	6	14	1	2	1
5	5	6	19	2	2	1
6	6	19	18	2	2	2

In Case 4, the three items most chosen by the teacher were item 24 (*to propose activities allowing the children to work on the objectives of the oral language*), item 25 (*to facilitate students to initiate communicative interactions*) and item 26 (*to give the students the time to take turns*).

Table 5. Items linked to the decisions of the teacher and evolution of the scores of the items more frequently selected (24, 25 26) in a special education school.

Case 4						
Session	Decisions			Scores		
				24	25	26
1	24	26	25	0	0	1
2				1	1	2
3				1	0	1
4	26	13	27	0	0	0
5	24	26	25	1	0	2
6				1	1	2
7				2	1	2
8				2	2	2
9				1	1	2
10				1	1	2
11				1	2	2
12				2	2	2

The second part of Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 also show the evolution of scores of those items chosen by the teachers during the different sessions in the three types of participating schools. An increase in the scores of those items throughout the data-gathering process can be observed.

Table 6 presents some of the teachers' opinions and reflections during the fifth meeting between each teacher and researcher.

Table 6. Reflections of the teachers on the use and usefulness of EVALOE-DSS, during the fifth meeting between each teacher and researcher.

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
But I see that it is really working, I see the difference when they talk to each other. They have started to make more structured questions when they address me. I see that they are applying everything we have been working on, in their own way, as far as they are able to, within their level or within the level that they can achieve.	*Many times, I thought the instrument was not adapted for kindergarten level. Sometimes it uses a very complex vocabulary.*	*I have seen improvements in the students, after starting the process of reflection with the instrument. They are more open and participative, and it has helped me think of the classes differently.*	*It has helped me to be less directive and to facilitate the students in initiating the interaction.*
I am also enjoying being able to work in a different way in this school. Everything was on paper and, based on this study, I am able to work more on the oral language.	*One difficulty is the time you have to invest . . . It's a lot and we do not have time to do it . . .*		*It has helped me to teach students to ask more questions, more varied, at different times, and not just the weekend.*
We did not do that here before, and I like it, the children like it too, they see it as something they enjoy, the moment in which they can talk.	*I do not like to observe myself and self-evaluate in a planned way, nor that children do so, so aware. Learning takes place through imitation. I do not think this should be done like this in kindergarten.*		*It has helped me to give more importance to oral language in all activities, and not only in oral language.*
New challenges like this one where they have to self-manage and self-regulate, I like that, they gradually do it. It is hard because they are used to the opposite of this, but well, they gradually do it.			*It has motivated me a lot that while I was using the questionnaire, I was being trained to teach the oral language in the class more adequately.*
I am happy to have participated in this study. I was scared at first, but I've enjoyed it a lot. I have learned, and that is something I like, and I am very happy.			*I have already used some of the strategies that the instrument contains but much less. Now I have them in mind all the time.*

Table 7 presents some of the reflections of the teachers during the final meeting and their evaluation of the process and their own participation in it.

Table 7. Reflections of the teachers regarding EVALOE-DSS during the closing meeting with each researcher.

Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
As you use the instrument, you remember the items. For instance, this last self-assessment, I do not even have to read the instrument and I remember that. I finish it in twenty minutes…	*EVALOE-SSD has too many items.*	*An idea would be to put examples with short videos and see other performances of other classrooms.*	*I did not have time to complete it and I left it for the weekend, so I did not remember so well how the class had developed. The aims of the improvement proposals were almost impossible to reach in a week.*
At the beginning you get somewhat scared, because the explanations are very long. You get the information all at once and the explanations are very long, but I believe that long explanations are necessary. Because, of course, you do not understand it only based on the statements. You have to read it and read it all over again, and again.	*The examples go well but I think you would have to adjust to the stage of the students with whom you work.*		*Sometimes it was a little long. Sometimes it seemed to me that I was evaluating the same thing. Of course, I also realized later that some items were the same, but some of them from the point of view of the teacher and others from the point of view of the students.*
When you read the explanation for each item, you understood it, but it was really important the explanation of the researcher during the meetings to help me to fully clarify the concepts.	*All the items may not appear at the beginning, for instance, sequence their appearance by levels.*		*It would be good to fill the questionnaire in several moments, and it should be allowed to be saved.It would be good if it could be completed in blocks or that you could choose which set of items you respond to at each moment.*
For instance, I get the feeling that I have already incorporated one item, and most times I write 100%, maybe that item could be eliminated from my questionnaire.			*When I fill the questionnaire the weekend after that class, I did not remember so well how the class had developed.*
I was scared at first that I would not achieve the objective…or not achieve it properly, or that it would go wrong, I was paying attention…but as you feel more and more comfortable…you move on to the next step and now I focus more on the activity and on improving, …it is not something that worried me too much.			*It is much better to answer the instrument by analysing the class recorded on video.*
You have to be consistent in filling out the instrument every week. It is true that sometimes it is very hard to find a moment and some weeks you forget…it is always best to do it that very moment or the next day at the latest.			

Discussion

The analysis of the data has allowed us to know in greater depth the process experienced by four teachers in three different schools who have actively participated in the gathering of data for this study, as well as their students. The first goal of the study was to try out a first version of EVALOE-DSS with the purpose of determining its usefulness as a tool to help teachers self-assess their teaching practice linked to oral language teaching, make decisions and introduce changes into their classes to improve them, and to contribute to fostering language development in the students. A second goal was to detect some aspects to improve the tool in order to build a more useful version.

The results regarding the number of self-assessments, decisions and the progress in the scores shown in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 highlight important differences between the samples. While the teacher in the ordinary school carried out 17 self-assessments, the two rural school teachers carried out 6 each, and the special education teacher, 12. This is probably due to individual differences among the teachers in terms of their involvement in the study, the meaning they give to their participation, and the instrument itself. If the comments made by the teachers in the last follow-up meeting and at the closing meeting are reviewed, it is evident that the teachers who carried out most self-assessments are those who reflected the most. In addition, from these reflections, comments and assessments, we can observe a particular perception of the instrument as something that can be useful in improving their practice and the development of the linguistic skills of their students. While the teacher from the ordinary school (Case 1) commented that the tool was useful for her, that she saw progress in her students, for example in the ability to self-regulate, and also progress in her understanding of the instrument, the comments of the teacher from the rural kindergarten school (Case 2) show that this teacher did not incorporate the instrument, probably because she considered it to be unsuitable for kindergarten level and because it uses language that is too complex. In addition, it seemed to her that the use and knowledge of the instrument required a lot of time that she did

not have. The teacher from the same school who taught primary education level (Case 3) seemed to value the instrument better and the changes its use produced in her students; however, she did not use it very much. Although the small number of students per class in the rural school may seem to favour the use of strategies to foster the use of oral language in class, the results do not confirm it. Although the initial scores assigned by the researchers were a little higher than those of the other two teachers, progress was less. Finally, the special education teacher (Case 4) used the instrument quite frequently and made specific comments on important issues on which those she found useful, such as helping her not to be so directive, to give more importance to oral language and, in general, to motivate her to improve her practice. Undoubtedly, these are very different experiences with regard to the perception of the instrument, in what it meant for them to understand and use it, and in the changes that they themselves introduced and the progress they saw in their students. All these reflections seem to indicate that some of the teachers started a reflection process about her practice, focusing their attention on the way oral language is taught in the classroom and the way in which their interaction helps their students interact verbally in day-to-day activities in the class. The results are in agreement with those of a similar research based on the original EVALOE (Gràcia et al., 2012), as well as the EVALOE adapted to special education schools (Gràcia et al., 2015).

Regardless of the individual differences, the improvement observed in some of the teachers, especially in Cases 1 and 4, is probably linked to the process of self-assessment and reflection by the teacher regarding her practice (Gómez, 2008; Jones, 2017). The aim we proposed was that the use of the EVALOE-SSD would help the teachers to incorporate the Conversational Method (CM) into their classes. Thus, they would promote a more propitious context for the development of communicative and linguistic competence through the use of language in specific situations both in terms of help and the accompaniment of the learning process (Gràcia et al., 2012). The results seem to indicate that the teachers incorporated some of the elements of CM, with differences between them.

On the other hand, Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 also show differences between the scores in the sessions that were assessed by the teacher and the researcher. Although the score of the teacher from the ordinary school (Case 1) initially differed clearly with respect to the researcher's scores, they gradually grew closer until reaching a point where they coincided, despite a slight distancing later. The same occurred in the case of the special education teacher (Case 4). In both cases this coincidence occurred in the fourth observation made by the researcher, which can be interpreted as indicating that teachers, even those who were deeply involved in learning and understanding of the use of the tool, needed time to know it and to understand the indicators in the same way as the researchers. The differences between the initial scores of the rural school teachers and the researchers are also evident at the beginning in both cases. Nevertheless, while the primary school teacher (Case 3) continued to show poorly adjusted assessments throughout the entire data collection period, although with a degree of closing between the scores in the third and fourth session observed by the teacher, in the case of the kindergarten teacher (Case 2) the differences between her scores and those of the researcher decreased as the teacher became more familiar with the instrument, especially in the last two sessions.

The scores obtained by the teachers over these six months show that changes in educational practice require time and a resolute dedication of the educator. As Saviani (2009) points out, in order to begin any process of change, professionals must respect some basic conditions: to show a predisposition to change and a motivation for continuous training work, to want to improve certain pedagogical aspects, to find themselves in a relaxed situation and to have time to assimilate all the knowledge and teaching tools. In this sense, some of the comments of the teachers highlight the need for time to try out and reflect, to keep gaining confidence, as well as the positive disposition of the particular teacher to overcome new challenges.

With regards to the decisions made, it is evident that there is no unified trend among the teachers. It seems that each teacher took decisions based on different criteria that were not always clear. The teacher from

the ordinary school (Case 1), who took decisions in a systematic way, tended to prioritize certain aspects for improvement, mainly in relation to instructional design and the management of students, and sometimes in relation to teaching management. It should also be noted that the teachers did not make any decision linked to educational strategies or the communicative functions of students, which seems to contradict the final values recognized in the tool, namely that the teachers emphasised the importance of basic items such as those that refer to the distribution of furniture, those promoting communicative functions and those that get the students to accept an active role in networking interaction. In spite of the increase in the scores as the teacher became more familiarised with the tool and the methodology, it probably reflects the long road still ahead of us with regard to understanding the role played in the interaction by each and every one of the actions and strategies that the tool involves, as well as the general aspect in which they are included. These results are in agreement with results obtained in studies in which changes in practice were proposed to teachers (Gómez, 2008), which highlights a need to give teachers time for reflection regarding the change.

The second objective of our study was to detect aspects to improve the tool. As pointed out at the beginning, DSSs are in general considered as resources to empower people, both in everyday life and in the professional world (Arnott, Pervan, 2016; Gregg, 2009; Kalay, Chen, 2002; Xu, Wang, 2006). The results obtained from the use of the first version of EVALOE-DSS, provided by four teachers, would probably not have been possible without their meetings with the researchers. The challenge we face, based on the results obtained in this multiple case study, is introducing modifications to the tool so that it incorporates the advisory role of researchers, especially their assistance during the meetings. This means that it must be transformed into a semi-intelligent tool which provides adapted assistance to teachers according to their initial scores.

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Los mitos como herramienta de educación del carácter

Resumen: El trabajo estudia la relación entre la literatura y la formación del carácter (resiliencia, fortaleza), centrándose en textos literarios que pertenecen al patrimonio inmaterial de la humanidad: los mitos. Los mitos en cualquiera de sus tipos (etiológicos, cosmogónicos, teogónicos, antropogónicos, sociales, etc.) no son sólo el marco superior de comprensión del mundo sino que además son hojas de ruta para saber a qué atenerse en la vida; proponen modelos a imitar. En concreto encontramos que la resiliencia (fortaleza) es uno de los valores fundamentales que se transmiten en las narraciones míticas de todas las culturas. A ello dedicamos el presente trabajo centrándonos en los héroes de sagas míticas ancestrales (Giglamesh, Rama, Ulises) y de otros mitos menores (Hunahpú e Ixbalanqué, Izanagui, Tyr). El empleo de estos mitos en el mundo de la pedagogía no es sólo un entretenimiento curioso, sino que recupera al menos uno de los sentidos originales de la educación al constituirse en paradigmas de acción para el educando.

Palabras clave: mito, educación, carácter, fortaleza, resiliencia.

Introducción: Mito, Resiliencia y Educación

Mito, etimológicamente, significa "lo que se cuenta". Una traducción bastante fiel de la palabra sería, pues, "relato". Así que todo lo que se relata formaría parte del mito. Y sin embargo, el mito ha comportado siempre

cierto componente maravilloso, increíble. El mito es algo que se cuenta y que tiene algo de increíble (Widengren, 1976: 153). El tercer componente podría ser que dicho relato increíble se ha constituido en un referente cultural para el propio grupo social: cuenta algo que es un referente, porque todos conocemos el relato. El cuarto componente del mito es que siempre lo atribuimos a una cultura lejana, de la cual no participamos. Al *Cantar del Myo Cid* o a la *Chanson de Roland* les llamamos epopeyas, y sin embargo si los estudiaran desde otras culturas distintas de la nuestra, les llamarían indudablemente mitos. Lo mismo con el Quijote o los cuentos de hadas que denominamos "literatura fantástica": observado con los ojos de otra cultura serían también relatos míticos. También los grandes relatos de los superhéroes a los que nos ha acostumbrado la empresa cinematográfica entroncarían profundamente con grandes relatos maravillosos que se han convertido en referente culturales (Campbell, 2018). Así que los mitos son relatos maravillosos convertidos en referentes culturales que encontramos en otras culturas distintas de la nuestra.

Sobre el significado de los mitos también se ha escrito muchísimo (Ries, 2011). No todas las interpretaciones de los mitos son excluyentes entre sí: los mitos pueden servir para una cosa y también para otra distinta a la vez. Por ejemplo, un mito puede ser el correlato necesario que explica los ritos de las distintas religiones (interpretación religiosa del mito, Eliade, 1991) y puede también servir de metarelato que permite amalgamar a una comunidad en torno a unas creencias compartidas, como quería Durkheim (interpretación sociológica del mito). Es imposible aquí entrar en una discusión detallada sobre las interpretaciones del mito (Véase una síntesis en García Gual, 1984). Sin embargo, es evidente que en todos los mitos se nos pintan de modo inequívoco algunos valores, algunas distinciones valorativas importantes. Por ejemplo, la distinción entre cobarde y valiente en el mito de Ulises. El estructuralismo podrá descubrir arqueológicamente las estructuras que subyacen a los mitos, y decir cosas de ellos que jamás se nos hubiera ocurrido pensar. Pero comprender que en el relato del desventurado Ulises se nos cuenta la historia de un valiente no requiere de utillaje científico especial: está a la vista de cualquiera que se acerque al texto. Esto es precisamente lo que nos

va a interesar aquí de los mitos: el hecho de que sus personajes se constituyen inconscientemente como referentes valorativos para las personas que los escuchan y leen (Díez de Velasco, 1997: 8–9; Cencillo, 1998: 529).

Los textos seleccionados para comprobar esto son tres relatos míticos mayores (Gilgamesh, Odiseo, Rama) y tres relatos míticos menores (Hunapuh e Ixbalanqué, Izanami e Izanagi y Tyr frente al lobo Fenrir). Importa también notar que la versión del mito elegida (que indicaremos puntualmente) no es en absoluto relevante para el propósito de este trabajo. Precisamente porque los mitos han sido durante gran parte del tiempo patrimonio de la oralidad, no ha habido una fijación definitiva sobre los detalles del mismo. "Los mitos están abiertos a infinitos retoques en su tratamiento" (Rodriguez Adrados, 1984: 64). Y sin embargo, la estructura esencial de lo que se cuenta permanece invariable, no sólo por su estructura profunda (Propp, 1971), sino por los valores que transmite. Caperucita y el lobo se puede contar de mil maneras distintas, pero siempre hay un lobo que quiere comerse a una niña inocente. Las aventuras de Ulises tienen decenas de peripecias que pueden ser relatadas de muchos modos, pero siempre se trata de un hombre deseoso de volver a casa a través de las penalidades urdidas por los dioses.

No todos los mitos sirven para formar todos los aspectos que configuran el carácter de una persona. Como tampoco se pueden examinar todos los elementos del carácter en los que el mito tendría alguna influencia, elegimos el de las virtudes de la fortaleza y la resiliencia, por tratarse de virtudes necesarias en el desarrollo de toda persona y que por tanto deberían estar presentes en gran parte de los relatos míticos. Según el DRAE (2014) la resiliencia es la "capacidad humana de asumir con flexibilidad situaciones límite y sobreponerse a ellas". Todas las definiciones de resiliencia ofrecidas por los expertos (Temprado, 2015: 35–36) se pueden reconducir a la clásica definición de fortaleza: resistir a las adversidades. Para la resiliencia, como para la fortaleza, hace falta una situación traumática que afecte al sujeto, y hace falta un resultado exitoso. La fortaleza o la resiliencia sería lo que permite afrontar con éxito la adversidad, doblándose pero sin romperse, y recuperando luego la forma original. Los estudios pioneros sobre la resiliencia (niños sometidos a factores

adversos como maltrato, falta de hogar, problemática familiar, pobreza, zona rural aislada, supervivientes del terrorismo, etc.) en el fondo se refieren a la virtud de la fortaleza, redefinida y rebautizada nuevamente. Los matices que cabría hacer para intentar deslindar ambos campos semánticos resultan a la postre algo artificiales: por ejemplo algunos dicen que la fortaleza denota inflexibilidad mientras que la resiliencia es flexible; pero si nos atenemos a la clásica definición de virtud como término medio descubrimos que la fortaleza también es flexible porque el término medio varía según las circunstancias y los sujetos. Además, ¿de verdad una virtud tan importante ha pasado tanto tiempo desapercibida al ojo humano para que sólo se haya podido bautizar en los últimos decenios?

Así que tampoco está de más recodar lo que nos dicen los clásicos sobre la virtud de la fortaleza para que tengamos claro qué es lo que estamos buscando en los grandes relatos míticos. Vayamos a la *Magna Ética* Aristotélica, que trata de esta virtud bajo la forma de valentía en el Capítulo XX del libro primero. Allí se nos dice que miedo y valentía están definidos en función de las capacidades ordinarias del hombre: no es fuerte quien resiste lo que ordinariamente se resiste, no es valiente quien afronta lo que ordinariamente se afronta. Tampoco es valiente quien usando su saber se pone a luchar en el lugar aparentemente más intrincado de la batalla pero sabiendo perfectamente que es el lugar más seguro. Tampoco es valiente el que ignora los peligros que afronta (es más bien un insensato). Tampoco sería un valiente el impasible porque para poder ser llamado valiente hay que tener algún miedo que poder afrontar (como recuerda el famoso cuento de Juan sin miedo). Santo Tomás sistematiza estas ideas en su aquilatado estudio sobre la justicia, en la segunda parte de la Suma. Hace notar algo que vamos a considerar también relevante para lo que vamos a leer en los mitos, y es que el objeto más temible de cuantos pueda haber es la muerte (Suma Teológica, IIª II, q. 123, a. 4).

Por último es necesario decir algunas palabras sobre en qué sentido los relatos míticos ayudan a educar en la virtud de la fortaleza. Siendo verdad que el ser humano en ocasiones aprende por ensayo-error, y en ocasiones descubre por sí mismo, con la pura reflexión, la solución de las cosas, creemos más bien que el medio fundamental de la educación

humana no puede ser otro que la imitación (véanse las interesantes reflexiones sobre esto en las obras del antropólogo René Girad, como *Mentira romántica y verdad novelesca*). El ser humano aprende por imitación: y si no tiene nadie al cual imitar, sencillamente no aprende nada; como demuestran los dolorosos casos de los niños salvaje. Es algo evidente pero que frecuentemente se pasa por alto. Así que uno de los elementos más importantes de la educación consiste en proponer modelos que sean dignos de imitar. Esto también tiene una consecuencia pedagógica importante: el medio fundamental para educar en virtudes consiste en poner al alumno frente al modelo imitable. Lo fundamental no es hacer muchas actividades en torno a un relato que nos presente a un personaje valiente, sino volver a contarlo. Lo principal es contar el mito, como afirman los expertos en storytelling, lo secundario hacer actividades sobre él (Bonds, 2016). Vamos ahora a ver cómo la virtud de la fortaleza está pintada en los relatos seleccionados.

1. Gilgamesh, el valiente buscador de la inmortalidad

Gilgamesh es un héroe mesopotámico cuyas aventuras están recogidas en distintas tablillas de arcilla, en escritura cuneiforme hace más 4000 años. Ya desde el principio del poema se nos presenta a Gilgamesh, rey de Uruk, como alguien valiente porque "cruzó el océano y vastos mares hasta donde Shamash (el sol) se eleva, (…) exploró los confines del mundo en búsqueda de la Vida. Es él quien, en su osadía, alcanzó a Utnapishtim el Lejano" (Lara Peinado, 2010: 4). Gilgamesh "se muestra el más fuerte, como un búfalo salvaje alzando su testa" (6), y el dios de la tempestad le dio el heroísmo (7). Él es "perfecto en fuerza, donde como un búfalo salvaje, sobrepasa en fuerza a los demás hombres" (15). Pero se trata de un rey que abusa de sus súbditos, por lo que los dioses deciden enviarle un rival: Enkidu. Este ser semisalvaje es conducido por una cortesana hasta la ciudad de Uruk, y allí lucha con Gilgamesh, pero al tratarse de dos héroes que tienen fuerza similar ninguno puede vencer y acaban haciéndose amigos.

Entonces Gilgamesh y Enkidu deciden correr juntos aventuras. Y en primer lugar se proponen dar muerte al monstruo Khumbaba, que mantiene aterrorizada a la población porque "su bramido es el diluvio/tormenta, su boca es fuego, su aliento es la muerte" (37). Enkidu parece vacilar ante la acometida del monstruo, y Gilgamesh le anima con su ejemplo: "Tú mismo, aquí, si tienes miedo de morir, ¿en qué se ha convertido tu coraje? Voy a partir, pues, delante de ti, que tu boca pueda gritarme: avanza, no temas. Si sucumbo, al menos me habré hecho un renombre" (41). "Amigo mío ¿Por qué vamos a rendirnos como unos cobardes?" (71). Tras matar al monstruo, la diosa Ishtar se enamora de Gilgamesh, y al ser rechazada por este, se enfurece y decide desencadenar al Toro celeste, que acomete a los héroes. Pero Gilgamesh, "valeroso y fuerte, golpeó al Toro Celeste, e hincó su puñal entre la cerviz, las astas y el crucero" (102).

Como los héroes han dado muerte al monstruo Khumbaba, talado los cedros sagrados de su bosque, liquidado al Toro celeste y airado a Ishtar, los dioses deciden que uno de los dos muera: Enkidu. Y cuando Gilgamesh descubre el cadáver de su amigo afronta el mayor temor del hombre: la muerte. "¿Debo morir yo también? ¿No seré semejante a Enkidu? La Angustia ha entrado en mis entrañas, el temor a la muerte me hace vagar por la estepa" (133). Pero en lugar de hundirse en la lamentación decide ir en busca de la inmortalidad, porque ha oído hablar de un mortal que alcanzó este preciado don de los dioses. Para llegar hasta él primero tiene que cruzar un oscuro túnel vigilado por los hombres escorpión "tan terroríficos y pavorosos eran que su sola vista acarreaba la muerte… Gilgamesh, recuperando el coraje, marchó hacia ellos" (136) y logra cruzar el túnel. Al otro lado la ninfa Siduri intenta sin éxito hacerle desistir del objetivo de su viaje. Para alcanzar a Utnapistim el inmortal Gilgameh tiene que cruzar el mar, pero "el único que traviesa el mar es Shamash (el sol), el valiente; excepto Shamash, ¿quién podría cruzarlo? La travesía es penosa, muy difícil su recorrido, pues en su curso las Aguas de la muerte bloquean su paso" (150).

Pero Gilgamesh logra llegar frente a Utnapistim. Éste consiguió la inmortalidad porque logró sobrevivir a un diluvio catastrófico que los dioses enviaron sobre el mundo. Gracias a que fue el único superviviente los

dioses le concedieron la inmortalidad, pero no repetirán el regalo a nadie más. Gilgamesh intenta demostrar que es merecedor del don pero no logra superar la prueba a la que le somete Utnapistim (no dormir en siete días). Ante la perspectiva de regresar a Uruk con las manos vacías la mujer de Utnapistim intercede por Gilgamesh y logra que al menos sea conocedor de la planta de la juventud, que está en el fondo del mar. Gilgamesh decide afrontar el peligro para conseguir dicha planta: "abrió un conducto de agua, dejó caer su carga, ató pesadas piedras a sus pies que le hundieron hasta el fondo del Apsu (el mar)" (177). Consigue la planta, pero con la mala suerte de que regresando a la ciudad de Uruk, mientras se da un baño, una serpiente le arrebata el preciado don. Dejamos fuera del relato la tablilla número 12 porque no aporta nada sustancial a la historia, y como los mismos expertos reconocen no tiene encaje lógico en la misma.

En este relato unos han querido interpretar un mito solar de muerte-resurrección. Otros leen en él un avance de toda la literatura antigua. Para otros se trata de la fuente oculta de la Biblia, que plagió el poema entero (Lara Peinado, 2010). Digan lo que digan, al menos es evidente que Gilgamesh se nos ofrece como un ejemplo de valentía ante grandes peligros: Khumbaba, el Toro Celeste, los hombres escorpión, la bajada al fondo del mar, etc. Sin embargo también es verdad que ciertos pasajes denotan una cobardía de Gilgamesh ante la muerte. Ya nos previno Aristóteles que si no se tiene miedo de algo no se puede ser valiente. Gilgamesh es un ejemplo de alguien que frente a la inevitabilidad de la muerte no se queda paralizado sino que busca un remedio aunque a la postre resulte inútil. Así que los jóvenes de Mesopotamia que accedían a este mito mediante el recitado público eran capaces, como los de hoy, de asimilar este doble mensaje: hay que ser valiente aunque la muerte sea inevitable.

2. Rama, el valiente esposo de Sita

El Ramayana es una epopeya hindú, muy popular, cuya versión más conocida es la de Valmiki (S. V-I aC), aunque como siempre los relatos provienen de tradiciones mucho más remotas. Cuenta las aventuras del príncipe

Rama, junto a su hermano Laksmana, en busca de la mujer de Rama raptada por un malvado demonio.

Rama era hijo del rey de Ayoda y junto con sus dos hermanos había dado muestras de valentía. Su educación había corrido a cargo de un ermitaño al que defendió de los ataques de los demonios: "Rama (…) estuvo seis noches de pie, velando con Laksmana el sacrificio del anacoreta, con el arco en la mano, sin dormir ni hacer movimiento, lo mismo que el tronco de un árbol, impaciente por ver a los raksasas (demonios) abatir su vuelo sobre la ermita" (Valmiki, 1992: 3). "Rama los vio … y tomando de su carcaj la flecha llamada Dardo del hombre, sin dejarse dominar por la cólera, lo lanzó al pecho de Maricha (un demonio principal)" (4). Tras estas hazañas, decide ir a buscar una esposa, y la encuentra en la princesa Sita. Pero para acceder a su mano tiene que vencer en una prueba a los otros pretendientes: el que logre armar un arco gigante alcanzará la mano de la princesa. Rama no sólo logra alzar al arco (los pretendientes ni siquiera habían podido) sino que lo quiebra intentando armarlo, por lo que consigue la mano de su amada princesa.

Pero al regresar al reino de Ayoda descubre que su madrastra, madre de su hermano pequeño, ha urdido un plan para destronarlo como legítimo heredero del trono: la madrastra, urgiendo el cumplimiento de una antigua promesa, ha logrado que el rey nombre próximo rey a su tercer hijo y no a Rama. Cuando le dan la noticia de que no sólo no será rey sino que tiene que marchar exiliado al bosque, Rama exhibe un notable dominio de sí mismo: "Para resistir a la violencia de estas palabras, Rama se refugió en la fuerza de su alma, y considerando que la palabra comprometida por el padre era como un deber que obligaba estrechamente al hijo, resolvió partir a las selvas" (15). No sólo demuestra dominio de sí, sino que "tranquilo, trató de calmar la iracundia y el dolor de Laksmana" (32), el hermano compañero que le propone matar al tercer hermano usurpador. Y explica que la misión del guerrero no es sólo resistir el embate, sino defender al oprimido porque "el arma se encuentra en la mano del chatria (guerrero) para impedir que la opresión obligue a quejarse al desgraciado" (36).

Rama y Sita se van al bosque y Laksmana se ofrece a servirles de compañero. Allí viven tranquilamente hasta que una bruja intenta seducir

a Rama. Al ser rechazada por este, la bruja decide destrozar la cara de Sita, pero es detenida por una certera flecha de Laksmana que le corta la nariz. La bruja parte de inmediato a quejarse a su hermano Ravana, el gran demonio emperador del reino de Lanka. Atraído por la belleza de Sita, Ravana decide ayudar a su hermana la bruja en su plan de venganza, y para ello raptará a la esposa de Rama. Engañan a Rama para que se aleje de la compañía de Laksmana y Sita, y cuando en el bosque se oye la voz de Rama pidiendo auxilio (una treta de Ravana para que Sita se quede sola), Laksmana no se lo cree porque "Rama, en caso de peligro, no dejaría nunca escapar una palabra indigna de su valor" (45). Finalmente Laksmana abandona a Sita para ayudar a Rama, y esta es raptada por Ravana.

Mientras Sita es llevada por los aires hacia Lanka lanza sus joyas al suelo con la esperanza de que Rama las encuentre. Las recoge el rey mono que se las muestra a Rama: "En el instante que el raguida (Rama) reconoció los objetos, su firmeza le abandonó y cayó al suelo" (53). La valentía y la fortaleza no están reñidas con la intensidad del amor. Tras algunas aventuras más, cuando Rama pide ayuda al rey mono, éste le cede la ayuda de su hermano Hanuman. El héroe mono Hanuman va en busca de Sita por todo el mundo porque la localización de la isla de Lanka es desconocida. Cuando por fin la encuentran, Hanuman espía a Ravana, que intenta seducir sin éxito a la fiel Sita. Ante el rechazo de la princesa Ravana enfurece y "los ministros que conocían el carácter del irascible monarca, al ver su violento furor, se echaron a temblar" (79). La iracundia de Ravana ofrece un contrapunto interesante al dominio de sí que muestra Rama.

Hanuman regresa con Rama y Laksmana y entre todos urden un plan para atacar la isla de Lanka. Tras muchos esfuerzos (cruzar el mar, atacar, enfrentarse con un gigante, etc.), logran vencer y Rama por fin recupera a Sita. Como ya han pasado los años prescritos del destierro, el príncipe Rama puede al fin regresar a su reino de Ayoda y recuperar el trono.

Este mito es un ejemplo de lo que pretendemos decir cuando afirmamos que los mitos son herramientas educativas poderosas. En la India contemporánea este relato sigue siendo fundamental en la educación de pequeños y grandes. La cantidad de versiones, comics, films e incluso series televisivas, dan fe de ello. El mito no sólo es un ejemplo de valen-

tía (Rama), sino también de amistad (Laksmana), de obediencia a la voluntad de los padres, de fidelidad (Sita). A través del ejemplo de Rama, los niños en Bombay o Jaipur aprender modelos de comportamiento.

Y sin embargo, aunque los valores sean universales, no toda aplicación de los mismos lo es. Un aspecto preocupante del mito lo encontramos en la actitud de Rama cuando rescata a Sita. Desconfía de su integridad: "Pero no olvides una cosa: los trabajos y las fatigas que en unión de mis amigos he soportado en esta guerra, lo han sido por rencor, señora, y no por ti. Te he reconquistado entre las manos del enemigo, en mi cólera, para salvar mi honor y lavar la mancha vertida sobre mi ilustre familia. Tu presencia me es enojosa, como lámpara que se mostrara a intervalos ante mis ojos. Vete pues" (103). Ante el desprecio de Rama, Sita decide someterse a una ordalía y se lanza a una pira de fuego. Sólo cuando Rama comprueba que Sita es respetada por el fuego, decide acogerla de nuevo. La figura del maestro que narra el mito se revela como imprescindible para discernir el grano de la paja.

3. El divino y muy sufrido Odiseo

En esta revisión de los grandes mitos como herramientas para la educación de la valentía no podía faltar el ejemplo de Odiseo. Se trata de una epopeya escrita en el S. VIII aC supuestamente por Homero. Que la fortaleza sea precisamente la virtud más relevante de Odiseo en esta epopeya nos lo indica el adjetivo elegido para designarlo: "muy sufrido" (*politlas*), mientras que en la Iliada Homero lo suele calificar como "fecundo en recursos".

Pero Odiseo no es el único valiente. También lo es su hijo Telémaco. Así empieza la Odisea, cuando nos presenta la casa de Odiseo atestada de pretendientes gorrones que van consumiendo la hacienda del héroe de Troya, mientras él está ausente. Estos pretendientes se ríen del oscuro vaticinio de un anciano adivino: "Ya que a nadie tememos, desde luego, ni siquiera a Telémaco, no, por muy fanfarrón que sea, no hacemos caso del vaticinio, que tú, anciano, profieres en vano" (Homero, 2013, Canto II, v200).

Telémaco decide afrontar la situación y después de enfrentarse a los pretendientes se embarca en busca de noticias de su padre. El punto álgido de la epopeya para él será cuando se sitúa junto a su padre ya vuelto en la sala del banquete, dispuesto a defender lo suyo hasta el último aliento. Y es que Atenea había infundido valor desde el principio al joven hijo de Odiseo: "Telémaco, en adelante ya no serás cobarde ni estúpido, si algo en ti se ha inculcado del valeroso coraje de tu padre" (Canto II, v270). Por cierto, Telémaco, criado en la ausencia del padre y en medio de pretendientes de su madre hostiles, habría sido un buen candidato para los estudios contemporáneos sobre resiliencia.

De Odiseo mismo son muchos los que alaban su valor y fortaleza. Helena de Troya dice: "no os relataré ni enumeraré cuántas proezas están en el haber del sufrido Odiseo, sino sólo algo que él acometió y soportó como bravo guerrero en el país s de los troyanos, donde sufristeis penalidades los aqueos" (Canto IV, v240). Su marido Menelao afirma que "nunca vi yo con mis ojos a ningún otro con un corazón igual al del sufrido Odiseo" (Canto IV, v270). El propio Odiseo da cuenta de su fortaleza cuando afirma: "Si alguno de los dioses me ataca de nuevo en la vinosa alta mar, lo soportaré con un corazón sufridor en mi pecho. Pues ya numerosos pesares pené y aguanté en medio de las olas y de la guerra". (Canto V, v220). Odiseo se sabe perseguido por la mala voluntad de algunos dioses, por eso exclama: "A quienes entre los humanos vosotros conocéis que hayan soportado las máximas desdichas, a estos en dolores podría igualarme. Y aún más desventuras yo podría contaros, todo cuanto ya he sufrido por voluntad de los dioses" (Canto VII, v210). O cuando dice que "ahora estoy agobiado por mi desdicha y mis dolores pues mucho sufrí, enfrentando las guerras de los hombres y atravesando dolorosas olas" (Canto VIII, v182).

El relato, tras contar en los primeros cantos la situación de la casa de Odiseo, se centra en el héroe que logra salir de la isla donde le retenía la ninfa Calipso, pero naufraga en la isla de los Feacios. "Y allí habría perecido desdichado por encima de su destino Odiseo, si no le hubiera infundido perseverancia Atenea de glauca mirada, emergiendo de las olas que rompían rugiendo en las rocas", (Canto V, v437). Allí Alcínoo le acoge

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y en el banquete nocturno Odiseo cuenta sus aventuras. Llorar no está reñido con la fortaleza, porque también "Odiseo se encogía y bañaba con el llanto de sus ojos sus mejillas. Como llora una mujer abrazada a su querido esposo, que ha caído delante de su ciudad al frente de sus tropas cuando intentaba proteger de la cruenta matanza a la ciudad y a sus hijos (…) así vertía tumultuoso llano de sus ojos Odiseo", (Canto VIII, v522).

El héroe cuenta cómo después de dejar Troya atacó con sus hombres a los cícones; pero cuando estaban disfrutando del botín los cícones contratacaron con fuerza y tuvieron que huir. Más tarde, en el país de los lotófagos, los marineros que habían desembarcado como exploradores ingieren el loto y no quieren regresar a sus casas. En las islas de los cíclopes afrontan al terrible Polifemo: "Y a nosotros de nuevo se nos quebró el corazón, amedrentados ante su profundo vozarrón y su monstruoso aspecto" (Canto IX, v256). Como es bien sabido logran escapar gracias a la astucia de Odiseo, y llegan a la isla de Eolo quien les regala un saco de vientos. Cuando ya están a punto de llegar a la ansiada Ítaca un marinero curioso abre el saco de vientos y una tempestad les arrastra lejos de casa. Y cuenta Odiseo: "Al despertarme dudé en mi ánimo intachable si dejarme morir arrojándome de la nave al mar, o soportarlo en silencio y seguir compartiendo con ellos la vida. Lo sufrí y me quedé" (Canto X, v51).

Llegan a la tierra de los lestrigones, que se comen a los marineros y arrojan rocas a las cóncavas naves. Más tarde la hechicera Circe convierte a sus marineros en cerdos, pero Odiseo armado de valor, en lugar de abandonarlos, reclama a la maga que les devuelva a su estado original. Odiseo afronta el temor a la muerte mediante su propia bajada a los infiernos con el rito recomendado por Circe (Nekuya). Vence el peligro de las sirenas más con inteligencia que con valentía, pero enseguida afronta un nuevo el peligro: Escila y Caribdis, donde naufraga nuevamente y pierde a todos sus compañeros. Recala en la isla de Calipso donde estará varios años hasta que logra salir y vuelve a naufragar, como hemos dicho, en la isla de los Feacios.

Cuando Odiseo llega a Ítaca se hace pasar por mendigo para saber quiénes le han sido fieles y quiénes le han traicionado. No se arredra ante lo difícil de la situación: "… jamás mi ánimo valiente sintió temor

a la muerte, sino que me lanzaba al ataque el primero con furia, y con mi lanza derribaba a cualquier enemigo que quedaba al alcance de mis pies" (Canto XIV, v217). Los pretendientes aparecen como contrafiguras de cobardes, que así son llamados (Canto XVII, v124). Odiseo soporta pacientemente las afrentas de los pretendientes y hasta de los mendigos, porque uno de ellos "al pasar, con gesto brutal, le atizó una patada en la cadera. Mas no lo derribó ni apartó del camino, sino que Odiseo resistió firme, en tanto que dudaba si le quitaría la vida a golpes de bastón, o si lo tumbaría en el suelo agarrándolo por la cabeza, pero se contuvo, lo soportó con coraje" (Canto XVII, v234). Fuerte no es sólo el que ataca cuando hay que atacar, sino el que sabe contenerse cuando hay que contenerse; por eso Odiseo se decía a sí mismo para soportar los ultrajes: "¡Sopórtalo, corazón! Ya antes soportaste otro ultraje aún más desgarrador (…) Así dijo, mientras refrenaba en el pecho su corazón. Y su corazón, paciente, lo resistía sufriéndolo tenazmente, mientras él se daba vueltas a un lado y a otro" (Canto XX, v18). Por fin llega el momento en que Odiseo se revela como tal en la sala del banquete. Y armado con su arco va eliminando uno a uno a todos sus opositores. Queda ensombrecida su hazaña, sin embargo, cuando ahorca a todas las sirvientas que le habían traicionado (ya hemos dicho a propósito del Ramayana que aunque las virtudes sean universales, la aplicación de las mismas no siempre lo es). De nuevo se hace necesaria la figura del maestro como guía en la interpretación correcta del mito.

En esta epopeya no sólo Telémaco u Odiseo se muestran fuertes, sino que Penélope, ejemplo de esposa fiel, se muestra excepcionalmente fuerte ante las insidias de los pretendientes. El ejemplo de Penélope, tejiendo y destejiendo la tela para ganar tiempo, ha quedado grabado en la mente de la humanidad como modelo de mujer fuerte y tenaz. No hay debilidad en ella. Así que, de nuevo, al situar al educando frente a este relato, el joven griego como el adolescente de hoy aprende valor, resistencia y fortaleza. Y además del ejemplo, encontramos en el mito razones y reflexiones de por qué hay que resistir (en un tono, por cierto, que recuerda algunos pasajes del Job bíblico): "Nada más débil que el hombre cría la tierra, entre todos los seres que sobre el suelo respiran y se agitan.

Porque se confía en que nunca va a sufrir daño alguno en su futuro mientras los dioses le conceden valor y sus rodillas le sostienen. Pero cuando los dioses felices le envían desdichas ha de sufrirlas con ánimo no menos resignado" (Canto XVIII, v130).

4. Otros mitos menores: Hunahpú e Ixbalanqué, Izanagui, Tyr

La virtud de la valentía es algo que no solo existe en unas pocas culturas, sino que es un valor transcultural. Para verlo hemos seleccionado tres mitos menores, no tan extensos como los anteriores, pero también de culturas muy dispares como pueden ser la cultura maya, la cultura japonesa o la cultura nórdica. Podríamos fácilmente encontrar ejemplos de lo mismo en religiones vivas, como la lucha que Buda mantiene con Mara justo antes de alcanzar la iluminación (Arnau, 2013), o la fortaleza que debe mostrar Mahoma ante la oposición de los mequíes que no aceptan su mensaje (Cruz, 1977), pero los ejemplos seleccionados bastarán.

El Popol Vuh es un relato maya de creación, escrito alrededor del S. XVI dC (Vida, Rivera, 2017). Tras narrar la creación del mundo, se nos cuenta la historia de dos hermanos, Hun Hunahpú y Vucub Hunahpú que jugando a la pelota molestaron a los de Xibalbá (inframundo). Los señores de Xibalbá llamaron a los hermanos, que respondieron a su llamada. Pero estos señores son suficientemente terribles como para echarse a temblar ante ellos, porque son los que causan pérdidas de sangre, los que hinchan a los hombres y hacen que salga pus de las piernas y suba la palidez a la cara, los que hacen enflaquecer a los hombres y los hacen morir convertidos en puros esqueletos, los que causan desgracias a los hombres y hacen que los encuentren heridos, tendidos boca arriba en el suelo y muertos, y los que dan la muerte repentina, y hacen que les suba la sangre a la boca hasta que mueran vomitándola, y los que les oprimen la garganta y el pecho para que mueran en los caminos y les llegue la sangre a la garganta mientras caminan. Los hermanos mueren en este terrible lugar, pero logran dejar embarazada a Ixquic, hija de uno de los señores de Xibalbá. Ixquic, embarazada, tiene que abandonar Xibalbá,

y va a la casa de Ixmucané, la madre de los hermanos muertos, donde también viven dos hijos de estos.

Ixquic, madre soltera, tiene que aguantar la inquina de la abuela y los desprecios de los hijos de los hermanos que competirán con sus propios hijos. Así que los hijos de Ixquic, Hunapú e Ixbalanqué, crecen en un ambiente sin padre y con la insidiosa oposición de sus dos hermanastros; de nuevo serían candidatos excelentes para un estudio contemporáneo sobre resiliencia. Hunahpúh e Ixbalanqué deciden bajar ellos también al inframundo (Xibalbá), pero ellos, a diferencia de sus padres, vencen las pruebas que les han preparado los señores de la muerte: escogen el camino correcto, adivinan sus nombres, pasan la noche en la casa de la oscuridad, en la de las navajas, en la del hielo, en la de los jaguares y en la del fuego. Pero en la casa de los murciélagos muere Hunahpú, aunque luego es reconstituido. Entonces los hermanos trazan un plan para derrotar a los de Xibalbá. Proyectan arrojarse al fuego para después poder resucitar con poderes mágicos. Así que afrontan la muerte, el mayor de los miedos al que se enfrenta el ser humano: "Entonces, abrazándose frente a frente, extendieron ambos los brazos, se inclinaron hacia el suelo y se precipitaron en la hoguera, y así muriron los dos juntos". Cuando los hermanos resucitan han adquirido poderes mágicos y entre otras cosas son capaces de resucitar muertos. Los señores de Xibalbá, que no los reconocen, les piden que les hagan una muestra de su poder, matándolos y luego resucitándolos. Los hermanos matan a los de Xibalbá pero ya no les resucitan, y así les vencen. En este mito maya, encontramos la valentía en el afrontamiento de la muerte, cuando los hermanos originales (Hun Hunahpú y Vucub Hunahpú) y sus hijos (Hunahpú e Ixbalanqué) atienden a la llamada de Xibalbá (el inframundo). Además Hunahpú y Ixbalanqué se crían en condiciones difíciles (resiliencia) debido a la ausencia de padre, la mala consideración de la madre (exiliada) y la hostilidad de sus dos hermanos mayores que no les dejan comer y se comen lo que Hunahpu e Ixbalanqué mismos cazan.

El frontamiento de la muerte como ejemplo de valentía lo encontramos también en un relato muy alejado en el espacio del que acabamos de exponer. Se trata de la historia de Izanami e Izanagi, tal como

aparecen en los capítulos 4º y 5º del Kojiki, una crónica del S. VIII de Japón, que narra los orígenes míticos de la isla de Onogoro (Japón) y sus posteriores dinastías (Rubio, Tami, 2008). Después de ser creada la pareja primordial de dioses (Izanami e Izanagi), la mujer, Izanami, muere al dar a luz a su último hijo: el dios del fuego (Kagutschi). El marido, en un intento de que su mujer no acabe de morir, decapita a su propio hijo Kagutschi. Pero es demasiado tarde porque ya Izanami ha emprendido su viaje hacia el país de las tinieblas (Yomi). Izanagi afrontando de nuevo el miedo a la muerte viaja al inframundo pero su mujer no puede regresar porque ha probado la comida de aquel mundo. Izanagi no puede resistir la tentación de contemplar por última vez a su esposa así que enciende una astilla de madera y descubre horrorizado que el cuerpo de la diosa está putrefacto y lleno de gusanos. Su esposa Izanami enfurece e intenta retener a Izanagi que logra escapar y cubrir la entrada de la cueva con una roca. Si Izanami jura matar cada día a 10000 personas en el mundo, Izanagi responde que él hará nacer 15000 más. Aunque ciertamente le ha tocado escapar del inframundo, no deja de ser un relato en el que el modelo invita a afrontar la muerte, aunque al final se llegue a la conclusión de su inevitabilidad y la imposibilidad de volver del más allá, como en el Gilgamesh o el mito de Orfeo y Eurídice.

En los poemas escáldicos también encontramos ejemplos de valor y fortaleza. Snorri Sturlson nos da un buen ejemplo en el mito de Tyr, narrado en Gylfaginning XXV, de la Edda prosacia (Sturlson, 2000). Allí se cuenta cómo los dioses intentaron capturar y atar al lobo Fenrir, quien asolaba los campos y no dejaba de molestar. Para ello fabricaron una cadena fortísima que el lobo rompió con facilidad: para colocársela tuvieron que convencerle apelando a la vanidad del lobo y diciéndole que no le creían capaz de romper esta cadena. La segunda cadena, más fuerte aún, lograron ponérsela con la misma treta pero el lobo Fenrir de nuevo la rompió. Por último, los enanos forjaron una cuerda mágica, aparentemente débil, pero que se hacía más fuerte cuanto más se intentaba romperla. El lobo Fenrir, sospechando que querían atraparlo, dijo que sólo accedería a poner su cuello en el lazo de la cuerda si algún dios a su vez introducía la mano en su boca como garantía. Sólo el valeroso Tyr

se atrevió e introdujo su brazo en la boca del lobo. Y cuando los dioses se aseguraron de que por fin habían logrado atar a Fenrir (quien esta vez no pudo romper la cuerda) comenzaron a regocijarse; todos menos Tyr, cuyo brazo estaba ahora en posesión de Fenrir que aprovechó la ocasión para cerrar sus fauces. Finalmente ataron a Fenrir a la base de una montaña y allí estará hasta el Ragnarok.

Conclusión

¿Qué pretendíamos? Mostrar, más que demostrar, que los mitos han sido y son, entre otras cosas, herramientas para la formación del carácter de las personas. Hemos elegido en concreto la virtud de la fortaleza (tematizada contemporáneamente a menudo como resiliencia) para mostrarlo. A lo largo de las épocas y a lo ancho de las culturas el ser humano ha encontrado ejemplos de valentía dignos de admiración e imitación, como muestran los ejemplos de Gilgamesh, Rama, Odiseo, Hunapú e Ixbalanqué, Izanagi o Tyr.

El problema es que si no hay mitos, si no se cuentan relatos, entonces no hay modelos que imitar. Lo importante de los mitos como herramienta educativa no es que se "trabajen" en una sesión didáctica, sino que se vuelvan a contar, que sean conocidos. O vendrán otros nuevos mitos (p.e., los superhéroes del universo Marvel) que en el fondo serán una reedición de los viejos, proponiendo los mismos eternos temas; con la desventaja añadida de que la cultura de lo visual frente a la cultura de lo textual-oral supone una evidente merma en el aprendizaje de la reflexión. Sin quererlo, constatamos además que las virtudes y los valores de la ética no son algo tan circunscrito al grupo social como algunos relativistas culturales nos quisieran hacer pensar. En las clases de religión católica, sin ir más lejos, se sigue reproponiendo el supremo modelo de un hombre divino que afronta el miedo máximo de la muerte terrible en la cruz no solo con valentía, sino en actitud de ofrenda al Padre y a los hermanos. Con la diferencia de que esto ya no es un mito (Danielou, 1967).

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REVIEWS & REPORTS

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Typology of "Music Mirrors"

Reviewed publication: Szymajda, A. (2016). *Od muzykoterapii do "muzycznego lustra" dziecka* [*From music therapy to the child's "music mirror"*]. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, ISBN 978-83-65408-20-4, 174 pages.

Music therapy, a young scientific discipline which is still 'in the making', primarily uses research tools developed in the related fields of science, especially pedagogy and psychology. Therefore, every attempt to create its own research tools is extremely important, as it helps to build scientific identity of music therapy. In this context, Agnieszka Szymajda's book is doubly pleasing. The author presented the results of her studies conducted among children at a preschool age, thus contributing to the development of music therapy and strengthening its scientific status. Secondly, she used her own tool, the IKES psychomotor test, which she developed together with Joanna Kruk-Lasocka: *Inwentarz do badania kompetencji emocjonalno-społecznych dziecka w wieku przedszkolnym (od 4. do 7. roku życia)* [*An inventory for testing emotional and social competences of a child at a preschool age (between 4 and 7)*]. It allows, for example, for predicting whether a child may experience difficulties in adapting to new situations connected with going to school and for identifying the areas which require teachers' and parents' special attention. In the appendix, the author included a detailed description of the inventory, together with the measurement scale and measurement cards, thus providing other researchers with a ready-to-use diagnostic tool based on eight interesting exercises.

The study investigated the area of supporting the emotional development of a child at a preschool age through music therapy techniques developed within Szymajda's original programme, based on the concept of Nordoff-Robbins creative music therapy, one of the main schools of music therapy. The essence of its therapeutic process lies in establishing a "musical dialogue", in creating live music in a two-agent relationship between a child and a music therapist. This is one of the basic techniques traditionally used in the initial stage of work, which – in the subsequent stages – is replaced with ready-made instrumental compositions, songs and dances.

The study was divided into two stages. The first stage was a quantitative study conducted as an experiment which measured the impact of creative music therapy on the emotional development of a child at a preschool age. Its aim was to verify the usefulness of the programme in supporting emotional development of a child. The questions posed by the researcher concerned the changes in reading and in expressing emotions by children who had undergone creative music therapy. The experiment was conducted between January and July 2012 in two kindergartens in Wrocław, in a group of 88 children aged between 4 and 7. Children from the control group participated in standard music classes. The results obtained in this stage clearly demonstrated significant changes in the ability to express emotions in children who had attended music therapy classes. Their reading of emotions also improved, but the results were statistically insignificant.

In the second stage of the study, the researcher looked at how children with different emotionality reacted to creative music therapy, what features of musical behaviour they revealed, and how they interacted with music. This stage was a qualitative study conducted as a case study. The basic – but not the only – way of collecting data was to observe twelve children aged 4–7 during individual classes in a kindergarten over a period of ten months. The classes were individualised and adjusted to the needs and abilities of each child. In her description of the process of music therapy, the researcher focused mainly on the features of children's instrumental, vocal and motor improvisations and the changes taking place in them. On the basis of their creativity expressed in contact with music, the author

developed a concept of the child's "music mirror", which reflected his or her emotionality. "The child's *music mirror* is a reflection of a 'musical encounter' between a child with a specific musical sensitivity and a person responding to that sensitivity. The relationship is initiated by the child, and the music therapist adapts to it by using appropriately selected forms, methods and techniques of creative music therapy, which allow him or her to follow the child's musical creativity" (Szymajda, 2016: 109).

The typology developed by Szymajda distinguishes the following music mirrors: creative, impulsive, sensitive, imagined, and experimenting. The author not only provided a list of the characteristics of musical behaviours and changes in the emotional area which happened in the period before and after music therapy, but also developed a strategy of selecting appropriate forms, methods and techniques of music therapy for each of the types mentioned above. This way she contributed to the development of Nordoff-Robins' concept and offered people who work with children the tools allowing them to adequately follow the child's "musical reflection" and thus to support his or her development, especially in the emotional sphere.

The author demonstrated her scientific maturity and shared with the reader how the programme evolved during the course of her study. The quantitative research itself revealed that creative music therapy increases the ability to express emotions, however, it was her fascinating observations of children's behaviour that motivated the researcher to undertake the next, qualitative stage. Such a strategy is not uncommon, as Krzysztof Rubacha notices, since qualitative research helps to understand how quantitative patterns change when confronted with the changing contexts (Rubacha, 2008). And although case studies were not planned initially, they led the author to much more interesting scientific discoveries, including the concept of "music mirrors". Moreover, the detailed descriptions of the music therapy process and of the changes in children's behaviour are both exciting and inspiring.

The methodological and research issues discussed above constitute the main parts of the book, which are also the most valuable scientifically; they are preceded by the first two introductory theoretical chapters.

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In the first chapter the author attempted to capture the essence of music therapy by briefly presenting its directions, forms, methods and techniques – developed both in Poland and abroad. The second chapter describes emotionality, the importance of emotional development and its impact on the quality of general development, and social and cognitive functioning of a child at a preschool age.

A serious shortcoming of the book is the lack of the programme developed by the author. Since it exists and yielded positive results in her quantitative study, the reader is somewhat disappointed by the lack of an appendix with the programme, which makes it impossible to have a look at it. Without it, there is no way one could be inspired to use it, as publishing only the results of a quantitative study deprives the book of its practical dimension and application. We are told that it works, but we do not know exactly what works. It is to be hoped that in the author's future publications the programme will be presented in detail.

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