

The education crisis and a revolution in thinking

Crise da educação e a revolução do pensamento

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ABSTRACT

In his most recent book, the French philosopher Edgar Morin presents a synthesis of his ideas about the inadequacy of current forms of knowledge production, and points out the path to a revolution in thinking, having Education as one of the main engines of this change. He restates that philosophy cannot be closed on itself, since it has a commitment to the fundamental and urgent questions of existence, and he reinforces his confidence in a *complex thought* as a prerequisite to the construction of a *pertinent knowledge*, which is the kind of knowledge that must fully respond to the challenges of a world that, paradoxically, has become more incomprehensible as the means of communication have made it more accessible.

Keywords: Education, philosophy, communication, complex thought

RESUMO

Neste seu mais recente livro, o filósofo francês Edgar Morin apresenta uma síntese de suas reflexões sobre a inadequação das formas atuais de produção de conhecimento e formula um modelo de ação que considera capaz de revolucionar o pensamento, tendo a educação como um dos motores principais desta mudança. Reafirma sua posição de que a filosofia não pode se fechar sobre si mesma, pois tem um compromisso com as questões fundamentais e urgentes da existência, e renova sua convicção de que o desenvolvimento de um *pensamento complexo* é condição sine qua non para a construção de um *conhecimento pertinente*, que responda aos desafios de um mundo que, paradoxalmente, tem se tornado mais incompreensível à medida que os meios de comunicação o tornaram mais acessível.

Palavras-chave: Educação, filosofia, comunicação, pensamento complexo

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1. This is a free translation of the title since we were not able to find an English version of the book.

2. Published in seven volumes, the first in 1977 (The nature of nature), the second in 1980 (The life of life), the third in 1986 (The knowledge of knowledge), the fourth in 1991 (The ideas), the fifth in 2001 (The humanity of humanity) and the sixth in 2004 (Ethics). The edition used in this article was the Brazilian one, published in 2005).

THE BOOK *TEACHING how to live: a manifesto to change education*¹, by Edgar Morin, is the first of a series entitled “Changing education” – organized by the French publisher Actes Sud – in which several authors will succeed Morin in this proposal of considering solutions to the profound educational crisis that, according to him, is not restricted to France, being part of something bigger: of the Western civilization crisis.

The word “manifesto” in the subhead of the book reveals the author’s intention: it is a public statement and a political positioning in the form of reflections that actually synthesize the ideas Morin has developed over the years and has published in several of his previous books, articles and lectures, having started with *The Method*², considered his most important work.

In this manifesto, Morin summarizes his main ideas on the inadequacy of the current forms of knowledge production, and formulates an action plan considered capable of revolutionizing the ways of thinking, having education as one of the major engines of these changes. Keeping the tone of his last works and speeches, *Teaching how to live* is an affectionate book, concerned about the world, the animals, the future generations, the victims of racism and xenophobia, the discouraged teachers and their unmotivated students.

Despite the apparent naïveté of certain terminology that talks about love, kindness, understanding, solidarity, and poetry, Morin’s book is, in fact, moved by a sense of urgency and responsibility because he believes philosophy cannot be closed on itself, so his is “a philosophy that observes the world, the real events” (Morin, 2015).

He assumes that today we are a planetary population, a “community of destiny” (p.142), in the sense that if any phenomenon, event, disaster or tragedy befalls some part of the world it will affect everything else sooner or later, one way or another. Thus, misery and war plaguing nations in ruins generate refugee crowds knocking on the doors of Europe and America, both reacting scared and unprepared as if this were all unpredictable.

Nuclear accidents, oceans pollution, climate changes, epidemics caused by genetic mutations of viruses and bacteria, and revolutions and terrorism are no longer (and never again will be) localized incidents, restricted and encapsulated in a time and space, hence the idea of “community of destiny” has turned the problem of some people in a problem of all people.

Throughout history, human societies have responded to crises and needs for change with wars, beliefs and forms of knowledge that led to the agricultural, industrial and scientific revolutions, the creation of formal education and university systems, and the beginning of the globalized era with the age of discovery that evolved into spatial conquests and the expansion of telecom-

munications. This process was gradual, but its latest results have accelerated radical changes, disabling the accumulated knowledge and belief systems to respond to crises and new demands in face of the multidimensional nature of the challenges and the speed they occur and change.

Transformed in just over a century in a “planetary population”, today human societies face issues that used to be situated in their own specific temporalities and spatialities that now require their inclusion in a “totality” only understandable as an abstraction, despite the concreteness of the realities that comprise them.

To understand this totality by the pursuit of a “complex thought” is what Edgar Morin considers the *sine qua non* condition for overcoming the inadequate methods that have been used to respond to the challenges of a world that, paradoxically, has become more incomprehensible as the means of communication have expanded.

From a reflection on the macrostructures that constitute the universe, the emergence of life, and the development of human societies throughout history, to put forward his argument that the processes are made of continuities and ruptures, deviations and reorganizations that do not admit determinisms, orders or certainties, Morin lands on “here and now” and examines the most urgent facts of our days, such as the recent wave of immigration to Europe and the fear that these foreign “invasions” might endanger the national identity of host countries, reaffirming his faith in the secular state which, according to Morin, is highly capable of integrating political and ethnic diversity as the history of his own country has shown.

Now 94 years old, Morin is himself the product and a witness of this era of vertiginous changes, using his own life history and his experiences as a philosopher and political activist to show how to achieve the necessary metamorphosis of all forms of knowledge in the XXI century. Despite the crisis in teaching systems, Morin still considers the educational institutions a powerful factor of social change. It is on the revitalization of education that his plan relies to overcome what he calls “the crisis of the future”, the historical uncertainty that replaced the confidence in the future and has caused a sense of anguish that, according to him, can only be confronted with a common project with the “other”.

Although his idea of revitalization requires a radical change in today’s educational system, it implies the improvement and not the denial of its legacy. He takes into consideration the importance of all experiences accumulated over the centuries by teachers, students, and educational institutions. As he had already done in previous works, Morin evokes Rousseau’s *Emílio* (1992)

to explain the general principles of his proposal, also taking inspiration for the title of his book from it: education that “teaches how to live”.

However, teaching how to live was never an exclusive task for educators, not to mention in a time when even the children can control their own sources of knowledge over the Internet, which has also introduced new reception habits and forms of participative culture. Morin resorts to the role of orchestra conductor to define what could be the role of teachers from primary school to university. This image suggests that everybody is in control of their own score, and the conductor’s mission would be to guide and help the group to hit the correct pitch and rhythm with no intentions of interfering in their individual interpretations.

In his manifesto, Morin denounces today’s schools and universities as places of transmission of knowledge and research practices that reproduce with insufficient (if any) reflexivity principles based on the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, considering that if this was already a mistake in the past, nowadays it is something seen as nonsense. He also reports that this model is reproducing a form of thinking and of disciplinary organization that separates the objects of study for analytical purposes without returning them to the totalities they were removed from.

Morin even reports this model as the generator of an intellectual accommodation fed by certainties impregnated of mistakes and illusions, which leads to the bureaucratization of knowledge, and the reproduction of evaluation systems that disqualify the diversity of students and researchers, and never went through a self-evaluation. He also reports the attitude of incomprehension that prevails in the intellectuals’ world, where because of the need for recognition and glory, it is “the most gangrenous by the hypertrophy of the ego” (p.75).

None of this is new in the Morin’s discourse. The present criticism, from which he built the idea of “complex thought”, has been developed since the 1970s, when he began to think more systematically about the epistemological basis of scientific and educational practices in the West. Morin’s notion of “complex thought” is currently considered his most important contribution to the philosophical studies of science and education. It requires the foundation of a new scientific paradigm, free of the current division that isolates subjects and objects of study, promoting the connection between them and their contexts in a transdisciplinary practice that requires the training of “multicompetent” students, scientists and researchers able to cross disciplinary boundaries (Morin, 2003: 110). These reflections are theoretically applicable to any field of knowledge, as much for the so called hard sciences as for the humanities, more

strongly appealing to the communication studies, a transdisciplinary field *par excellence*³.

Morin's theses have questioned essential aspects of the Cartesian foundation of scientific thinking by proposing, for example, the end of the supremacy of reason as the basis of knowledge, arguing that emotions and instincts walk together with reason in cognitive investments (Almeida, 2004: 9). By following this line, besides rescuing the importance of subjectivity and affectivity, Morin claims that a new education system must recognize that every search for knowledge is driven by a "desire" to know, and encourages teachers to let themselves be guided by a passionate, pulsating and engaging motivation possessed by the pedagogical Eros. By doing so, all scientific research and teaching practices should be able to produce what he calls a "pertinent knowledge", that is, a knowledge that actually contributes to solve human beings' fundamental problems and to foster the responsible autonomy of each individual, and to the pursuing the welfare of all members of this planetary community.

3. Several authors have written about this subject; as an example, I cite Néstor García Canclini (2012)

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