

# Why Educate After All?: Reflections On The Demand For Educating The New Generations

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## **Abstract:**

*Based on a bibliographic research, this text aims to understand the requirement of human educability. In short, it is about shedding light to answer the question: "Why do we talk about education and do we need it?". In this sense, it is considered that the desire that this world can deepen and continue to exist, beyond the duration of a lifetime, feeds the desire to educate future generations. First, to get to know the human world and become familiar with it, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the language, learn from others and incorporate the historical and cultural legacy of previous generations. It is in this place that education is inserted, a meeting place between the old and the new. Thus, the need to preserve a heritage and take care of those who come as a novelty is formed.*

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## **I. Introduction**

With every birth, with every new being that comes into the world, education once again must assume its task. Unlike other living beings, who are born already being what they should be, inevitably what they will be regardless of what happens, we humans are born for humanity. Kant also draws attention to this: "Man is the only creature that needs to be educated. By education is meant the care of his childhood (nurture, upbringing), discipline, and instruction as formation" (KANT, 1999, p. 11, translation by the author).

From this standpoint, it is considered that providing students with knowledge, introducing them to public languages and the culturally produced knowledge of humanity, is a challenging, slow, and gradual task that demands effort, dedication, and choices, both from those equipping and those being equipped. Our condition, as

Savater (2001) reminds us, is essentially symbolic, and it forms the basis for the importance of education in our lives. Even though we can learn things on our own, there are knowledge and symbolic objectifications that must be taught to us by other humans, by our peers. Perhaps this is why we humans have the longest childhood among primates, precisely because we need ample time to learn and recognize the symbols that will later shape our way of existence in the common human world.

In this sense, it is emphasized the human need to learn from peers, to be influenced by them, shaping the human species as a pedagogical species (BOUFLEUER; FENSTERSEIFER, 2010), a species that always learns from someone who came before, who has been in the world longer. Therefore, the aim is to understand the reasons that lead to the demand for human educability, the necessity to discuss education and its need—put differently, it seeks to answer the question: “Why do we speak of education and why do we need it?”

Furthermore, it is considered that speaking of education and educating a generation entering the human world implies that we believe education can offer guidance based on human history, enabling each newcomer to find their place in the world. This is the reason why one generation educates another, and it is only possible because one generation receives such education from another, in a movement of continuity, durability, complicity, and intimacy. It is in this sense that education moves by the desire for the human world, constructed by preceding generations, to become inhabitable, worthy, and durable.

Moreover, we speak of education and educate because we believe in the human world, and that this world, with its languages, techniques, values, works, achievements, customs etc., constitutes a legacy that deserves to be preserved and presented to new generations, so that the new ones can learn the symbolic and know the works that humanity has built, even through hardships.

## **II. A Exigência Da Educabilidade: Afinal, Por Que Falamos De Educação?**

*“If faith in God builds churches, faith in democracy establishes parliaments, and faith in justice constructs courts, then what would be the faith that 'creates' a society to have schools and therefore teachers?” (MASSCHELEIN; SIMONS, 2014, p. 113, translation by the author).*

To be with those who came before us in this world fundamentally configures the educational field, as we always educate the generations that arrive based on what represents our perceptions of what is desirable – inherited through dialogue with preceding generations – about the human and the human world, aiming for generations to understand our human condition. We agree with Savater (2012, p. 38, translation by the author) that the first thing education conveys to each newcomer “[...] is that we are not unique, that our condition implies significant exchange with other symbolic relatives who confirm and enable our condition,” thereby also conveying to the newcomers that “[...] we are not initiators of our lineage, that we appear in a world where the human mark is already in force in a thousand ways and there is a tradition of techniques, myths, and rites of which we will become a part and in which we will also be formed” (SAVATER, 2012, p. 38, translation by the author). Thus, society and time configure the human openness to the world.

We speak of education because we believe that education can offer guidance towards humanity and allow each newcomer to find a place in the world. Therefore, “man cannot become a true human being except through education” (KANT, 1999, p. 15, translation by the author). This is the reason why one generation educates another, and it is only possible because one generation receives such education from another, in a movement of continuity, durability, and complicity. Hence, when we speak of education, it always presupposes the desire for the human world, built by previous generations, to become durable, inhabitable, and dignified.

Moreover, we speak of education and about education because we believe that the human world, with its languages, techniques, values, works, etc., constitutes a legacy that deserves to be preserved and presented to new generations, so that they learn the languages and know the works that human history has built. The *raison d'être* of education is the “[...] fact that beings are born into the world” (ARENDDT, 2013, p. 223, translation by the author). We can speak of education and educate the new generations because the world was and is produced and conceived by us as a concrete result of our actions and creations. When we educate children, we allow what has been bequeathed to us by previous generations to remain, connecting us to them and mediating our actions and relationships.

According to Savater (2012), newcomers will learn that the humans who built and modified this world are not all present, that many of them have already died, and yet, their works, stories, achievements, discoveries, and struggles continue to serve as lessons in human existence for them, just as others have not yet been born, although it is already important for them to consider them to maintain or renew the standards that humans have built for interactions among themselves and with the natural environment.

In this way, the temporal perspective expands our margins of existence, and education's task is to show the newcomers that “[...] we are not born into the world but into time” (SAVATER, 2012, p. 39, translation by the author), meaning that new generations cannot learn if they do not cultivate a temporal consciousness. This corresponds, too, to the possibility that new generations do not need to start from ground zero, since there is

someone in this world who is older than them and who has already incorporated and become intimate with the common world, allowing them to initiate the newcomers into this legacy.

Therefore, education is “[...] the revelation of others, of human condition as a concert of inevitable complicity” (SAVATER, 2012, p. 35, translation by the author). Thus, education must offer newcomers the common world with all its stories – whether good or not – with the details of what has already been produced and achieved in this world, enriching them with the humanity that surrounds them.

From this perspective, for Savater (2012), education's task is to transmit, and it transmits precisely because it wishes to preserve something, and preserves because it values certain knowledge, values, skills, behaviors, ideals. In this sense, we could say that education is never neutral, as it chooses, analyzes, presupposes, discards, praises, and convinces. We can also consider that it is not neutral because there is always a common world and its stories to be transmitted to the new generations. Or else, because it concerns an inheritance that depends on choices both from those who deliver it (teachers, adults, guardians) and those who receive it (students, children, youth).

Thus, according to Arendt (2013), education must be conservative in the sense of conservation, which is the specificity of educational activity. Its task is always to welcome and protect something, in this case, “[...] the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new. Even the broad responsibility for the world assumed there naturally implies a conservative attitude” (ARENDT, 2013, p. 242, translation by the author). Therefore, education is represented as a space of transmission, and it is so because we want something to be preserved, or because there are “things” of the human world that do not deserve to be forgotten. It is in this set of understandings that the idea of human and common human world is present, and not the idea of destruction, abandonment, barbarism.

Nevertheless, we can consider that education transmits and preserves the entire path that humanity has traveled up to the present day, and with this, introduces newcomers to the cultural legacy of humanity. This represents a bet on the new generation, namely, that they learn what is the result of several centuries of human action and, with this, become capable of continuing the adventure of knowledge. As Arendt (2013) reminds us, it is about transmitting the petrified knowledge acquired by previous generations.

For the transmission of the legacy to be effective, that is, for the memory of the past to become alive and simultaneously cultivated by future generations, they must recognize the experiences that are transmitted to them as valuable and memorable for themselves as well. Transmittable experiences are thus common, valuable, and worthy of being saved from oblivion. Transmitting and presenting to the new generation a common heritage allows newcomers the opportunity to “[...] choose their companions among men, among things, and among thoughts, both in the present and in the past” (ARENDT, 2013, p. 222, translation by the author).

It is through education, therefore, that newcomers are welcomed, who have the right to know the world, to appropriate it and then to seek their own paths and intervene in what they share with others. It is in this act of transmitting the legacy that the continuity between past and present is made possible. Transmitting the past, tradition, human achievements and stories consists of enabling each newcomer the possibility of innovation, of creation. For, only armed with what is common, which belongs to humanity, is there the possibility of renewal and innovation.

From this, it is important to emphasize that education, by transmitting and presenting the historical and cultural legacy to the new generations, performs a dual movement: conservation and renewal. It conserves because it considers that common experiences are the most valuable thing to be preserved, saving them from the ruin of oblivion, giving them intelligibility, transforming them into stories, so that it provides the new with criteria according to which the experiences in question are the most valuable; it renews, because the newcomers interpret, in their own way, the legacy that will be presented to them.

However, what the new generation will preserve from the previous one is indeed unpredictable. Therefore, their actions cannot be oriented towards the future, since the inheritance, paraphrasing René Char, does not come with any will, with no instruction manual. What we can do is suppose that those who occupy a position of heirs have an ability to act that, in the future, is located between maintaining, increasing, and abandoning the inheritance, that is, between continuity and rupture.

Our legacy is not a destiny but something offered to be interpreted. Those who receive it must be accountable to the inheritance, to what has been bequeathed to them. Thus, it is possible to affirm that it is from the legacy, and only through it, that the new will create bonds of belonging and assume commitments to renew the world, in order to make it their world. This is why the renewal of the world is contained in the unpredictability of the new, in natality, and in how adults (who are already in the world) are responsible for the education and initiation of the new in the historical and cultural legacy of humanity. Once the new are familiar with the common legacy, they also become part of the world's artificialities, responding to its conservation and able to renew it through action. In this ability to initiate lies human freedom.

From birth, each child represents not only a new specimen of the species, but someone new, and with this, there is the possibility of starting something unpredictable. And it is in consideration of hope that education

cannot be confused as a means of creating a new society based on supposed models conceived from one generation to the next.

Our hope always hinges on the novelty that each generation brings; it is precisely because we base our hope solely on this that we destroy everything if we try to control the new in such a way that we, the old, can dictate their future appearance (ARENDR, 2013, p. 243, translation by the author).

In this perspective, there is a rejection of the instrumentalization of education, as discourses that sought to impose upon the new generation the formation of a new world stripped “[...] from the hands of newcomers their own opportunity to face the new” (ARENDR, 2013, p. 226, translation by the author). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that education is not primarily the space for the action and renewal of the world by the new generation. Since they are still in the process of development, they need to familiarize themselves with and be integrated into the common historical legacy, so that in the future they may have the conditions and capacities to act collectively in the presence of others. The sphere of action is the public sphere, an adult space occupied by individuals already educated and familiar with this world, thus capable of acting and renewing it by virtue of their initiation into the legacy.

This perspective implies that we cannot direct the actions of the new generation towards a predetermined future, as the inheritance does not come with any testament (instructions or techniques). Furthermore, education transmits knowledge and cultivates concepts, principles, and capacities that favor the future participation of the new generation in the political realm.

The unpredictability that characterizes our human condition also pertains to what each new generation will preserve, modify, expand, or abandon from the inheritance, thereby establishing both continuity and rupture. Therefore, the legacy is always presented to new generations so that it can be interpreted; each new generation must account for the inheritance and what has been bequeathed to them.

We can assert that history is not made through incorporations or additions but through changes, renewals, and restructurings. Moreover, the unpredictability of the future is the price humans pay for engaging in actions that are free and marked by plurality, by intersubjective mediation.

Thus, if we can affirm that education involves establishing common/collective perspectives, then our responsibility implies preserving the world (through renewal) and also the children (newcomers). Therefore, teachers need to be conservative in the sense of cherishing the world, resisting the desire to prepare a generation for a new world. In this sense, educability is necessary not only to prepare children for life and its necessities but also because it nurtures the possibility for new generations to participate in the common human world with love for it. If education's concern is not this, then it suffices for children to acquire skills and competencies to survive and pursue their individual desires and projects.

If the child were not a newcomer to this human world, but simply an unfinished living creature, education would merely be a function of life and would consist of nothing more than concern for the preservation of life, training, and the practice of living, which all animals assume in relation to their offspring (ARENDR, 2013, p. 235, translation by the author).

Education, as a collective project, is necessary because it introduces the new generation to what is common to all of us. Therefore, we educate new generations not only for them to satisfy their needs and desires but also so that in the future they can enjoy, care for, recreate, and improve the human world. For this purpose, initially and without yet assuming responsibility for the world, they need to know its stories, languages, conflicts, achievements, work etc. By emphasizing that the specificity of education is natality, the fact that new beings are born into the world, Arendt (2013) underscores both the preservation of the world bequeathed to the new generation and the ever-present possibility of renewing this common space.

According to Masschelein and Simons (2014), accepting, caring for, preserving, and protecting the world radically implies also accepting, caring for, and protecting children as part of this common world. This means making the world available to the new generation, exposing it, and handing it over. From this perspective, adults are the stewards of the world, responsible for both the world and the new generations. This responsibility entails an attitude of preservation, conservation, admiration, and care for the things of the common world. It is the task of older generations to protect, conserve, and love the world, showing valuable things to children as if saying to them, “this is our world, make yourselves at home.” According to Arendt (2013), those who fail to do so should not have children and should be prohibited from participating in their education. For Savater (2012, pp. 166-167, translation by the author),

It is necessary to say pedagogically to those who come that we expect everything from them but that we cannot keep waiting for them. That we transmit to them what we believe to be better than what we were but that we know will be insufficient for them, just as it was insufficient for us. That they transform everything, starting with themselves, but maintaining awareness - out of fidelity to the human, their unique and true root, this bundle of tentacles that, beneath appearances, seeks out others and clings to them - of what is and how it is (of what was and how it was) that they will transform [...]. The sense of education is to conserve and transmit intellectual love for humanity.

However, when we disconnect the meaning of education from the commitment to the common world and only tie it to its utility in developing certain competencies and skills, or for economic and technological development, it means that education loses its role as a mediator between the world and the newcomers. In alignment, Carvalho (2017) considers that education is a link between the common and public world and the newcomers who arrive in it. Teaching and learning, for the same author, are justified not exclusively by their functional character or their immediate application to life's demands, but by their capacity to constitute a symbolic experience of relation with the world. Additionally, the author reminds us that recognizing someone as an authority implies seeing them as a model/example or reference because one believes they know more, can do more, or have more experience in dealing with this world, its languages, and practices (CARVALHO, 2017).

It seems to us that we forget that only by belonging to a pedagogical tradition can we make children (students) also feel inserted into it. Perhaps we should proliferate more the advice that wise Africans give to those who lose their way in the immense savannah of life: "If you do not know where you are going, look back and see, at least, from where you came." Thus, the newcomers will only be able to feel at home in this world if the elders care about the world and all those who arrive here. Moreover, for Hannah Arendt (2013, p. 247, translation by the author), education is

[...] the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and save it from the ruin that would be inevitable were it not for the renewal and coming of the new and the young. Education is also where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and abandon them to their own resources [...].

In this direction, the demand for educability becomes necessary because we possess a common world, because we possess language, because we desire this world to continue, endure, and deepen with each new generation. Education is the space in which dialogue with the plurality of voices, which constitutes the world and the languages inherited from the past, allows each one to be a subject of the present. Therefore, education surpasses any pragmatic purpose, since its content concerns the objects of culture and the potentially common symbolic legacy.

### **III. Conclusion**

We are biological, cultural, and symbolic beings. The only way to survive is through other beings. Intellectual culture is built slowly over centuries, and for this reason, we have no other way to preserve what has been achieved than by transmitting it to future generations. Transmission and communication depend on language. Language is the certificate of belonging to the human species, the genetic code of humanity. If we have language, we have peers, we have a world. After all, language is taught, inculcated, publicized. It is not a solitary invention. No one becomes human alone. We become human among others. We need to be "infected" by our humanity because "[...] we would not be what we are without others, but it is difficult for us to be with others" (SAVATER, 2001, p. 148, translation by the author).

This is the price we pay for inhabiting the world. We act in the world and respond to it. We invent and transform the world in unforeseen ways. We are an open species, constantly creating ourselves from the things of the world. In this world, there are things we can learn on our own, but there are symbolic objectifications that must be taught to us by other humans, by our peers. We need a lot of time to learn and understand the public languages that will shape our mode of existence in the human world.

In this direction, myths, religions, art, science, politics, history, and also schooling constitute symbolic systems based on language. Human language serves to talk about anything, whether belonging to the past or the future, as well as to invent things that have not yet occurred, or even to refer to the possibility or impossibility of their occurrence. The demand for the educability of new generations is possible because they are still unfamiliar with the world, as they are strangers to it, which is why they need to be gradually introduced to it. According to Peters (1979), children are largely indifferent. They start from the position of barbarians outside the gates. The problem is to bring them inside the citadel of civilization so that they understand and love what they see when they are there.

Therefore, it is always the adults, the elders, who are responsible for this world and for the generations entering it, who have the responsibility to pass on what we have constituted as "common" to the new generations, so that this "common" can be incorporated by them. This is what the expression *amor mundi* represents for Hannah Arendt, namely, gratitude for having received an inheritance from those who came before us, and therefore, it is now our responsibility to commit to this legacy, contributing so that it can be passed on to those who arrive in this world. Taking responsibility for the common world and for the new generations is the essential task of all those who wish for the world to continue, endure, and deepen. In our view, this is the crucial task of education, imposing the demand for educability!

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