

author

“We are sick of ideology, of the desire to place the real under the dominion of the possible”

**Gregorio Luri Medrano** was born in Azagra (Navarra) in 1955 and studied teaching in Pamplona. He has been living in El Masnou, Catalonia, since 1978. He has a doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Barcelona and a degree in Educational Sciences. Luri was awarded the Extraordinary Prize for the Degree in Educational Sciences and the Prize for the Doctorate in Philosophy. He has worked as a primary school teacher, as a teacher of Philosophy in secondary school and has also been a university lecturer at the Complutense University of Madrid.

Luri has published many books on philosophy and pedagogy, including *La escuela contra el mundo* (2008), *Por una educación republicana* (2012), *Vale más educar. Consejos para los padres, a favor del sentido común* (2014), *Elogio de las familias sensatamente imperfectas* (2017), *El deber moral de ser inteligente: conferencias y artículos sobre la educación y la vida* (2018) and his latest book *La escuela no es un parque de atracciones* (2020).

> He is the author of the blog <https://elcafedeocata.blogspot.com/>



by Jordi Viladrosa i Clua

## INTERVIEW WITH GREGORIO LURI

### **At *Vale més educar* you offered advice to parents in favour of common sense. Has the current school lost its common sense?**

My intention - which I may not have always conveyed well - is not to offer advice to parents, but to help them value the common sense they already have; to encourage them not to rent out their responsibility to a specialist; to make them see that we have not invented the family. As for your question, I believe that there is a permanent attempt in modernity to subject reality to the schemes of particular theories that have an instrumental conception of human beings. Common sense is the attempt to respect reality to respond to its challenges with prudence. We are sick of ideology, of the desire to place the real under the dominion of the possible.

**Your latest book, *The school is not an amusement park*, is an optimistic critique of the current educational system. You state that the gap between ignorance and powerful knowledge must be reduced as much as possible. What do you mean by “powerful knowledge”?**

As long as my intention with families is to help them appreciate the common sense they already have, my cooperation with teachers is to suggest developing reflective practices. There is no better approach than a teacher who knows why he or she does what they do at all times and is willing to learn from their reality and the reality of their peers. As for powerful knowledge is concerned, it is precisely the one we expect the plumber, the dentist, the surgeon or the mechanic to have in an emergency. In such situations, the right attitude is not enough for us. We want rigour and guarantees. It is the knowledge that the expert possesses and that the ambitious apprentice intends to achieve. Ultimately, powerful knowledge is evident in a person’s linguistic competence since our language is our culture in action.

### **Is didactics or, even more so, pedagogy currently in crisis? Has neuroscience taken its place?**

Modern pedagogy suffers from a complex that seems incapable of being cured. It would like to be a science not taking into account that it is something else: it is an art.

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To reach the category of science, pedagogy has been surrendering to psychology, economics, technology, neuroscience and anything else that promises guarantees of good results under the appearance of axiological neutrality. But such warranties do not exist. There are no methods that ensure success in a hundred per cent of cases. A suitable way could, for example, be successful in 80% of cases. This would mean that generalising the statistical data, in a classroom of 20 students, the teacher would have to find alternative methods for four students. In the end, the crisis in didactics highlights its lack of serious anthropology to support it.

### **Who builds in terms of education what in other areas is called a “story” in Catalonia and Spain?**

If we dare to look at reality face to face, we will immediately realise that the difference between pedagogically correct discourses (the fashionable stories) and effective practices is enormous. There are examples worthy of attention in Catalonia: the sense of reality is lost when the desire for the possible moves away

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from the doable, and so one ends up falling into hypocrisy. We are living in a time of splendour of educational hypocrisy. But in pedagogy, whatever impossible is immoral. So why have specific New Age educational stories become fashionable? For various reasons: as a consequence of the strength of “novolatriy” (i.e. the cult of novelty that replaces the respect for the good); for the need to individualise schools in times of steep demographic decline; because of the fear towards the future (nobody wants to be left behind); as a result of the dream of providing an education that exempts the student from effort; through pedagogically suicidal disrepute of memory; at the hand of overvaluation of knowledge (which never defines what exactly is a pedagogical experience), etc.

**Can we say that educational innovation in our schools and institutes is in good health? Is experience sufficiently taken into account before validating a new methodology?**

I have very little concern about anything that is just new. I am interested in good things, whether

they are new or old. I think, for example, that the Socratic dialogue is still an efficient methodology if we want to achieve a reliable representation of our ignorance. I have met teachers who do wonders by handing out a blackboard to each child, and I know highly specialised centres to which I would not take my grandchildren. The critical question is whether anthropological permanency exists or not. I believe that they do and that, in fact, technologies are anthropological prostheses and that amplify what we already are. Human beings have more stability than some people suspect. Innovation makes sense when the model of the person who guides his or her actions is clearly known, and the school has a very defined path; it makes no sense when it becomes an end in itself, and the school is stumbling along in its research of the newest things.

**At some point, you have stated that “it is not the methods themselves that generate confidence or mistrust, but the teachers who apply them”. Don’t you think that many teachers face reality in classrooms for which**

**they have not received enough training?**

I have the feeling that new teachers arrive in the classroom knowing many innovative methodologies, but with little knowledge of the students and the forcefulness of human beings. I’ve talked to many teachers who are surprised because the students do not live up to their pedagogical ideal. Teaching is a demanding profession; very challenging. That is why the first duty of a teacher is being learnt of their job.

**There’s a transversal angle in many of your works: a humanism that drinks from the source of family context values rather than those within the school environment. What imperfections would the current school have to polish?**

The school is a noble and imperfect institution. It can lose its nobility, but not its deficiency. That is why our commitment should be trying to make it less and less limited. That is impossible if it limits itself to evaluating itself not by the height of its pretensions, and ignoring the reality of the behaviour of their students. School values are either



seen in the actions of its students; otherwise, they are just rhetoric. And if there are no values, there is no school. Take, for example, what happens with emotional education: emotions cannot educate themselves. We need principles that order them, give them a hierarchy and also suppress them. Without the leading role of ideals, emotional education soon drifts towards emotivism.

**Many pedagogues give importance to evaluation, and I think you are no exception. You state in your book that “we lack a systematic culture of evaluation and transparency”. Could you explain this to us?**

I have a clinical view of pedagogy. That is why I rely on the right diagnosis to establish the correct treatment of each student which also allows them to visualise their highest possibilities. But evaluation is a professional task. Just as one does not pay a visit to the doctor to learn that he or she is a lost cause in his health, we don't go to school to be notified that we have failed in those questions and that we have a 3 in mathematics. What we must demand from the teacher is

that he or she makes explicit to the students the logic inherent in their mistakes. A child always gives the correct answer to the question he or she asks himself. The difference between the question asked by the teacher and the student's understanding of it shows the cognitive load of a specific learning process. We cannot know what we are talking about if we do not have data on all this. Another example: a student's reading speed is a detailed index of their reading competence. Can we afford so not to evaluate it?

**One last question: is Covid-19 pandemic an opportunity to rediscover what is essential in education?**

The pandemic has shown some essential and relevant things; for

instance, that there is no substitute for the direct relationship between teacher and student. That is why the most useful online resources have been those that have best visualised this co-presentation: by telephone, for example. We have also seen that telematic teaching affects both students of different ages and from different cultural backgrounds in very different ways. We should carefully evaluate all of them because the next course is quite likely to be similar to this one.

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