

the report



José Víctor Orón Semper (Madrid) is a teacher, trainer and researcher. He has a PhD in Education from the University of Navarra and is currently developing the project 'UPTOYOU, Accompanying growth' dedicated to the personal training of educators. His field of research is an educational model centred on interpersonal relationships complemented by other related topics like emotional education, educational neuroscience and the psychology of human development.

Educating from being: A revolution in integral education

UPTOYOU, Accompanying growth, an educational model focused on interpersonal relationships

by Ana Moreno Salvo

INTERVIEW WITH JOSÉ VÍCTOR ORÓN SEMPER

The mission of the UPTOYOU project is quality education. Could you explain your vision of education in today's world and society?

The truth is that education today relies more on things than on people and more on what the person knows how to do than on who the person is. This leads to problems, because it is a kind of competency-centred education, that is, one in which the person has a lot of power to transform reality for whatever life they may have. It thinks that providing tools without training people is a resource. And from the very origin of education, that has been known not to work. In other words, knowing how to use a

hammer very well without knowing whether the hammer is being used to hammer nails or to hit people is a bit ridiculous. And this current division in education aims for grand horizons and a new world, but at the operational level it is losing its purpose and focusing simply on the means or instruments, that is, on competencies.

What we propose is an education integrated in meaning. That means that we work on mathematics,

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history or whatever so that the person grows as a person. And when we talk about personal growth, we are referring to self-knowledge, to the knowledge of why you live the way you do, and to taking decisions about who you want to be in your relationships with others.

If studying English or geography is an opportunity for students to get to know themselves, take charge of their lives and take decisions about the way they live and relate to others, the subject becomes very interesting. Another type of motivation and excitement appears from that, another way of working. If students see that they are simply being forced to meet others' interests, then they say: 'What does that have to do with my life?' I believe

that children rebel against what we adults have naturalised as a way of living life and working; this adolescent rebelliousness is much healthier than it would be in adults, who have already become socialised and have shifted to a more conformist model.

What role do relationships play in people's growth and therefore in education?

The connection between people and education is total. The most important thing in people's lives is their interpersonal relationships, so why not put what we do at the service of what we know is the most important thing in life? Moreover, studies on the importance of high-quality interpersonal relationships in a person's life and development are clear. Likewise, when you

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study how human beings learn and make reality meaningful, it turns out that everything becomes meaningful because of the way a person experiences their interpersonal relationships.

It is common knowledge that the quality of education is determined by the educator's personal qualities, not by their technical training, which is obviously desirable. When I was teaching, I would often say to my students: 'If you are bad students, you are not students, you are not they students?'

Because deep down they don't see the value in it, even if they are clever. Why should they get involved in something that has no value?

It started in my first years of teaching, and people still talk about school failure. And when you begin to look deeper, you discover that school failure in itself does not exist. What tends to happen is that some people's lives are unstructured and they don't know how to situate themselves, and this manifests itself in many aspects, including school failure. In my opinion, a student who fails everything is just as problematic as a student who passes everything with A's simply because that is what's expected of them. What is happening to them as a person? How are they growing? What is new for them? What are they contributing? And my experience is that when you focus on the person and their



personal reality, everything else falls into place.

Another key aspect of UPTOYOU is emotions. Why are emotions so important in education?

This could actually be the title of a book, "The Sad Origin of Emotional Education". Its origin historically is the business world, not the world of education. It's about that businessman who knows that he wants to make money, but he has a problem. As a person, there are days when he goes with the flow and other days when he goes against it. And in order to make money, this businessman wants to control everything, not only all the external elements, but even his own internal elements. He becomes his own worst enemy and then has to control his emotions to always get what he wants. That is why almost all emotional education proposals seek to identify emotions in order to regulate them. But he also discovers that this has to be done with the workers, not just with himself. After all, if they don't know how to set problems aside, they don't do what they have to do in the company, which is to work to fulfil the boss's goals.

And a third dimension appears, which is how you can influence others, because if you are aware of how you move, speak and suggest, you can really engage in emotional manipulation. This was born in the business world with this vision, and it has been shifted to the world of education, although some things have changed. Instead of a boss it is a teacher; instead of an employee it is a student; and instead of making money it is training the student.

Emotions are the expression of the complexity of life at a particular moment in time

But it's the same idea. Moreover, conceptually speaking, it sprang from a misconception of emotions. Emotions are viewed as a kind of reaction to something that impacts you and generates an emotional state in you that you need to control or regulate.

Emotions have much more to do with expressing the complexity of life at a particular moment and, therefore, they're about the person. For example, a father shouts at his son and the son says to him: 'Why are you shouting at me?', and the father says: 'Because you made me nervous'. This parent is profoundly ignorant of what emotions are, because it seems that the child has passed on their nervousness to the father. It is wanting to make the other person responsible for what are actually inner dynamics that are manifesting themselves in certain contexts.

The person needs to know, not to identify. Nor is it a question of regulating; it is a question of acting. This is why it is very important to point out that we work a lot on emotions, but from this different perspective. We want people to be people and bring out their full potential. I don't agree with focusing on competencies, but I am not criticising competencies per se. The goal is knowing how to put competencies at the service of interpersonal relationships. Emotional experience is very important, but it is essential to place it in an adequate conceptual framework, which is not viewing emotions as a kind of reaction to an event.

How does UPTOYOU approach education for free decision-making?

The first thing to understand is that the most important decision is knowing that what a person is deciding is who they want to be, not what they want to do. There is

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a Canadian Jesuit philosopher who said: 'The way I act presupposes a way of being and promotes a way of being'. You have to know that this is the core of decision-making. And then, with the formation of character, virtue and the whole, we sometimes start from certain semi-dogmas. The first is educating in a way of being, ignoring the fact that the child already has a way of being. By the time they're five, their whole character is already defined. That doesn't mean that it's not open to change, because as long as we are alive there is the possibility of growth. So, first and foremost, people need to understand their current way of being.

Instead of putting a kind of pre-set list of goals that people have to achieve, instead of taking people out of their reality, why not approach character education in a way that helps people to know and embrace their reality? Everyone who has worked on the theme of growth, despite all the different expressions and different ways, has suggested that there is no way to grow except by accepting one's own reality.

In addition to relationships and emotions, UPTOYOU considers experience to be a valuable aspect of people's growth. What role does it play in the educational model?

Experience is the person's confluence with the world and their relations. Experiencing by touching things is not experience. Experience is the confluence of who we are in our relations with the world itself. That's where people get to know

themselves, others and the world at the same time.

At all times, in all circumstances, one is always experiencing. Even when the teacher says: let them experience, let them touch. What they may be experiencing there is the teacher's abandonment, because the child is pitted against the world if the teacher is taken out of the classroom. And so what they are experiencing is, in fact, abandonment.

What often happens? The teacher speaks from the mindset of someone who has already experienced abandonment. And then the children don't understand this language, because they start to speak from the particular to the general. When human beings learn something, they always go from the general to the particular, not from the particular to the general. However, when someone already knows a lot, they tend to go from the particular to the general. But teachers should not speak for those who already know; they have to speak to encourage processes.

And therefore, teachers should not present their classes based on the particularity that they already know, their entire world of details, but instead support students in such a way that they will be able to learn much more quickly. And this is a key factor that teachers have to take into account when designing their classes. For example, experience is not pouring sulphuric acid onto marble to see if CO₂ is produced to find out if it is real or fake marble; this would be an experiment. Experience is about what teachers suggest students do that includes personal elements,

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relational elements and elements of the world all together, and how should they support this to unpack all the elements? By doing this, the students learn it in such a way that they can then make better use of what they have learned. Because from an integrated experience between the person, the world and the other, they will then be able to use things by introducing ethics from the beginning. This competency-centred education, which leaves out the personal, ends up nullifying ethics.

In what sense is UPTOYOU an educational model more than a method?

The difference between model and method is simple. A method tells you what to do. When supporting growth, UPTOYOU does not have methodological elements such as books for tutorials. A model is an attempt to answer the big questions of education. What is education? What are the keys to it? What does education seek? What is the role of interpersonal relationships in education? What we want to do is to primarily focus on being able to develop an educational model that we know meets needs, and that is not original to us. What we are doing in supporting growth may be novel, but it is not new. It seems novel because, in the current context, no one speaks with such power about the person.

In fact, in many places where we go to give training, people are often happy because they find an orderly presentation of something that they already had in their hearts, namely the desire to focus on the person. To do this, we have to help the person to be a person, to be the author or the creator of their own life. And this cannot mean telling others what to do. In other words, the goal isn't to give others thoughts but to help them to think. The goal isn't to give others your assessments

so they copy them but to help them learn how to assess. You shouldn't tell them how to behave but help them to know how to contextualise and translate their positions into behaviour according to contexts. And in that sense, we are a model.

There are teachers who don't take responsibility when it comes to deciding how to intervene or what methodology to use. The goal is not to lose sight of the focus on the person. Because if the teacher is a 'programme implementer', the child will be a 'programme executor'. If we want the teacher to promote the child's authorship and creativity, we need training that promotes the teacher's creativity. When the bulk of training in an institution is focused on methodologies, not the teacher as a person, what is the teacher going to do naturally when they reach the classroom? They are not going to focus on the student as a person; they will focus on doing things the way they should be done.

How do you approach teacher, leader and family training at UPTOYOU?

The training is personal and person-centred so participants can get to know themselves and be able to act on their own reality. Formal university training and the majority of postgraduate courses focus on methodologies or organisational and pedagogical issues. Many of the institutions that support their teachers offer identity-based training courses, and all of them are necessary. But the question is: What about the teacher's personal training? In other words, why should a teacher be sensitive to the complexity of a student's life? A teacher is only going to be sensitive to the complexity of a student's life and will not be satisfied with superficial interpretations if they experience it themselves. If the teacher is living in an accelerated, rushed fashion,

ignoring their own inner life because they are constantly putting out fires everywhere, they will be unable to support children in their situation even if they want to.

The teacher needs to do this exercise of reconsidering questions like what kind of self-esteem am I going to promote in children? A teacher need to re-understand their own self-esteem in all its depth, understand that their life is meaningful through their relationships with others. Then they will be able to promote a different kind of self-esteem. We offer trainings that are designed for participants to work on themselves

and focus on the things they have to do with their students.

We focus a lot on the foundations, the anthropology of education. We work on personal experience with tools that enable self-knowledge and decision-making. We help to work on support, on how to talk with children, how to turn conversation into the teacher's most valuable educational instrument with the students. So, we work a lot on dialogue and teaching. We have gradually been venturing into other areas of training, such as mental health issues, to avoid withdrawing into oneself and instead knowing how to open ourselves up to the complexity and discover that

mental health is impossible without personal health.

We have also developed a way to view education from birth to age five in a new book, "The Cradle of Humanity". This is training for early childhood teachers so they can overcome reductive views. Children need routines, but sometimes educators need routines for their psychological peace of mind than more than children do for their process. Interaction platforms are sought to follow up on the training courses so they can be transferred to day-to-day life in the classroom, so there ends up being a clear transformation.

