

CORINA MARTIN-IORDACHE

***EDUCATION WITH MEANING. A TEACHER'S JOURNAL
FROM THE YEARS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 2019-2021.***

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Corina Martin-Iordache's book is organised as a kaleidoscopic display of thoughts and beliefs about key issues pertaining to education, organised in five parts and thirty-five sub-sections, each presenting a distinct point of view (political, philosophical, historical, cultural, moral, and ethical). The thirty-five sections, which function like a collection of separate journal entries, allow the author to explore key concepts, such as one's purpose in life, the pursuit of happiness, social strata, social action, identity and their impact on educational policies and practices across time, from antiquity to modern times, from Europe to North America, Canada.

From the introduction, readers find out a little about teacher Corina Martin-Iordache, who, with thirty years of experience as a teacher and an education that brought her into contact with Julia Kristeva and J. E. Chamberlain, sets out to explore how education opens doors for human fulfilment.

The first lens proposed by the author is that of political views that impact education, which shift between liberal, conservative, or socialist, in the section called "Defining concepts: Morality, Ethics and Liberalism". Starting from Kant's view of reason as the basis of any moral and ethical system and the definition of freedom as submission to laws that serve both the individual, and the larger community, the author moves through Blackburn's claim to balance between rights, freedoms and compromises through critical thinking and the exercise of healthy debate of moral and ethical issues, only to reach the concept of liberalism and the evolution of liberal thought from the Enlightenment age to the 20th century: "Thus critical thinking shaped by quality education becomes a key element in the healthy evolution of any society" (7)

In the section "Reforming Society through education", the author takes further the idea of political liberalism to its transfer for the educational system and the birth of concepts such as child-centred education, individual learner and critical thinking. She skilfully explores these key concepts as they came under the scrutiny of John Dewey at the beginning of the 20th century and comments on the importance of developing critical thinking "in the age of social media, fake news, trolls and influencers [...] since rising populist thinking and mob mentality threaten the very fabric of our society" (9). The next few journal entries continue the idea of freedom and critical thinking with a focus on the idea of reform of the educational

system in the context of the French Revolution of 1968. The author discusses the cry of the leftist-socialist movement, initiated at Nanterre University, for a reform of education, which, due to political manipulation, lost the support of the population and strengthened the power of de Gaulle's conservative party. Martin-Iordache brings to attention the role of Pierre Bourdieu around the same time, who fought for social equity within the educational system, so that all students be supported in the pursuit of their dreams. Key concepts such as meritocracy, cultural privilege and symbolic violence are brought into discussion, which culminates with the conclusion that the socio-cultural difficulties of students have a direct impact on their poor academic achievement. In the next section, the author focuses on the idea of coercion and Foucault's parallel between schools and prisons, only to re-state the importance of a shift from supervising the individual to nurturing as a primary role of public education. Change and reform are also addressed when mentioning G. Deleuze's claim for a shift from control societies to nomadic ones, which would allow the movement away from mainstream patterns of thought towards marginal ones and the modern principle of re-evaluating what we know and how we have come to know something. With the next few journal sections, the author concentrates on the changing beliefs of various societies - from the views of H. Marcuse in North America, who advocated the beneficial role of "constructive dissent" and critical thinking, to H. A. Giroux's claim for the teacher to act as an agent within a system of critical pedagogy, and to Herrnstein and Murray's pessimistic views concerning the "public education system as ill-equipped to properly develop talent and special intellectual endowment" (39), which she warns against.

The second and third parts of Corina Martin-Iordache's book cover different standpoints concerning moral values and theories, from antiquity and the Enlightenment (part two) to modernity (part three), as drivers of education. In these two parts, the author returns to the beliefs and educational practices of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca as inspiring lessons with impact at the individual and the societal level. Then she shifts her attention to the 18th century, to Hume, Rousseau, Smith and Bentham, as philosophers who have "all influenced the thinking of their societies in a significant way affecting every aspect of cultural life including education" (66). She bridges the historical gap between the 18th century and the present day by discussing the modern claim of Joseph Heath who argues in favour of a return to the pursuit of Enlightenment values in the modern age, but she also dwells on the negative moral values of evil, selfishness and anger and the dangers of their effects at the societal level, such as the inequality of opportunity. Part three moves the reader's attention to the modern moral theories, concentrating on the human personality and psyche, as the author claims that "one cannot be a good educator without going through some basic lessons in psychoanalysis" (87). She thus spotlights issues that resonate very closely with the experience of the Pandemic, such as anxiety, communication problems and autism, discipline, intellectual standards, by referring to psychoanalysts such as Freud, Jung, Horney, Lasch, but also to philosophers Kristeva, Heidegger or Dworkin. She also takes a closer look at issues pertaining to justice and fairness, and the utilitarianism – contractualism positions related to social justice through the views of Rawls, and concludes that if society managed to "create [...] reasonably confident conditions in order to give each individual the conviction that his or her plan of life can succeed according to their aspirations, we could say that we have put in place a society which is as fair as possible" (111).

In the fourth part Corina Martin-Iordache turns towards different hot topics in present day educational debates. The first entry opens the discussion about conformity and uniformity versus individually tailored educational practices and argues the case of Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, underlining the teacher's task to "establish as early as possible the individual intelligence profile" of students (115) and adjust the teaching strategy accordingly. Next, the focus is on Canadian education theorist Malcolm Gladwell, who comments on the dangers of rapid cognition, responsible for inequity and discrimination, but also advocates for taking into consideration creativity and imagination when discussing intellectual exceptionality. In her entries, Martin-Iordache considers the issue of meritocracy, equality in education, success versus inequality, privileges and status anxiety, recalling the views of R. Collins, D. Markovits and M. Kingwell. She then moves on to examine issues pertaining to education and technology, by first mapping the shift away from the printed letter to the screen, with a reference to M. McLuhan's warnings against the dangers of disengagement from reality. Then, her attention turns towards further implications of technology in education, which may result in a degradation of critical thinking, and builds her case on B. Stiegler's claims for a need to engage in a process of dis-automation in order to control automation. Corina Martin-Iordache continues then to weave into discussion a deeper purpose for engaging in education and explores the idea of the pursuit of happiness and academic success, only to tackle, in a petal like structure, elements pertaining to the individual construction, which impact one's academic results. Here she revisits the concepts of the multiple intelligence theory in close connection to emotional literacy, the role of learned optimism and the role of positive psychology as a means of reaching intellectual well-being.

Being a teacher of literature, Corina Martin-Iordache dedicates the last part of her book to lessons learnt from literature and concentrates in turn on Victor Hugo and Romanticism, on Albert Camus and his social involvement, and on black and first nations identities in modern society. Major literary works are skilfully viewed both from the perspective of the message they encode and from an autobiographical standpoint, taking into account the social-historical context which led to their creation. From the fascination with Romanticism in general, Martin-Iordache moves on to document Hugo's real-life fight for human rights, his strong position against the death sentence, against poverty, and his overt support of abolitionists in the US, as well as the echoes of these fights in his masterpiece *Les Misérables*, but also in other important literary creations, concluding that Hugo should be viewed as a "humanist and a humanitarian" (170). Albert Camus is another important author whose work and life intertwine. Camus' cry for social justice reflected his day-to-day civic involvement. His Algerian origin and fight against the oppression of the poor, his position against Arab-Muslim terrorism and his involvement in the French Resistance movement interlace with topics covered by theatre plays such as *Le temps du mépris*, *Caligula*, *L'État de siege*, but also by his novels *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Rebel* and later *L'étranger* - works that bear a strong voice for the pursuit of justice, defend the case of the individual versus society, and highlight injustice and the clash of cultures, to name just a few issues. Further, the author reflects upon different works with a strong impact on shaping modern views towards issues pertaining to the first nations people. The author moves from the reading of the Land Acknowledgement Protocol in the Toronto District, to the works of explorer Samuel de Champlain and the negative impact of the coloniser upon the colonised, to Voltaire's *L'Ingénu*,

with the bush garden as the space where the European mind projects the dream of possession in N. Frye, to the metaphor of the bush in M. Atwood, to the build-up of Canada as a mix of indigenous and immigrant blood in J. R. Saul, the hardship of indigenous young people in T. Talaga, the focus on indigenous peoples' rights in the writings of J. E. Chamberlain and the displacement of indigenous communities, the birth of residential schools for the Indigenous population in T. King, or N. Klein's proposal for a re-instatement of indigenous sovereignty. Martin-Iordache ends this part with a series of references to powerful voices in modern literature, voices of indigenous authors engaged in an effort to free their culture, such as J. Bacon, N. K. Fontaine and R. Mestokosho, or N. Kanapé Fontaine, but she also refers to authors who bring to the forefront issues connected to the Négritude movement in France and Créolité movement in the Caribbean literature.

To conclude, Corina Martin-Iordache's book is extremely dense and not easy to review, as it is not a research oriented book on education, nor a journal, as she proposes in the title - it is not characterised by a confessional mood and a regularity of entries - and it is not a book just on literary criticism either, but an interesting mix of genres, which follows the interior mapping of its author in a quest for the deeper meaning of the teacher's role. As such, this review has only managed to present some of the highlights of the author's thought-provoking invitation to look at underlying issues in education today and trace back their sources or discover similar challenges from different standpoints, perhaps wondering where education should be heading in the future.