



# Education, body and alterity Meetings face to face for the formation of the other

### Educación, cuerpo y alteridad Encuentros cara a cara para la formación del otro

**Jhon Fredy Orrego Noreña** is a Teacher-Researcher of the Master's Degree in Education and Human Development of the Center for Advanced Studies in Children and Youth of the University of Manizales and CINDE (Colombia) (jforrego@cinde.org.co) (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4914-5636)

**Diego Armando Jaramillo Ocampo** He is professor of the Master in Pedagogy at the Catholic University of Manizales (Colombia) (djaramillo@ucm.edu.co) (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3949-

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#### **Abstract**

Cannot possible think, do and / or transform education out of the relationship with the Other; you cannot assume education without the pretense of "form" the Other or at least try, as if such a thing were possible. Education, as a practical transmission of knowledge (also transmission of culture, languages, ways and ways of being and living, to appoint and be appointed), but above all, is a scene of encounter with the Other, which depend on the conception of the subject and the world you have, the development of a training bet. This encounter implies a transformation, rupture, leave of the subject of an ontology that chains the subject to a cruel utilitarianism, to go further, to a scenario in which the subject no longer finds himself alone, but finds himself with Other, radically different from him. There, an education that exceeds the preeminence of knowledge and starts from a relationship

with the Other is possible. This perspective, addressed from the proposals of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and Joan Carles Mèlich, can pass through a moral education based on knowledge, rules and socially accepted to a putting on the training needs of individuals who respond responsibly to education and other ethical values.

**Keywords:** Education, alterity, ethics, responsibility, fostering, body.

#### Resumen

No es posible pensar, reflexionar, hacer y/o transformar la educación al margen de la relación con el Otro; no se puede asumir la educación sin la pretensión de "formar" al Otro o por lo menos, intentarlo, como si tal cosa fuese posible. La educación, al igual que una práctica de transmisión de conocimiento (es también transmisión de cultura, lenguajes, modos y

formas de ser y de estar, de nombrar y ser nombrado), pero, sobre todo, es un escenario de encuentro con el Otro, el cual dependerá de la concepción de sujeto y de mundo que se tenga, el desarrollo de una apuesta formativa. Este encuentro implica una transformación, ruptura, excedencia del sujeto de una ontología que encadena al sujeto a un utilitarismo cruel, para ir más allá, a un escenario en el que el sujeto ya no se encuentra solo a sí-mismo, sino que se encuentra con Otro, radicalmente diferente de él. Allí, es posible una educación que supere la preminencia del conocimiento y parta de una relación con el Otro. Dicha perspectiva, abordada desde las propuestas de los Filósofo Emmanuel Levinas y Joan Carles Mèlich, puede transitar por una educación moral centrada en el conocimiento, reglas y valores socialmente aceptados hasta una educación ética puesta sobre las necesidades formativas de los sujetos que responden responsablemente al y del Otro.

Descriptores: Educación, alteridad, ética, responsabilidad, acogimiento y cuerpo.

#### 1. Introduction

During the training process, a large number of questions emerge, questions that go from one side to the other, from here to there, questions that pass through the classes, the seminars; uncertainties that are shaken in the corridors and cafeterias of educational institutions and doubts that go beyond the different classes and subjects that are present in the training process. For the field of education, these questions are addressed in general on: What is pedagogy? What are the currents on which its proposals are focused? What are the most appropriate models to address the multiple realities of our country? What role does didactics play in the organization of educational environments? What is the most pertinent knowledge and where in the training process can they be located? How to transform the educational reality? Among many others.

All these questions that allow proposing the different encounters in the field of education do not cover (or at least not explicitly), other issues of equal or greater importance in the understanding and transformation of education, such as: What is education? What are its traces and horizons of formation in the other or with the Other<sup>1</sup>? Is it possible to think outside the subject? What are the relationships that are built within the framework of its practice? Should education form or, rather, enable the formation of the Other? Who is the Other of education? How is the existence of the Other assumed in

the formation processes? Where does the relationship established with the Other focus? What are the conditions of possibility for educability to appear and the Other to be an educable subject? Is there any difference between talking about the other or talking to the Other in education<sup>2</sup>? These and many other questions should permanently guide the educational work, guide its reflections, boost its processes of change and social transformation of people and institutions (Murcia, 2012).

These issues permanently emerge within the framework of contemporary scenarios, scenarios permeated with hegemonies and powers as well as resistances and ruptures, in which the re-signification of education, school and knowledge which transits through it, is increasingly demanded in search of overcoming traditional scenarios that have reduced the educable subject to a being "tired (...) a society that is characterized by the disappearance of otherness and strangeness" (Chul Han, 2012, p.8), a society that sees in the other, in its being, in its body, the difference that separates either to exclude and reject or to include and normalize, as if it did not have something to teach, something to say, something to show, something what to tell, something to give.

These societies "tired" and "exhausted" by the speed of the "modern" world, increasingly enclose people in their sameness, that is, each time they interact and are more informed with the world while leaving behind talking, sharing and getting to know others, because modern rationality assumes quantity and noise as an option for communication with others. However, it is necessary to leave the ground of being that implies thinking and being different (Lévinas, 1987), a pause, a silence, a peace that allows one to look and listen to the Other without prejudice and to give the subject a distance in which the radical alterity is not subsumed in the powers of the self. This could prevent "the other being reified as an object, as an 'it' …" (Chul Han, 2014, p.13).

A challenge emerges in these times of haste and occupation, this fatigue, this reification and this denial of the Other have not been limited to surveillance and control over the practices that we can or cannot do, learn and even think. a whole structure of domination and confinement of the body, as a whole, has also been legitimized in and on the body (Lévinas, 1977, 2012).

However, the body escapes any attempt or pretense of capture and classification. From this perspective, the human being who shows or who "gives" himself in his fragile and vulnerable condition does so from his finite condition, as stated by Mèlich (2010b), for whom:

Human beings are corporeal. Our condition is not 'corporal' but 'corporeal'. Corporeity causes a fracture, a crack in our identity. We are corporeal because we do not start from scratch, because we are born in a symbolic universe, in a grammar, and, at the same time, we are not located at all, completely finished, constituted entirely. We are beings to be made or made (p.37).

This location of the condition of humanity from the body and in the body, leads us to think that the processes of relationship and encounter are much more than attending passively to receive a class in a traditional and routine manner, they involve the constitution of subjectivity by the irruption of the Other, of the body "that is the Other", of his humanity in the educational relationship.

Precisely, education and school as they are conceived today, have become times and spaces to be indoctrinated, where the only "active" actor is an imposed knowledge that has excluded the subjects and left them in their margins, It is right there, outside the school, where other forms of education have emerged, welcoming the human being, procuring his humanity, granting recognition to his sentient, corporeal condition, giving a transforming place for himself and for the context that surrounds him.

That is why thinking about the relationship between education, body and otherness takes on value, since education must recover its place as a meeting place between subjects, encounters that occur in an existing human being (Lévinas, 2006), of flesh and blood, finite, provisional, contingent (Mèlich, 2002, 2010a, 2010b) who is also eager to know, of experiences that allow him/her to train himself in principle and from there contribute to the formation of the Other and of the others. Education and school should then turn its "gaze" and awaken their ability to "listen" about their ethical and political responsibility to society.

In these considerations, from an ethical perspective, the educational process is woven from questions such as: how is the human being formed? How do you approach the Other as Other? and what relations are established with him in the multiple meeting spaces that are constituted as educational?

In this sense, addressing a commitment to an education from/to/in and with otherness, could be assumed as a redundancy because every educational process must always be directed towards the formation of the Other, an Other that demands the presence and the voice of an interlocutor, another with the "who" to explore the world (including the world of knowledge) to rebuild it permanently. Another that is corporeity for itself and for the Other, that through it transits day by day in the scenarios of human life.

#### 2. From the subject to alterity

Alterity is not a condition that is given or can be defined, it is precisely the indefinable in the human being<sup>3</sup>, what cannot be framed under any category or name in any way, alterity is the ineffable in the subject and escapes any social and/or cultural frame of reference.

In this way, although alterity is the unnameable in the Other, it can only emerge in the relationship with it, this implies that someone (be I, or the Other) is detached from his/her shields, the world or grammar<sup>4</sup> which defines it or is defining it, to assume itself curious and contemplative in the face of the strange, in front of the Other that presents itself as an epiphany. Thus, making it possible for the response to be hospitable and fraternal, a warm response to welcome it and take responsibility for it, of its uniqueness before it demands from me any responsibility (a responsibility without any justification and without any reason<sup>5</sup>).

Similarly, to reach the Other, to infinity<sup>6</sup>, is an arduous path that implies a transformation of the self, a liberation of oneself to be able to transcend the Other, wage a constant struggle with our identity, unprotect ourselves, distance ourselves from the moral frameworks to go in search of the ethical, to open ourselves to what is not yet and we do not know if it will be.

This liberation starts from assuming ourselves, in the first instance, as beings chained to the world, chained to existence, locked in such a particular consciousness that isolates us from others, even when we share a world with them, even these, the others, are seen as "objects" placed there, next to me, but that do not directly affect me, but from the definition of its characteristics I seek to control, name, classify, thematize, to distinguish other "objects" in the world and know how to relate and directing myself towards them.

The relationship with that world and objects is a moral relationship, it is a grammar<sup>7</sup> of the world, in which we find all the inputs to address it by default. In this relationship, the answers to all the questions are already given, they have already been defined by those who believe they have "reason" or "truth", by those who legitimize their power and their cruelty

both in what they say and in what they do, which makes everything stop being strange and novel to be "normal", in that moment everything has been "naturalized" and nothing surprises, but neither does anyone interrupt.

Grammar is the shield against the paranoia produced by difference, the uncontrollable, the ephemeral. Grammar is thus the normalization of the world, to feel safe believing that "everything is under control" only by being able to name it within our frames of reference.

Thus, the Other is another, as an object to consciousness, is another represented, drawn, classified and limited to my range of possibilities to name its characteristics, this subject loses its particularity and is linked, including<sup>8</sup> if you will, to a whole. There, we find ourselves with a face, with certain characteristics (eyes, mouth, nose, colors, shapes) that need to be named, but that do not give a proper account of that Other facing me, that is, it becomes another distant from me and not close.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the human being a discomfort is generated before the categories in which it has been framed, because its name, being tall or short, cute, ugly, white, black, mestizo, man, woman, child, young or adult, etc., they fail to give an account of what he really feels he is, but in the same way, he does not find in his frames of reference ways of naming himself, he does not find in what has been imposed on him as "being".

This discomfort Lévinas (2011) calls it "nausea", like that pressure that is felt inside, from the confinement in which it has been placed and that is no longer enough to contain it, thus generating a "need¹¹ for evasion", need to get out of that mold that has been imposed on it, to go beyond the self to be-Other, to give testimony of oneself through its own language.

This stress generates ruptures in the subject, in his ways of seeing and directing himself towards the world that surrounds him, he mobilizes, he is destabilized, he shakes himself to crack and to be able to "overreach", to get out of himself, to go into darkness, to get away of

the light that has marked the course and walk in uncertainty towards the unforeseen in search of new horizons, walking aimlessly.

This departure is given through a language of its own, of a particular way of saying, to give testimony of oneself, finding our own words, discovering others; another language that flows outwards in search of the Other-being also exceeded of itself, in search of otherness. But this own language demands the Other's presence to be heard, to be contemplated, to be found and welcomed, that is why going to the Other is exceeding, this requires the desire for him or her ¬-but not a desire like the need for something that we lack and we can obtain, but - as a desire for the unattainable, desire for a horizon that summons us but that we cannot reach.

That being said, the Other, humanity, the infinite (for Lévinas), is the one who calls us and demands our attention, listening, contemplation; his face transcends the nameable features of the face and is presented as a language, as an epiphany; it presents his pain, his passion, his emotion, his demand, his joy and his suffering.

This encounter with the Other (among others) that is presented by everyone from their languages, implies attentive listening, contemplation, responsibility (compassion, Mèlich, 2010b) for the other, responding to his demand, even in the absence of an explicit call. Just here, after breaking with oneself we can find it by approaching it without covering it, without controlling or classifying it, right here we are witnessing, in front of the face of the Other, its epiphany, the ethical encounter, the educational relationship that responsibly responds the other.

## 3. From moral education to the ethical encounter

Joan-Carles Mèlich states that all education is moral, while education is the process through which we inherit culture, norms, laws, behaviors, even ways of thinking and even feeling. In this sense, educa-

tion is a grammatical education, because we learn to name, classify, include and exclude everything that surrounds us, including others.

A moral education does not have as a central concern the subject, but knowledge, since the first is also knowledge, is a cluster of characteristics of which we can account from referential frames socially and culturally inherited. From this point of view, educating the human being implies filling him with knowledge<sup>11</sup> from which to account for everything around him, is to teach him to protect himself from uncertainty, that is, he teaches not to face the Other but behind his back and wait that the predetermined moral frameworks of society include or exclude it and from there, from the periphery, act in favor or against it.

Education viewed from this point of view, has become a scenario for the transmission of knowledge, with the full pretension that acquires what is necessary to be a member of society, to be able to incorporate and respond to the same extent that this imposes; otherwise one will be excluded, rejected, seen as a stranger, confined, confined to oblivion, to the deepest corner of the room.

The problem of education with each generation, is precisely to stay there, which happens because those who teach are from other generations already chained to their frames of reference, to their moral frameworks, the will has already been tamed and from there they impose themselves on the Other, they want to indoctrinate him, while the Other seeks his emancipation, his openness, he resists being chained in the same way as his teachers to be converted into one more.

For this reason, for education to transcend, it is required that the teacher himself *evade* himself, his moral frames, be destabilized, break with his own chains to *depart* from himself, to discover new languages, to go in search of the Other out of compassion. and not expect him to seek my piety (Mèlich, 2014, 2010b).

From there, education ceases to be transmisionist and knowledge is no longer the center of any educational act, it is transformed, muted towards an education as departure, an education that discovers languages, forms of expressions, exceptional knowledge, accommodates the doubt, the uncertainty and not find a single answer as absolute truth, but multiple answers from where each subject, from their own perspectives, contributes to the construction of new knowledge.

An ethical education finds in the other possibilities, not imposition of reference schemes, it opens to the epiphany of the Other's face, it presents itself contemplative before it to learn from it; thus the roles between teacher and student are diluted and both are teachers and apprentices, both have something to share, something to donate to the Other, something to give to the Other.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, education achieves in its actors the ability to transcend, go beyond, generate a contingency scenario for the ethical event (Bárcena and Mèlich, 2000, 2014) in which, each one is responsible for the Other, where none is in better position than the Other; on the contrary, where we all build ourselves in the relationship with the Other and with knowledge. From this point of view, one goes from a moral education, from domination, from control and indoctrination, to an ethical education, of contingency, of uncertainty, where the doubt is curiosity, not distrust and the interpellation is not disrespectful but to listen, that for Han (2017) means:

Listening is not a passive act. It is characterized by a peculiar activity. First, I must welcome the other, that is, I have to affirm the other in his otherness. Then I listen to what he says. Listening is a lending, a giving, a gift. It is the only thing that helps the other to speak. He does not passively follow the discourse of the other. In a sense, listening precedes speech. Listening is the only thing that makes the other speak. I already listen before the other speaks, or I listen for the other to speak. Listening

invites the other to speak, freeing it for its otherness (pp. 117-118).

Likewise, responsibility for the Other, for his word. Education then, could be understood as an ethical scenario, meeting in order to promote the formation of the Other. Formation that is presented face-to-face, attentive listening to what the Other wants to say and that has been denied at all costs. It is attended to an education that overcomes indoctrination and is presented as dialogue, openness and encounter.

# 4. On the condition of humanity: corporeality13 as a niche of one's own and shared existence

This ethical perspective assumes how the existing relationships between the finite and corporeal human being have been expressed with the presence/absence of the other and the response given from education, that is, an answer that is never complete because in front is the Other. That is, from the processes of encounter and appearance of the other before the self, appearance that occurs with the arrival of the body, that which is corporeality gives way to the event, to the transformations, to the possibilities of reaching be, in terms of Mèlich himself (2010a, p.11)

The body is, while corporeality becomes, at the same time, it becomes another than it is, it becomes different, it becomes against what it is... and, also, it is never completely, because a being corporeal refers to an open, always mobile scenario, a scenario that cannot elude the past, the memory of what has been, what they have done, the inheritance received, the grammar in which they have been educated and, at the same time, it refers to a future, not only to a more or less predictable, programmable or planned future, but to a future that is always to come, that is always open to events that break any project, any identity, any fixation.

That which we are as corporeality and that we become, is what with the help of education we are doing, we are transforming and we are transiting through our own existence without staying in it, without stopping in our own body, but throwing ourselves towards the Another, throwing us beyond being, even in another-wayto-be (Lévinas, 1987).

The human being is corporeal, that is, a being of flesh and blood, a being that inhabits a place in the world since its existence and at the same time is inhabited by multiple dimensions that rest on its corporeal existence as possibility, language, thought, sensitivity, biological and organic functions as well as those built socially have a reason for being in corporeality, that which makes us human. This scenario of corporeity constituted by the visible and by the invisible, by the immanent and the chiasmatic or by the union of the soul and the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, 2006) are those that make possible the human existence, particular, singular and Completely shared with others and with the world.

This condition of existence in corporeity and from corporeity makes us assume a position in which the human being is an embodied being, a being that not only has flesh or body, but is flesh and is more than body (corporeity); in terms of Henry (2001).

Incarnated beings are suffering beings, crossed by desire and fear, who feel the whole series of impressions linked to the flesh insofar as, constituting their substance - an impressionable substance therefore - they begin and end with what they experience. (p.11)

That which crosses us as humans, which touches us and upsets us, breaks down little by little what we thought we were, knowing, showing our fragile and vulnerable condition always exposed to the unforeseen, to what comes from far and from outside, to what escapes our control and that becomes a condition of possibility to enter into relationship and encounter with the Other and with the other, those tenuous certainties of what one is or believes to have been overflowing into the new and the unknown, towards the Other.

It could be said then that embodied corporeity is more than the objectivity of the body thing or reified, it is a body that touches and is touched, that wishes and is desired, a body as sentient corporeality with gestures full of meanings (Vanegas, 2001), a corporeity that is socially constructed (Le Bretón, 2000) within the framework of relationships that are woven with others, with our closest neighbors, even with strangers and foreigners.

Precisely, the recognition of the Other of itself as posed by Mèlich (2010a), that is, of the body as corporeity, implies an adequate or inadequate response to the request of the Other; answers that are constant in the formation processes and that they sometimes limit, reject or make invisible the existence of the other in the School, in the built social institutions and that build humanity. However, an ethical response (at least from the Lévinasian perspective) will base its expression on listening, on language, on obedience to the mandate of the Other's face (Lévinas, 2001a) and on the possibility of responsibly choosing how to allow the Other continue to be, how to accompany their process of becoming, how to become together, among ourselves (Lévinas, 2001b) maintaining a close distance, a close relationship without absorbing the existence of the other, without eliminating it subtly in homogeneity or abruptly in the total heterogeneity.

The body as corporeity is not born, but is made, is not planned, programmed or determined, but is pure incompleteness, uncertainty, vertigo, is man's opening to the world, is a risk crossed by the encounter and the appearance of others in the very existence, is the sensitivity that bursts and questions one's own calmness, it is the joy of feeling alive, affectation that comes from outside to rebuke one's own skin, the request of another that lies exposed and commands, orders, calls, calls concern, attention and reception. Unamuno (1913) rightly insisted: "Neither the human nor the humanity, nor the simple adjective, nor the substantive, but the concrete noun: man. The man of flesh and bone, the one who is born, suffers and dies -especially dies-, the one who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and wants, the man who is seen and who is heard, the brother, the true brother"(p. 3); yes, the brother, who does not have his own body, but who suffers and lives and dies in his body.

#### **Notes**

- Se hace necesario precisar la diferencia entre "otro" y "Otro"; el "otro" es otro objetualizado, cosificado y anclado a una gramática (Mèlich, 2014) que lo clasifica y lo categoriza desconociendo así su radical alteridad. Por su parte el "Otro" es lo absolutamente otro, es aquel que rompe todo mis esquemas y que me altera en mi propia esencia, es quien nunca podré llegar a ser y, parafraseando a Lévinas (2009, p. 133) exige de mí responsabilidad sin que él se haga responsable de mí.
- 2 En un artículo que lleva este nombre, se expresan las diferencias considerables entre hablar del otro y hablar con el otro, la primera referida a una forma de definir y tematizar al otro y la segunda, como posibilidad para que surja la relacionalidad y el encuentro. Ver: Jaramillo y Orozco (2015) y Jaramillo y Murcia (2014).
- 3 Mèlich (2014) prefiere utilizar el término "ser finito".
- 4 Mèlich (2014) en su obra Lógica de la crueldad, desarrolla el concepto de gramática para plantear que vivimos una realidad moral en la que todo está controlado, predeterminado, donde todo ya ha sido nombrado y cuenta con un significado.
- 5 Sobre este asunto, Zielinski (2011) muestra con suficiente elocuencia el planteamiento de Lévinas acerca de la responsabilidad, esa que es sin porqué, sin contrato, sin reciprocidad.
- 6 Para Lévinas, el "Infinito" es la humanidad en el Otro, que demanda una respuesta ética de mí, lo que implica una respuesta no predeterminada, no de libreto ni de manual como la da la moral, sino una respuesta contingente ante la contingencia de la aparición, presencia e irrupción del Otro.
- 7 Para Lévinas es el conocimiento como ya se había mencionado; en cambio es más conveniente emplear el término gramática de Mèlich, mucho más cercano al mundo propiamente.
- 8 Desde esta perspectiva se desarrolla una amplia crítica a las políticas y apuestas por la inclusión, pues incluir al Otro, es normalizarlo, es hacerlo otro más. Por tanto, diría Mèlich que la inclusión en tanto gramática moral incluye también la exclusión de aquellos que no cumplen los requisitos necesarios para ser incluidos o clasificados; este es uno de tantos ejemplos de lo que él denomina lógica de la crueldad.
- 9 Dice Viveros y Vergara (2014) que la distancia con el otro está asociada a la otredad, mientras que la proximidad y la cercanía dan cuenta de la alteridad.
- 10 Necesidad, no como ausencia de algo que nos falte sino,

- como desbordamiento por exceso de algo. Ver por ejemplo Domínquez (2005) y Leibovici (2012).
- 11 Al mejor estilo de la "educación bancaria" ya denunciada por Freire (2005) en su *Pedagogía del Oprimido*.
- 12 Lévinas (1977, p. 263) plantea que esta entrega "...consiste, para el uno, en dar el mundo, su posesión, al otro...". Así mismo, Skliar (2007a, 2007b y 2011; y en colaboración con Larrosa (2009) insiste en una educación que es del Otro, que se da con el Otro y es para el Otro.
- 13 La corporeidad tiene sus raíces en la fenomenología, principalmente en los desarrollos de la fenomenología de la percepción de Merleau-Ponty (1993) y se asocia estrechamente con lo expuesto por Duch y Mèlich en escenarios de la corporeidad (2012); en estos textos, así como en otras referencias tratadas en este documento, se sostiene la condición humana desde sus dimensiones sintientes, vivientes y por supuesto, corpóreas.

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