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**PSYCHO-SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION IN THE
21ST CENTURY**

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Abstract

This paper raises an important issue for the future of education: what would education mean in a world in a profound transformation, what would be its purpose and how can we educate young people to be adapted to new social, political, technological, etc. realities? How can we create a sustainable education, overcoming the limits that inevitably flow from a fragmented vision of man, seen only in terms of its economic utility and role in the labor market, and not as an integral human being that includes body, mind, heart and soul? Assuming that education today is in a crisis of meaning and purpose, this paper analyzes innovative approaches, such as the integral theory created by the philosopher Ken Wilber. The aim of this paper is to identify the directions of development of education, as a component of a social system in profound change, using the conceptual and methodological apparatus of integral theory.

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1. Introduction

We live in a world in a profound transformation full of continual challenges: the disruptive forces of digitalization and globalization, the rising threat of a climate catastrophe, to which is added war and its disastrous consequences for all of humanity.

Today's education must find its meaning, purpose and especially its role in a world on the brink of a deep economic, political, military, social and environmental crisis. As expected, it, too, as a component of the global system, has long been showing signs of an unprecedented crisis.

Much of our contemporary education systems structure was designed in an era undergoing revolution. For example, in late nineteenth-century America, widespread industrialization, urbanization, an immigration-fueled population boom following the Civil War, a reformist push for literacy and universal human rights (especially labor rights) set in motion the formation of a public education system (Cook, 2019). Also, the current education has its roots in the model of 19th century Germany, those "factory schools" where young people were offered free training so that they could later be employed in the industry. So, the principles of education were elaborated 200 years ago, during the industrialization period, when people had to be trained to be able to handle machines, so they only had to be good executors: to obey orders, to be told what, when and how to do and they just execute those tasks. Cook (2019) states that "these cornerstones of education, age-based enrollment, subject-based curricula, teacher as authoritative arbiter of knowledge, vocational preparation, persist to today, commonly captured in the industrial model of education mantra" (p. 9).

Today, the traditional education institutions are set up and are educating people perfectly for a world that no longer exists. Many experts say that we live in a time when the prospect of a radically different future forces us to renew or redefine the purpose of education, their principles, and their finalities.

The present paper aims to investigate several ways in which we can configure new goals, principles, purposes, and forms of education in this challenging period. Using Ken Wilber's approach to integral theory, we highlighted the connection between education and the level of development of the collective consciousness, as well as some applications of integral theory in education: post-disciplinarily, recognition of value and the use of other alternative approaches in education and the need for integral guidance counselors who would help the holistic development of young people.

2. Problem Statement

All this leads us to ask the question: what should be the aim of education in this era and how could it contribute to the more complex development of the human being, to face the new realities?

2.1. The Aim of Education for VUCA World

VUCA is a trendy acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity, widely used to describe today's world of incredible complexity, in which there are many interconnected parts and variables, there is a lot of information available, but it is difficult or overwhelming to process.

In our opinion, in fact today's society has not become VUCA, but our perception about reality has been updated, it has become wider and wider, we are beginning to understand and see more and more of what man, the world and life would truly mean. We are beginning to realize that our world, which we had the illusion of understanding and mastering, is VUCA. And we are still far from fully understanding reality.

It is curious to note that in a world characterized by change, uncertainty, insecurity, and ambiguity, our educational institutions, at least outside of art educational institutions, are dominated by a culture of clarity: yes or no, true or false, correct or incorrect. This is also true in science:

Almost a century after Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle and his theory of quantum mechanics has broken the paradigms of physics, and even philosophy, we are still accustomed to arguing and acting largely along linear causality patterns within insulated (isolated) boxes of fragmented sciences (Bast et al., 2019, pp. 247-248).

We seem to know very well what is true. We have very exact information transmitted in classrooms by very convinced teachers and measured with very accurate means of measurement, which will later provide the young people a very clear place in society. Out of our need for control and predictability (in fact, power), we have built a miniature, toy world, which we can know and master, and in which the child, the teenager must fit, and then must reduce himself. This is our current educational picture: an incredible, tremendously complex human being reduced to fit in the box of a system that reflects our extremely limited perception of who we are. This corresponds to the need for power and control of people, which is based on certain forms of scarcity that determine competition-based access to education. We must say that if there are young people who have developed to their full potential, this has not happened because of the educational system, but in spite of it. This was due to some soulful teachers who managed to see the children or teenagers with their hearts and with all their structures, not only with their minds programmed by society.

In a VUCA world, our illusion of control begins to falter. As we evolve as a species, we are more able to perceive and contain more and more of this complexity of the world and have an increasing tolerance for uncertainty.

Traditionally, the most important of the purposes of education refers to the preparation of the individual to perform a role in the economic and political field, to be a "citizen". Even the development of character and personality are seen here in the context in which they are useful in order to better exercise economic and political roles.

In a VUCA world, our perception about education has to follow the perception of a highly complex reality. Thus, the first question that education must answer is: "Who is man?" In a VUCA world, this question moves from a philosophical field to a very practical field.

2.2. Holistic Human, not Just Worker

Well-known analyst and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari has repeatedly said that in the future, the big struggle of a lot of people won't be against exploitation, but against irrelevance, referring to the

unprecedented increase in artificial intelligence that will tend to replace labor. If in the 20th century the big struggle was against exploitation, a small elite exploiting the masses, in the future the main struggle will be the fact that the elite won't need people, there will be nothing they could do which would be beneficial to the economic or political system. People will be useless for the economic and political system, not useless in general, so that will probably force people to find out who they are outside the economic and political roles conferred by the system and what they can do outside of them: to discover what their path is, what they really want and to realize what their voice is and what the voice of society is.

We must evolve in all aspects of our being to keep up with technological development. In the present, our existence is monetized, we receive monetary compensation. We need to cultivate the aspect of our nature that is not determined by our monetary value to society. Because we don't know what the nature of work will be in 20 or 30 years, we need to return to what is essential, to what is not demonetized and does not lose its value. For example, if a student failed an exam, the most important thing they learned is how to deal with the failure and how to pick themselves up. This approach, which allows developing a kind of mental robustness, is more important than getting a high grade.

Corporations today need efficient, intelligent, disciplined people. But qualities such as compassion, spirituality, artistic sensibility are not relevant to them. So, if we let the free market decide, we will not have an upgraded human being, but, on the contrary, simplified (downgraded) humans. As Harari (2018) says "techno-humanism could lead people to regress. The system may prefer downgraded humans not because they have any superhuman ability, but because they are missing certain truly inconvenient human traits that would hamper and slow it down" (p. 317).

Therefore, they don't really need human beings, but robots. If we fall into this trap of developing only the qualities necessary for corporations, this will put us in a position of maximum vulnerability to the threat of artificial intelligence that can surpass us at any time in intelligence, efficiency and discipline.

The mission of school today is to build self-knowledge and self-awareness that will be extremely useful tools in building a map of reality with which young people can navigate life. They must learn how to find their way in this ocean of information without being overwhelmed by it and must have the ability to connect with the only place that is not affected by duality and uncertainty, the only place from which they can receive guidance, which can be the compass to navigate through life: their heart and soul.

2.3. Integral Education. Toward a New Consciousness

Integral education is a perspective derived from integral theory (Ken Wilber). Author of the world's first truly comprehensive or integrative philosophy aptly named "Integral Theory", Ken Wilber is one of the world's renowned philosophers today. He is the most translated academic writer in America, with 25 books translated into approximately 30 foreign languages. The Integral Theory is a systematic philosophy that suggests the synthesis of all human knowledge and experience, perhaps the most comprehensive approach to society, life, and human beings, a Unified Theory of Everything. The integral movement includes well-known specialists in many fields such as Jane Loevinger, Stanislav Grof, Clare W. Graves, Don Edward Beck, Chris Cowan, Susanne Cook-Greuter and others.

This movement has also attracted a lot of practitioners and researchers from different countries around the world who base their experience on what Wilber called the AQAL-based Integral approach.

AQAL is an acronym for "all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types." It is a basis of Wilber's current version of Integral Metatheory and Practice. These five factors are the essential elements or keys to unlocking and facilitating human evolution. Any approach, if it aims at being truly holistic or comprehensive, must consider all these elements and factors (the four quadrants, all developmental levels, all developmental lines, all states, all types).

This integral approach can be applied to any human discipline: education, psychology, business, economy, politics, ecology, spirituality, etc. According to Wilber (2007), the AQAL matrix includes:

- all quadrants (four fundamental dimensions of reality: interior subjective self/consciousness; internal intersubjective culture/relationships; exterior objective brain/organism; exterior inter-objective social systems/environment);
- all levels (or "waves") of development (pre-rational to rational to trans-rational; pre-conventional to conventional to post-conventional; body to mind to spirit, etc.);
- all developmental lines or "streams" (multiple intelligences);
- all states of consciousness and being (ordinary and non-ordinary mental states, from gross to subtle to causal to witnessing to non-dual);
- all types of personality and events (sex, gender, personality type, etc.);
- and self.

Thus, the basic idea of the AQAL approach can be summarized as follows: the cultivation of body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature and involves moving to a new, more inclusive, level of human consciousness.

3. Research Questions

In this paper we seek to answer three very important questions that can bring clarification and solutions to the challenges facing education today:

- i. What is the connection between education and the level of development of the collective consciousness? How does our capacity for self-awareness and self-understanding as a species determine the way education takes place at all levels? What is the connection between the level of consciousness from which we approach politics, economics, ecology, technology, etc. and how is education set up today?
- ii. What would be the key features of integral education? What is the connection between integral education and holistic education? Is the body-mind-spirit approach enough to address the difficulties facing education today?
- iii. How can we use the integral meta-theory of education, overcoming human capital theory, to better prepare learners for this world? What could be some applications of integral theory in education?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the place and role of education in the context of the current great changes and crises facing humanity in the 21st century. We are also interested in configuring some

features of integral education, based on Ken Wilber's comprehensive meta-theory, compared to holistic education, which is also an important trend in future education approaches.

In addition, we aim to analyse some applications of integral theory in education and to describe some examples of how we can apply the principles and methods of this theory to train young people to be better prepared and adapted to new economic, technological, political and social realities. All this has the role of increasing the awareness related to the extreme complexity of the educational problem in the context of the crisis of the current society and the future threats.

5. Research Methods

This paper is a qualitative research in which we used the documentation and analysis of specialty literature to identify the main trends in future education, as well as its analysis from the perspective of the integral theory. Although we started from the analysis of some psycho-sociological aspects of education, the approach is interdisciplinary, incorporating concepts and theories from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy.

We also use some integral concepts (levels, stages) to analyze education, without doing a complete analysis from the perspective of integral theory. This requires much more laborious research that includes the four quadrants, all developmental levels, all developmental lines, all states, all types (AQAL model), and cannot be the subject of our short presentation.

6. Findings

6.1. Education and Collective Consciousness - an Integral Approach

What is the connection between education and the level of development of the collective consciousness? How does our capacity for self-awareness and self-understanding as a species determine the way education takes place at all levels? What is the connection between the level of consciousness from which we approach politics, economics, ecology, technology, etc. and how education is set up today?

Wilber (2007) talks in his famous Integral Theory about a process of "growing up" of societies structured on seven levels: archaic, magical, mythical, rational, pluralistic, integral, super-integral. Each level transcends and includes the others, and societies become more complex and inclusive as they evolve. Also, in the integral approach, four stages of consciousness development are considered: egocentric (being self-centered), ethnocentric (being focused on the groups people belong to: family, nation, religion, political party; the *us* group), world centric (transition from *us* to *all of us*, all of humanity), kosmocentric (to be one with all creation).

Given these criteria and because education is a reflection of the level of consciousness of a society, we can admit that for each level of evolution we have a corresponding type of education:

- super-integral education
- integral education
- pluralistic: communitarian, egalitarian education
- rational: strategic, opportunistic education

- mythic: purposeful, authoritarian education

- magical: animistic education

- archaic: instinctive, survivalistic education

The characteristics corresponding to each level would be:

- super-integral education: experiencing the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit

- integral education: responsibility, self-directiveness, autonomy

- pluralistic education: peace, harmony, exploration of feelings, cooperation

- rational education: experiments to win, self-interest, high tech, high status, mentors and guides

- mythical education: pre-determined outcomes, authority, moralistic lessons, punishment for errors

- magical education: paternalistic teachers, ritual and routine, passive learners

- archaic education: use of instinct and habits just to survive, oral histories.

Each society includes, more or less, all of these educational levels, but we can see a predominance of one level or another, which allows us to say, if we were to simplify for ease of analysis, that a society would be at one of these seven levels of evolution. In fact, these levels are not exceeded in order to move to a "higher" level, but are included with the purpose of living increasingly inclusive levels of experience. Thus, based on observations, documentaries, an experience of over 20 years in Romanian higher education and contact with other educational systems, we can say that the dominant note of the educational system today is rational education, alongside with mythical and pluralistic education in some amount.

Today's education is, as Bagley (2019) states, in many countries, underpinned by neo-liberal values around what constitutes progress and success, and how to measure those. This is the rational education that teaches people to be winners, to compete with others and to be winners. Unfortunately, this only creates a lot of internal conflicts and frustrations because, as deBoer (2020) showed, the contemporary capitalist society offers more ways to be a loser than to be a winner. Few are victorious and the rest live with the bitter feeling that they are not good enough, that they are inadequate and that they do not find meaning in life. Too many young people leave their formal education believing they are not smart, not capable, and that they cannot measure up to one-size-fits-all standards that define success so narrowly that most children are destined to fail (Hansen, 2021). Also, the emphasis on performance measurement and the limited access to education based on competition makes many of them cheat and seek to get good results undeservedly.

Therefore, the level of consciousness from which we approach all social aspects, politics, economics, ecology, technology, etc. determines the way education is configured today. All of this has to do with our capacity for self-awareness and self-understanding as a species, and they increase as we evolve to higher levels. Are we limited or do we have incredible superior abilities that are ready to be awakened? Do we have limited resources, or do we have access to the infinite energy of the universe? Who are we and what kind of world do we live in? Obviously, education is more than job training. And obviously, so far, we have approached education, as well as all aspects of social life, from a kind of feeling of limitation and scarcity that has led to competition, power struggles and cheating (Stein, 2019).

But education cannot be based on scarcity and limiting forms of self-understanding. It must be abundant in order to be free.

6.2. Integral Approach in Education

What are the key features of integral education? What is the connection between integral education and holistic education? Is the body-mind-spirit approach enough to address the difficulties facing education today?

6.2.1. Sustainable Education, Holistic Education, Integral Education

The first concept that specialists think of when talking about the education of the future is that of sustainability. To engage successfully in sustainable development, we must train ourselves to think holistically and to understand the connections and interactions between three complex systems: environmental, economic and social (Wheeler & Bijur, 2000).

What exactly does holistic education mean and what is the connection between it and comprehensive education? Holistic education addresses all aspects of the learner, including mind, body, and spirit. It refers to values such as peace, compassion, spirituality, and the importance of learning communities. It also emphasizes experiential learning and autonomy.

Including all aspects of human beings in education is fundamental to our thriving as a species. There are already many successful experiences using this approach in schools and even in universities. One of the best-known methods specific to holistic education is mindfulness, which is commonly used in the classroom to increase the overall effectiveness of the teacher, increase student performance, and rekindle the joy of teaching and learning. It also leads to increased empathy, goodwill, self-awareness, integrity, self-control and honesty (Mussey, 2021).

Renowned author de Bruin (2021) achieved remarkable results with his well-known Munich Model "Mindfulness and Meditation in a University Context", one of the first programs in Europe to offer university classes in mindfulness and meditation that also award academic credit. He also works closely with other universities in Germany and abroad. This program has been operating for more than ten years, demonstrating notable effects of these practices on physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels.

6.2.2. What Is Integral Education?

Integral education is based on many of the principles of holistic education, which it develops and complements on increasingly growing levels of complexity. It involves several commitments, or elements, such as:

- Exploring multiple perspectives: complex issues are not binary and paradox, contradiction, polarity and multiplicity are accepted.
- Including first-, second-, and third-person methodologies of learning and teaching: subjective, intersubjective, and objective aspects of reality simultaneously.
- Weaving together the domains of self, culture, and nature.
- Combining critical thinking with experiential feeling, the cognitive with the affective.

- Including the insights from constructive-developmental psychology: individuals (students and teachers) are at different stages of growth in their personal and educational journeys and it is important that the classrooms are informed by that.
- Engaging regular personal practices of transformation: various practices of “body, mind, and spirit”, techniques for exercising our embodiment, awareness, and presence.
- Including multiple ways of knowing: cognitive, emotional, moral, kinesthetic, transpersonal, a multidimensional view of humans that honors body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit.
- Recognizing various types of learners and teachers, multiple modes of learning and expression.
- Encouraging “shadow work” within learners and teachers: owning our projections, minimizing idealization, avoiding the tendency to split things into good and bad, etc.
- Honoring other approaches to education: being knowledgeable about the strengths and limits of conventional, alternative, holistic, and transformative approaches to education (Esbjörn-Hargens et al., 2010).

6.3. Applications of Integral Theory in Education

One of the most important applications of the integral theory in education is the awareness of the need to leap from an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary model to a post-disciplinary view. Scholars now realize that many problems facing us as nations and as a species do not fall into discrete disciplines. Thus, it's not about various connected disciplines, but about a model that transcends disciplines into an effective problem-solving relationship using the AQAL model of Integral Theory (Crittenden, 2022).

Beyond these and all its objectives listed above, integral education has the merit of encompassing all forms of knowledge, both scientific and beyond science. If, in general, all new approaches criticize previous approaches, showing their own superiority, the integral theory recognizes the value of all alternative approaches, using them, while considering their limitations. In integral education, traditional, conservative (and modern) values are as important as progressive and integral ones:

Traditional **values** (e.g., basic skills, memorization, respect, self-control, loyalty, conformity, responsibility, and accountability) are essential on the playing field of the real classroom. Equally **important are modernist values** (e.g., efficiency, achievement, measurable standards, and resource accumulation) and pre-conventional, egocentric values (e.g., self-protection and enjoyment.) The integral approach can help teachers integrate what progressive models prescribe with the realities of the classroom. It also helps teachers understand that particular students, classrooms, and even communities have developmental differences that require very different pedagogical approaches. Plus, it can help teachers empathize and communicate more effectively with students, principals, parents and others who have different value systems than their own (Willow, 2011, p. 42).

By incorporating all perspectives, integral education helps learners overcome the fragmentation that leads to conflict, cultivate integral awareness and provides them with tools to understand reality at a deep and complex level, thus helping them better adapt to new realities.

Another application of integral theory in education could be the establishment of integral guidance counsellors, a kind of academic "life coaches" who can come up with solutions to many of the problems facing schools today: from monitoring the progress of learners in multiple intelligences to supporting and challenging them towards holistic development, shadow work, solving adaptation problems, etc. (Fischler & deVos, 2022).

7. Conclusions

In this study we set out to analyse the role of education and the most appropriate forms of education in the context of the crisis and the great changes facing humanity in the 21st century. There is a link between education and the level of development of collective consciousness. Thus, the growing pressure for change that education is undergoing today is nothing more than the expression of the whole changing collective consciousness, in a time between worlds. Education at present tends to transform from a mythical (purposeful, authoritarian education) and rational (strategic, opportunistic education) into a pluralistic (communitarian, egalitarian education), integral and even super-integral education. The process is not uniform in time and space, elements of each level of education, from the lowest (magical and archaic education) to the highest (integral and super-integral education), being present to some extent in any educational system over time. It is all about making this vision or perception of reality more and more inclusive (the upper levels transcend and include the lower levels), overcoming the limitation and suffering associated with the lower levels and, at the end, human ignorance (ignorance means limited perception and understanding).

Integral education could respond to this goal to a very large extent: the human being is a holistic being, not just a worker. The holistic body-mind-soul approach, which is also an important trend in future education approaches, is not enough to address the difficulties facing education today. There is a need to develop these principles and complement them with increasing levels of complexity that will lead, among other things, to non-linear, multi-vectorial modes of perception, understanding, thinking and action. In other words, to perceive and understand reality itself more accurately and to upgrade human consciousness to unprecedented levels in recent history.

Some applications of Ken Wilber's meta-theory in education refer primarily to overcoming multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary towards what integral theorists call "postdisciplinarity": the use of the AQAL methodological model ("all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types") for understanding reality, in any aspect of it (for a more accurate understanding of this type of approach there is a lot of literature of integral researchers).

Another application of integral theory in education would be the recognition of the value of conventional, alternative, holistic, and transformative approaches to education, being at the same time knowledgeable about their limits. Also, education could be approached as a systemic flow with elements (students, classrooms, communities, etc.) at different levels of development that require very different educational approaches, which will reduce conflict, inadequacy and increase empathy and inclusion. Integral education is based on the cultivation of body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature, which is a systemic process through which human consciousness can be upgraded to increasing levels of inclusion, acceptance, empathy, and generally, to increasing levels of love.

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