

A better school for the XXI century

EDUCATING TO BUILD COMMUNITY (2)

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2- A school "going forth" is a better school for the XXI century

As Catholic educators, we are clear about the identity and mission of our institutions. I would like to stress that a school "going forth" is not only a good Christian school but also a school that responds to the challenges of education in this complex twenty-first century.

I'm not going to lose time in diagnoses that we all know. We know that around the world formal education is somehow caught between institutional logics, buildings, regulations and curricula that still reflect the encyclopedic logic of the nineteenth-century school, with parents and teachers who feel nostalgic for "the good old days" even if they have not been so much, and a "digital native" generation that no longer sees meaning in an education that is reduced to the reproduction of information they can find easier – and often more up-to-date and more nimbly presented – on the Internet. In the words of the Catalan educator Eduard Vallory, "*inertia makes us reproduce an obsolete education*".¹

We know it's not just about including more technology in school. The generation of the twenty-first century grows up in a culture of the uncertain, of the permanently changing, and all the experts are agreeing that they are essential the ability to "learn to learn all their lives", the ability to solve problems, work in a team, communicate in diverse contexts and that of "learning to live together" (Delors, 1996).

While the educational paradigm of the nineteenth century was conceived around the "Goddess Reason" of the Enlightenment, the twenty-first century tells us about cultivating emotional intelligence, empathy, multiple intelligences ...

The Church always raised the need for an integral education, which includes all the dimensions of human life, and after three centuries in which the dominant paradigm focused almost exclusively on mathematical logical intelligence and transmission of disciplinary knowledge, the good news is that lately even the most specialists more Pragmatists are beginning to recognize that education for the twenty-first century has to incorporate not only disciplinary literacies, not only the skills of know-how but also what the World Economic Forum now calls "character"... something that is much closer to what we understand by an integral personal formation than to the old encyclopedist paradigms.

¹ <http://ar.tiching.com/link/739626>

It seems that there is a growing convergence between the thought and educational experience of the Church with what is being proposed today by experts in the pedagogical field worldwide. And one of those fields of convergence must do precisely with the need for an "outgoing" school. Notice that UNESCO in its recent document "*Educating for Global Citizenship*" speaks of different approaches or "learning environments" and one of those it emphasizes is what it calls "*community-based approaches*" and those offline as

"Learning environments that promote links with communities, both locally and globally, and that connect learners to real-life experiences"

It seems to me that it is no coincidence that in this twenty-first century, in which our students are so immersed in virtual reality, so many of us are looking to bring them closer to the real life of the community so that they can learn and live in real life.

It seems to me that all this is summed up or very beautifully by Pope Francis in his dialogue with the educators at the 2015 World Congress when he told us that there are "three languages" - that of the head, the heart, and that of the hands - and that education has to be articulated on these three paths.

*"There are three languages: the language of the **head**, the language of the **heart**, the language of the **hands**. Education has to move on these three paths. Teach to think, help to feel good and accompany in doing, so that the three languages are in harmony; that the child, the adolescent, thinks what he feels and what he does, feels what he thinks and what he does, and does what he thinks and feels."²*

It could be said that nineteenth-century education focused above all on the head, and that the pragmatic education of the competences guided almost exclusively by the world of work that was wanted to impose on us in the twentieth century had to do above all with the language of the hands. And that the Pope is telling us that uniting in harmony the languages of the head, the heart and the hands is the only way to practice a truly integral education.

Maybe for some, it may sound like a utopia, but we know it's not. Many experiences in Catholic schools and also in many non-Catholic institutions today show that this integration of head, heart, and hands is possible.

I would like to share just one of many examples. The Jaime de Nevenes School in Bariloche, in Argentina Patagonia, serves a very vulnerable population, in a very precarious neighborhood near the mountain range between Argentina and Chile. Most pupils have been expelled from the city's public schools or have great difficulty staying in high school. Many of them are of Japanese origin, and some have left their families to study in the city. A few years ago, a group of 3rd grade of secondary school learned that one of their Mapuche classmates had no communication with his family for several months, even though his community was just over 100 km away. of the city. Neither the teenager nor his parents had money to travel that distance, and the family was in a place without electricity, and therefore without means of communication of any kind. Upon learning of this situation, the students asked their technology teacher if there was nothing they could do to make the Mapuche community have electricity. The teacher took the question as the trigger for a service-learning project focused on investigating various forms of sustainable energy, which concluded in the construction and installation of a windmill in the Community of Michigan. They contacted engineers from the Bariloche Atomic Center who advised them, sought resources in the community for materials, and discussed between men and women if girls could also use the welder, and that led to a valuable lesson about the dignity and capabilities of women in a strongly macho context ... and that the girls also learned to weld. And finally, they gathered the necessary funds to build the mill, go to the community of their partner and install it, to the surprise and joy of the families of the place, who now have the energy to improve their quality of life and expand their possibilities of development.

Through this service-learning project, students simultaneously developed scientific knowledge, research capacity, skills linked to doing and entrepreneurship, and communication, and at the same time developed valuable training for active and supportive citizenship. They did not contribute to effectively solving a community problem, but the project also motivated them to stay in school, to value the role of knowledge,

² http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151121_congresso-educazione-cattolica.html

and to rediscover their original identity. It was no coincidence that those pupils who had been expelled from other schools managed to finish their secondary school at that school.

It is just one of many cases in which solidarity learning and service projects contribute simultaneously to achieving academic excellence and facilitating the social inclusion of students who in other educational models are marginalized or expelled, and ultimately to generate a truly integral and excellent education.

You know better than I do that if there is something that characterizes the charism of the Charism of St. Joseph of Calasanz, it is precisely Integral Education. At the same time, it seems to me that in the search to embody that ideal we are always having to find new didactics, new strategies to make our educational projects truly and authentically integral in the time and place that touches us.

In this process, I believe that the great question that we could ask ourselves today as Catholic schools is how we do to "go forth" and overcome those parallel lives that sometimes occur in traditional education, where on one side is learning and on the other, without any connection, solidarity activities. In the classroom, we do germination and outside of class -in extra-school hours, and extra-curricular- we can do the solidarity campaign. We collect, we distribute, and none of that has to do with what we learned in the classrooms. On the one hand, there are the curricular areas and on the other, there is catechesis and pastoral care, which as in the geometric definition of parallels are "lines that are never touched". I don't know if it happens in their schools, but when I was a teacher at a Catholic school in Buenos Aires, I learned that my students were going to missionary camp just because they missed the history test... Perhaps from my class, I could have helped them to understand the traditions and roots of the rural populations they were going to visit, to reflect on the cultural differences between their city and the province they would visit, but nobody thought of it, because of what happened in the pastoral "had nothing to do with the subjects".

When these parallel lives are generated, tensions almost inevitably occur between academic requirements and pastoral expectations. And sometimes it seems that pastoral activities are only for those who are "blessed" and want to come to the youth group or to sign up for the missionary group, while instead the disciplinary curricular contents are for everyone and go with a note and are therefore read by the majority as the only thing that really matters.

I believe that one of the great contributions that the pedagogy of service-learning offers to the Catholic school is precisely the possibility of articulating academic life and pastoral life, overcoming institutional fragmentations to generate integral and integrating projects.

To use the well-known expression of the UNESCO Delors document, service-learning projects allow us to articulate in a single project the "learning to learn" with the "learning to do, to be, and to live together", helping our students to learn to serve their brothers with all their potentialities.

