

Encuentro de Educadores



THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES POSED BY TODAY'S WORLD

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Even before the pandemic, education was diagnosed very negatively, it was said that it was out of date, anchored in the past, routine and memory, that it did not respond to the challenges and needs of its time, that "school kills creativity"¹ and "scams and steals the life of the new generations"², that we were in an "educational emergency"³... And thus, endless discrediting remarks and dangers that, far from worrying or mobilizing us, have made us ignore them, looking the other way; or, reaffirming as a defense that "this has always been done here ...", thereby legitimizing bad education.

In recent decades, many reports from the Church, from international or national organizations, from experts and researchers, have shown us the path of improvement to follow and that we have distorted or ignored. I could give multiple examples, a simple one is the Delors Report, published in 1996, in which educational improvement was based on the development of four pillars: learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together; of all of them, the one that has been most cultivated so far has been that of learning to learn, we have focused on it, on intellectual development, on the mind, on the brains of children and young people, almost completely forgetting the other three. In light of current needs and trends, reinforced after the pandemic, the diagnosis is that we should have focused with greater depth and insistence on learning to be and learning to live together. The current health crisis has underscored the crisis of values, of being; and the crisis of our relationships with others, of living together. Today virtuous people are needed, in whom respect, justice, peace, honesty, truth prevail ... and who are capable of relating to others from empathy, compassion, brotherhood. Even today, we should introduce two more pillars to those four of Delors: learning to serve and learning to care for the "common home."

Thus, in the years before the pandemic, education has failed. And with the pandemic, the lack of good and adequate education has aggravated the health crisis and has lengthened it. Recently, in October 2020, on the occasion of the relaunching of the Global Compact on Education, Pope Francis described the current situation as an "educational catastrophe". This should make us stop, in order to reflect and diagnose what we are doing wrong and have to change; what we are doing well and must promote and improve; and finally, what new things to introduce, what innovations are needed to educate effectively, comprehensively, changing lives and contexts, to really change education and through it change society.

¹ Ken Robinson (2014). Las escuelas matan la creatividad.

² Claudio Naranjo (2017). La educación del s. XXI. Congreso Futuro, Chile.

³ Pope Benedict XVI (2008). Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese and City of Rome on the Urgent Task of Educating Young People.

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We must review some reports issued in recent years, both from the Church and from UNESCO, especially: "*Gravissimum educationis*" (1966), "Educating today and tomorrow: a renewing passion" (2014), "Educating to fraternal humanism" (2017), " Rethinking education " (2015); "The Incheon Declaration (2015), "Futures of education" (2021) ... All of them tell us about renewing, transforming, reinventing, rethinking, reimagining education, before a world that is becoming dehumanized, more violent, corrupt and exclusive, neglecting relationships with people and the environment.

From this brief and quick diagnosis, we go deeper into the current challenges of education in general and of the Catholic school in particular, which I will present in a schematic way and with a certain hierarchy, from my point of view, going from more to less important, although everything is important.

However, we can face these challenges in the order that you think is most convenient and possible, depending on how you define your historical journey and your current reality.

Main current challenges:

1.- To diagnose and understand what is the real state of the education that you offer in your centers, classrooms, corridors, playgrounds ... If you do not feel the need for change, the pressing urgency to change, nothing will change. More than speculating, it is urgent to act. It is urgent to introduce new criteria and new goals and new practices, without fear, with confidence. We make as many or more mistakes doing what we have always done, than daring to do something new. No to inaction.

2.- To face change from a collaborative perspective, working together and in a network, involving all the agents of the educational community (Directors, teachers, families, children/young people, collaborators...), as well as considering the context. It involves a paradigm shift, moving from competing to collaborating. It is not easy, it takes time, we have to grow in collaborative capacity.

To do this, we have to collaborate internally (teachers, students, school - family, school – environment, ...) there are many fragmentations in the educational center, many snipers who divert or make the project ineffective. Thus, we find that Kindergarten teachers make decisions that do not have continuity in Primary, Secondary, etc.; or that, the language teacher goes in one direction and the mathematics teacher in the other; or there is no coordination with the families; or in class we teach some values and in school sports others are taught ...

Furthermore, collaboration requires new organizational structures, more horizontal, flexible, decentralized, based on trust and autonomy combined with interdependence.

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It also requires new leadership. It is essential and decisive to take a chance on new leadership. A collective, shared leadership, encrypted in two axes: in humility (capable of listening, sharing and learning from others, being aware of their limitations); and, in the development of the organization's people. Genius is collective. Count on everyone and make it easier for them to use all their talents. Work together. It is also important to ensure some continuity in leadership and ensure its adequate replacement, with well-trained leaders.

On the other hand, we must be able to collaborate with the other schools in the environment or beyond; and, with the social, cultural, sports, associative, artistic, ecological contexts, etc. where the center is located.

Some dangers that threaten us are: individualism, uniformity, fragmentation, homogenization ... We must not forget that the operating unit is the educational center and not the network. Sharing generates value, let's not prevent each school from contributing its own, homogenizing them.

3.- Teachers of the soul, committed to education as a common good, capable of “bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (EG, 273). Competent teachers, well trained and constantly up to date, who really love their students, who are affectionate and tender with them. To educate is to love, insists Pope Francis and many others. If in the traditional school the teachers were up and in front, and they determined what, how and when to teach, in an imposed and rote form. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the New School movement, the teacher changed his role, standing next to his students, accompanying them, facilitating their learning. Today, in the midst of the 21st century, the teacher and the adults are asked to take a step back⁴, to give more prominence and autonomy to the students, to listen to them, allowing them to develop their talents and interests. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by children and young people.

Teachers capable of welcoming everyone, especially the last, so that “no one is left behind”. As Lorenzo Milani told us at the Barbiana School: “the school is not a hospital for the healthy”. Increasingly, in the classroom we will have more plural, diverse, unique students.

They have to educate from within, awakening and developing the talents and qualities of each of the students. We come from educating from outside, demanding that they memorize the knowledge that we teach them, without developing their capacities, competencies and values.

We need teachers who are called, who exercise their profession with passion, joy and creativity to attend to each one according to their needs.

4.- To put the person at the center of his learning, facilitating his active participation and collaboration, empowering them to transform their lives and their contexts. Pope Francis tells us that to educate is to serve and that we educate for service. So we have to enable a transformative education that leads children from an early age and young people to

⁴ Papa Francisco (2019). Discurso a los jóvenes participantes en el Encuentro ¡YO PUEDO!

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commitment and social action.

Enable a comprehensive education, which educates not only the head (mind) but starts from the heart (emotions, feelings, motivations) and leads them to their hands and feet (to commitment and mobilization in favor of the most disadvantaged, being compassionate and committed with the others and in the care of the “common home”).

5.- **An outgoing school, capable of going to and reaching the inner and outer peripheries** of the school or educational center itself, reaching the weakest, most vulnerable and needy, avoiding inequalities and discarding ... among them, the girls are the most harassed or excluded from education in many contexts and countries. We must firmly opt for everyone's right to a good education.

We can meet this challenge alone or with others. **It is urgent to work intercongregationally** to reach the peripheries, most remote and needy. A good example: "teachers, schools without borders", like the movement of "doctors without borders", capable of mobilizing ourselves and caring for children who are victims of natural disasters; or to go to the excluded peripheries of the cities, where children are the first affected (street children...). We may not be able to go alone, but with others, yes.

Already in *Gravissimum educationis*, the Church was pushing us to cooperation⁵, and even challenged us to free teachers to help other schools, nearby or distant, lacking means, to help them in their development and improvement, to increase their quality and equity. More than 55 years have passed, what have we done? Today we talk about nomadic teachers of knowledge, who help other teachers, within the center or in other centers, to train and innovate to better respond to changing needs and new challenges.

6.- In this scenario, **the Global Education Pact is presented to us as an opportunity and a commitment** to change education and respond to the needs and challenges of today and tomorrow, working together, to change society, to make it more human, fraternal, supportive and sustainable. It is important that we join, adhere to this global alliance. Changing education is a matter for and involves all. We have to work together, all the educational agents within the Educational Community of each educational center, but also work together with the other educational and social centers and agents of the context (neighborhood or city) and from there collaborate with the nation and the world, weaving together a network of local and global change... Without the others, without everyone, change will not be possible. It is of little use for an isolated school to speak of recycling or fraternity if the surrounding schools do not recycle, nor cultivate fraternity among everyone.

7.- **Generate a referential Christian community, which may become the heart of the school.** Before it was the religious community, now it is a community of religious and lay people who live their baptism and vocation, sharing the same charism, in which they have to be formed and evolve together, as in the origins of the Institution.

⁵ Vaticano II (1965). *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 12

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8.- **Innovate and experiment**, not because of fashion, but out of commitment to better serve and educate. This puts us in constant tension, to improve ourselves day by day, as if we had not reached the goal. We can and must always improve continuously.

9.- **A school connected to life**. Able to go to life, touch it, understand its needs, problems and hopes. A school capable of bringing life to the school. Let's not turn our backs on life, no to a decontextualized and impersonal education.

10.- **Changing education implies** being able to modify and enrich the curriculum; change or introduce new goals, more centered on the values of the gospel and on the new humanity that we have to generate together; modify the roles of teachers and students, giving more prominence to children/youth; introduce more active, participatory and collaborative methodologies that lead to commitment and social transformation, promoting more interdisciplinary learning.

School is not only a place of learning, it is also a place of relationship in which students learn to live together, to take responsibility for each other, to be in solidarity so that no one is left behind, being welcoming and caring for their peers and the context in which they inhabit. The school space (classrooms, corridors, patios, entrances ...) is presented to us as the "third educator"⁶, a place for meeting, learning and relationship, a place to experience and live values, in which they work together, in a charitable environment. Today there is talk of hyperaulas/hyperclassroom, in which several teachers educate together. For this reason, we must redesign schools to focus learning on the student and to be places of meeting and life.

By way of conclusion or final reflection ...

The challenges for the Catholic school today and in the future are immense. Allow me to end with the words of Pope Francis, who addressed the teachers and students of the Jesuit schools of Italy and Albania in June 2013, he encourages us today to renew educational passion with great courage: *"Do not be disheartened in the face of the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of man who always retains the Creator's hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate. Educators [...] pass on knowledge and values with their words; but their words will have an incisive effect on children and young people if they are accompanied by their witness, their consistent way of life. Without consistency it is impossible to educate!"*

⁶ Loris Malaguzzi, Escuelas Reggio Emilia.

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