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## LA SALLE FOUNDATION FOR NATURAL SCIENCE (FLASA)

In answer to a request from the editorial committee of "LASALLIANA" I shall try to give an account of how the La Salle Foundation for Natural Science achieved, in practice, the educational aims proposed at its inception.

FLASA has just completed twenty-five years of uninterrupted work in the service of important sectors of the population of Venezuela which were emarginated and discriminated against both socially and economically. Starting from zero twenty-five years ago, the Foundation today has four centres of activity. Three of these are situated in different parts of the country, at Margarita on the coast, at Guyana and at Cojedes Boconó in regions with varying natural resources to be exploited. The fourth centre is in Caracas. It is the headquarters of the Foundation and houses the central administration as well as the scientific staff who direct the work of the other centres.

The Foundation had its origin in the La Salle Association for Natural Science, an institution which has been in existence for forty-four years and which was due to the efforts of high school students who channelled their scientific curiosity into the study of the fauna and flora of Venezuela. Today the Association continues to render useful service to the country and its young people. It was during the course of their researches that these students became aware of the backwardness of many communities and the poor economic conditions in which they lived. This was due to the obsolete means of exploitation of natural resources in use. They were incapable of competing on the market with those who applied industrial methods to production and benefited from advanced technology.

The proposal to create the La Salle Foundation to improve conditions in these communities delighted Brother Ginès, its Founder and first President, and his zealous and faithful collaborators, for the action of FLASA would be inspired by the humanistic and philanthropic ideals of the Natural Science Association. He was all the more pleased as this orientation towards the poor and the disinherited was in line with the thinking of Saint John Baptist de La Salle who found similar conditions in the France in which he exercised his apostolate.

All its accumulated knowledge and acquired experience was to be put at the disposal of the communities which were gradually to come within the sphere of influence of FLASA. Education would, unquestionably, be the best means of attaining these objectives. For that reason we set about establishing technical high schools leading eventually to the setting up of University Institutes of Technology such as the Institute of Navigation and Fisheries at Margarita, of Industrial Technology at Guyana and of Agriculture and Stock Raising at Cojedes.

Today the student population of FLASA's institutions numbers 4,000.

In the statutes of the Foundation (here we must underline the general principles which inspire the philosophy underlying the ideals of FLASA) it is specified that this Institution "conceives education as a socialising process which respects individual character and which is achieved by assimilation of ancestral traditions together with a scientific and academic formation". This process is aimed at a better all-round development of persons prepared to respond to the needs of their social milieu and to share in its democratic way of life.

In accordance with this concept fourteen Educative Principles were drawn up as a guide to the daily realization, in each of the centres, of the ideals of the Foundation. Their formulation was the outcome of the educational experience gained by the directors of FLASA who wish to see them adopted not only in their own centres but also in the national education system.

These principles which faithfully reflect the philosophy of our Founder were, together with the practical means of applying them, laid down by the Administration in a document entitled "FLASA and Education". They are as follows:

1. Education is an evolutionary process which requires continual study and revision.
2. Participation of all members (teachers, administrators and workers) in the planning of school life, in the development of the institution and the evaluation of results so that all may understand that it is a collective undertaking based on continuing mutual co-operation.
3. Recognition of the fact that each individual has a specific personality with distinct physical and psychological characteristics which must be taken into account so that the pupil's growth and social formation (in the family and in society) make take place in accordance with the ideals of human solidarity.
4. Acknowledgement of the adolescent's need for and right to guidance in taking responsible decisions and in finding solutions to problems arising from social and professional relationships.
5. Strengthening of national identity by means of an education integrated into the oral tradition of the community whether local, national or Latin-American. Revitalization of craft training in order to rediscover the traditions of the people and to make a positive evaluation of the cultural heritage, created by earlier generations, which is at the base of these traditions.
6. Concept of school life in its totality as a series of experiences and effective stimuli that help students grow to understand the problems of social life, the standards and principles on which it is based and the responsibilities and duties which it implies.
7. Provision of experiences, activities and basic knowledge so as to discover and meet the interests and needs of students, to promote the full development of their personalities, to train them to think and to give them an opportunity to acquire an aptitude for action and a resolute attitude in the face of their natural and historic disadvantages.
8. Development of the abilities and skills of the students through activities and practical knowledge so that they may be able to use them effectively in the world of work thus making their training in trades a preparation for future productive work. In this way we hope to forge a link between the training we give the students and production in the local community.
9. Activities, experience and knowledge provided for the student should be chosen and adapted to suit his biological, intellectual and emotional development on the one hand, and on the other, account should be taken of the requirements of a nation striving for its own transformation and development.
10. Techniques adopted in carrying out a scholastic programme should be in accordance with the modern concept of education which stresses the complete development of the pupil's personality.
11. Scientific evaluation of the results of the educative process requires not only an assessment of the degree of knowledge but also of the forms of individual and social conduct that the student acquires and adopts during his period at school.
12. The modern concept of school discipline is that of a dynamic process of harmonious development of the personality of the student, of a conscious, considered and voluntary acceptance of a system of values. This presupposes an adequate understanding of social behaviour, emotional balance, acceptable habits and desirable attitudes.
13. The collaboration of parents, friends and public representatives, when well organized, can be an excellent means of finding solutions to the educational, socio-economic and health problems of the students, can enrich the life of the Institute and spread its influence to other sectors of society and can continue and make known its educative work.
14. The overall formation of the student should help him to find his place in the community and to identify with it. It should stimulate him to continue his education beyond the period of formal schooling and fit him to play a part in the development of the La Salle Foundation in his own locality and in the country at large. The teaching staff of the Institutes should also share in this process of continuing education.

The educational planning by which the Foundation puts its philosophy into practice has been so efficient that the success of its system of teaching and training is an established fact and the best guarantee of the validity of a method inspired by the humanist and Christian ideals of its authors.

Yesterday's students, today taking an active part in the productive life of their communities are the best proof that the La Salle Foundation has achieved its educational objectives and is ready to put itself at the service of Venezuela.

**Bro. GINÉS, President**

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