

A PEDAGOGY BASED ON PARTICIPATION

As man goes along unveiling the secrets of Mother Nature and taking charge of her resources, he discovers the necessity for cooperating with his fellow man in order to speed up and intensify the fulfillment of these objectives.

Communication, dialogue, participation and exchange of views—these are all activities that have been coming to the fore in all organizations and social groupings. The multinationals, diverse international scientific projects, political bedfellows, and the Common Market are but a few everyday reminders of this phenomenon.

The school, in its several levels, must prepare its students for a critical apprenticeship and a future exercise of this active participation. For this, there is nothing more effective than the application of practical exercises with the students. Such has been the method of the Lasallian school from its very beginnings. A cursory perusal of the *Conduct of Schools* amply attests to this. Consequently, I will omit the pages that deal with the "Officers" of De La Salle's school; I will limit myself to refer to passages which are less known but none the less significant.

From the moment the Lasallian school opened its doors at seven-thirty in the morning until they were closed again at four-thirty in the afternoon, the cooperation and participation of the pupils in their scholastic activities, both personal and group-oriented, were active and constant.

The students were accustomed to enter the class a half hour before the teacher. The minute regulations that governed this waiting period didn't leave a moment to chance that disorder or lack of discipline would take place; rather, as small boys are mightily tempted to act up, the *Conduct* foresees such an eventuality in this fashion:

"The first master and the inspector of the schools will name one of the more sensible pupils to take note of the students that cause noise while they are arriving. His job is to simply write this down without saying anything. He will afterwards pass this information on to the teacher in such a way that the other students do not realize it". (Cf. 1st part, Chap. 1, art. 1, page 8).

The most effective way (to avoid) disorder in the schoolroom is to restrain curiosity; for that end, the students reviewed their lessons before class; and in order that the little ones would not waste time:

"The teacher should designate two students from an upper level to teach them the letters and syllables". (Ibid., page 9).

Now classes have begun. After the prayer comes the reading period. During this class the pupils help the teacher constantly. If one of the little boys does not know a letter:

"The teacher will ask another child who does know it". (Cf. 1st part, Chap. III, art. 2, section 2, page 31).

When the student is breaking words down into syllables and mispronounces a syllable, if he is not able to correct himself:

"The teacher will point to another so that he may correct it". (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 1, art. 1, page 119).

A bit further on the *Conduct* indicates just what the limits of this help should be:

"The teacher will only intervene when there is no pupil that is able to help his companions". (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 1, art. 3, page 124).

During breakfast and the morning snack the students would review their lessons and the catechism. As the teacher had to attend the general order of the class:

"He would name a boy to help him who, for this occasion, at least, would be the inspector". (Cf. 1st part, Cap. II, art. 2, page 15).

If someone had to fulfill a punishment for being absent without permission:

"A companion would be named to proctor his reading". (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 6, art. 4, page 198).

Even more than the reading class, the maths lesson lent itself to the practice of mutual assistance among the pupils. In a case in which a student would make a mistake in doing one of the functions:

"The teacher would indicate to another boy of the same grade or of an upper level to do the correction. And only when there is no child that is able to do so will the teacher himself make the correction". (Cf. 1st part, Chap. 5, page 74).

What teacher hasn't had to pick up, just about every day, objects that can distract the attention of the class to the matter at hand? The *Conduct* indicates that, in these cases:

"There be a student in charge of picking them up, putting them away and, at the end of the class, will give them to the teacher who will then return them to their owners or do with them what seems most proper". (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 1, art. 2, page 121).

In spite of the fact that the *Conduct* recommends that teachers punish their pupils very little (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 5, art. 2, page 153) it does recognize that there are times when they must do so, but not

during the catechism explanation, prayers or Holy Mass. At these moments:

“a student will be encharged with taking careful note of those that deserve a punishment, that will be given to them at another time”. (Cf. and part, Cap. 5, art. 9, section 1, page 178).

There were cases, of course, in which the teacher should have to apply a punishment at a later time and would possibly forget it. To avoid that situation:

“The teacher would name one or more of the pupils to observe that a punishment would be carried out, and if such were not the case, to remind the teacher”. (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 5, art. 9, section 1, page 178).

While assigning them to places in class the teacher will take into account the help that some will be able to lend to their companions.

“He will place the newly-arrived at the side of those that fulfill their duties very well, so that they will learn by their example”. (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 5, art. 6, section 4, page 169, and 3rd part, Chap. 3, art. 1, page 250).

When a child would begin his ABC's...

“So that he can learn to follow in the book while the others are reading, the teacher will assign a companion to teach him how to follow. He will give him this help for as many days as are necessary”. (Cf. 1st part, Chap. 3, art. 3, page 35).

The teacher will adopt this same strategy on assigning places for the writing class:

“As far as possible he will place the students who are being promoted a grade at the side of those who are able to make elegant flourishes so that they can learn from them”. (Cf. 3rd part, Chap. 3, art. 2, page 253).

The participation that the *Conduct* proposes to the students borders on the heroic when it suggests that they consciously and freely not be promoted a grade so that:

“they may contribute to the progress of their companions and the good order of the class by remaining in the grade which they have completed”. (Cf. 1st part, Chap. 3, art. 1, section 3, page 27).

So the class day ends; however, even outside of class the *Conduct* demands the collaboration of the students in the task of education. The attentive and discreet vigilance of the teachers couldn't reach to all the streets and squares that the students would cross on their way from school to home. For that reason:

“Since the teachers could not observe what would go on in the streets other than the one in which the school stands, the director or the inspector, in agreement with the other Brothers, would assign certain boys to take careful note of the happenings in other streets, especially the ones in which most of the students lived, and to report back the information that he would have jotted down”. (Cf. 2nd part, Chap. 11, art. 3, page 114).

Conclusion

The above lines are but a pale reflection of the *participation* that the students contributed in the De La Salle school, for we have omitted to mention the most original and detailed part—the OFFICERS who had such *outstanding responsibility* for the good government of the classroom. What is treated here is a mere completion to all that has been already written about in this regard.

If we wish to answer today to the charism of La Salle and his first Brothers we must look for ways to bring about the active and intense participation and cooperation of our students in the good management of our centers with a view to their preparation for the future.

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