

VALUES EDUCATION
(2/2)

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Values in education.

To begin with, we are not neutral nor is the school neutral. Even a pretended neutrality is actually taking a position (4). This non-neutrality is as true for the school and its program guidelines as it is for the teacher himself. There has always been a cosmic vision of man, woman, the world and history.

In our society, in our Venezuela, which seems to be without direction, without a national program, where we see leaders who are continually undecided, on what should we place the emphasis, what contribution can we make in our daily contact with the young men and women with whom we relate? I am basing myself within the Venezuelan context and within the education program of AVEC (Venezuelan Association of Catholic Schools) that says: *“To develop an integrated education as a dynamic element of change, founded on Gospel values that promote justice, work, participation, solidarity and organization, in order to respond to the needs of the person, to the reality of Venezuela and to the life of the Church”* (5).

Without going into the definition of values we can point out that values can grow and they can be the goal of education. We believe that values are what give meaning to the human being in terms of all that lead the person to full personal, community and transcendental realization. Growth in order to become **good Christians and honest citizens** (Don Bosco).

I am going to refer to some values that I consider to be of interest to our reflection. You, as educators, can discuss later on if they are important or relevant today in your own educational practice. Some of these were presented at the Bangkok Conference (1982) as values for the year 2000 (6), others are of my own doing. Certainly the list is not exhaustive nor are the values presented in any order of priority.

Respect for others.

Not as an individual of a species but as a person. An other who **like yourself** can communicate and ask questions.

An other, not as a rival, but as someone who complements. An other, not who is a competitive subject but a cooperative one. Respect is much more than merely putting up with another; it has more to do with valuing, with discovering without forcing, with proposing rather than imposing.

It involves the other's real and varied cooperation. If one educates from the point of view of the other then aspects like listening, dialogue and the common search will begin to have more meaning and centrality in the educational relationship. (7)

Willingness to help.

I have met seen a lot of resistance to this suggestion. There is an unpleasantness with regard to wholesome dignity that violently rejects any reference to servility or to something that we have abolished many, many years ago in our country, the country of liberators, and it is slavery.

I am referring to a value that is very much rooted in the Gospel: *“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”* (Luke 22:25; Matthew 20:28).

In order to be of service, one has to be willing to serve and to be fit to serve. There are those who are very willing but they have no preparation, they have never performed a service for others that was worth the trouble. This value presupposes a radical attitude in the encounter with others and with society: What contribution can I make? What can I do to make the world a better place? I, too, am responsible for the world and I want to offer my small part of the solution.

– *“Am I my brother's keeper?”* (Genesis 4:9).

– Yes, otherwise you probably are his assassin.

The fundamental attitude one must have with regard to the other can be summed up in the question: What can I contribute to the needs of others? and not: How can I take advantage of their weaknesses?

Work

Many say that this is not a value but a punishment! And if it really is true that no one wants to work, the reality is that only with work and creation that men and women daily carry out are we going to achieve better life conditions. All work is worthy of being done and different jobs are complementary and interdependent.

This is a radical criticism of the unjust evaluation of some jobs as compared to others.

Creativity

Faced with attitudes that are uniform and of the masses stimulating thoughts and actions that are divergent is very unusual. This action may even surprise or disturb us.

“Either we invent or we are mistaken” said Simón Rodríguez.

It is important to show appreciation for the variety of roads or responses to arrive at a result or solve a problem. It is good to feel like a creator of something new as a condition of advancing history and science.

Coexistence

Our young people are rooted in coexistence which is proper to our culture. On the other hand, there are alarms that invite individualism and forgetting about

one's neighbors in order to be on the winning side.

Fostering the encounter, coexistence, relationships among our young people is to afford them the opportunity to get to know each other and to meet each other as members of a nation. In short, God does not offer us salvation as individuals but God does want to form a people.

In place of competition, it is necessary to foster responsible solidarity without neglecting affective goals in each academic subject. Fostering personal encounters where there is knowledge and mutual appreciation and where the heart may be taught and guided by all the creative force of love. There needs to be space for growth including dependence on the mother and the unique gifts of couples and the broadening of their emotions.

Austerity

This message is repeated over and over and it levels the playing field between the rich and the poor: *"It is necessary to have it all, and the very latest model; otherwise, you are a nobody"*. The dilemma is not in "Having or being" but in the common belief that "the more I have, the more I am".

While a few continue to devour the planet - and then subsequently throw away the leftovers - the rest are satisfied with only seeing it in the store windows and in the omnipresent store window of our television sets.

Those who take on austerity will learn to live with many fewer material good than the rest. The domination of the emotions, St. Ignatius said, is necessary to know how to live and to enjoy what one has. To appreciate the beauty of simple, free and everyday things. The classroom can stimulate this reconciliation with the simple, with the utilization of what is still useable and with the repair of what is able to be repaired.

All of this brings us to the four ecological "R's" facing the environmental consumer contamination:

- R, as in reuse
- R, as in reduce
- R, as in repair and
- R, as in recycle

Personally I am astounded as to how people, institutions and I myself use a very simple resource such as paper. Paper is cellulose and, in short, uses trees and oxygen of our planet.

Interiority

Education need to address the issue of silence of finding oneself within oneself. It is appropriate to offer space for the expression of the interior world of each student. This is a moment of anthropological methodology that deals with discovering and deepening great motivations, interests, goals and programs.

Places are needed where there is an opportunity for interiorization, prayer, personal interview. What we could do so that each student could discover his/her own fundamental life option would be beneficial and it would enable the student to meet the challenges proposed by the Gospel in the very concrete situation of the student's own people in their attitudes and behavior in accord with the Gospel.

The agents of values education

Each person is responsible for his/her own education and we all are responsible for our own education. We adult educators should review the coherence between the values that each one of us values and those that are being proposed as beneficial. We should strive to be at peace with ourselves. In short, if we do not do what we say we will end up saying in accord with our own behavior.

The child and the adolescent have a dream of growing up. And so there is the importance of models. Not as someone to copy but as points of reference and significant ones at that. It is necessary to appeal to responsibility and the good fortune of assuming the responsibility for one's own growth as a person and a child of God.

The family participates, even unknowingly, in values education. The family educates in the home and it should become involved in educational areas that influence the children (8). In a special way the Christian family should become involved to assure that among the values that are offered to their children are the following:

- a just freedom concerning material goods,
- common sociability and participation,
- clear and sensitive sex education (9).

The school as a physical and relational structure is an agent for education. It is necessary to discover what the real values are and what is the hidden curriculum at the center. We see many schools that are spaces for seclusion if not repression instead of being areas for growth and relationship.

Let us convert our schools into places for salvation. We trust in God's help and the example of Jesus of Nazareth who also was concerned with and fought against institutions.

Today this is our task.

Let's get to work! •

(4) Fourth General Congress of the Latin American Episcopate, 1992, *Documento de Santo Domingo*, number 265.

(5) AVEC, *Proyecto Educativo AVEC*, 1986, p. 56.

(6) Quoted in AAVV. *Ser educador hoy.*, page 19. Youth ministry handbook, number 6. CCS publishers, 1986, Madrid.

(7) Nanni, Antonio, *Partir del otro para cambiar la educación*. Education today, number 117, 1994, pp. 9-18.

(8) John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, Familiaris Consortium*, 1981, number 37.

(9) Huidobro, Faustino, *Hacia un nuevo modo de presencia de los padres de familia en la escuela*. Education today, number 17, CIEC (Bogotá), 1994, pp. 31-42.

(Translator's note: The idea here, which does not necessarily translate well into English, is that "values education" needs to be taught not just intellectually but from one's own personal experience).