

The principles of the Christian school (2/3)

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2. Associated for the service of young people

1. From the very beginning...

When De La Salle and the Brothers came to see the Christian school as the “work of God”, they realised also that education calls for team work. The spirit of association and the ways of implementing it came into existence during this same period (1691-1694).

Even if association is expressed in the form of a vow, it cannot be reduced to a simple formula. It encompasses a whole dynamic structure of concertation which is expressed quite naturally:

- through the formation of educational communities
- through availability
- including the willingness to move
- on the part of its members
- by working as part of a network.

One of the first consequences of this spirit of association was the “Conduct of the Christian Schools”, not only the text, of course, but also the reality of concerted and shared work.

2. And still today...

It is easy to imagine the positive effects of work in association, even if it is not possible actually to measure them. What is involved, in fact, is a dynamic process constantly at work to stimulate:

- the perception of the real everyday needs of young people
- the creation of responses suited to their needs and expectations
- the mutual enrichment of the adults by the sharing of ideas, work and results.

As the number of its members has increased, it has become increasingly difficult for the whole Lasallian network to function “together and by association”. And yet, the history of the Institute of the Brothers over the last 300 years and the present-day sharing with lay

people can be seen as the result of the dynamic force of the spirit of association. This force can be seen in particular in the creation and diffusion of forms of education adapted to needs of time and place.

3. Working in association

A Lasallian school is naturally very careful to ensure that it runs and works according to a spirit of association. This spirit should be clearly visible in the way the educational community lives and works as, for example:

- in personal relations, in the behaviour of individuals singly and together,
- in structures based on concertation and sharing,
- in the possibility of making suggestions, taking initiatives, being innovative,
- in the normal way in which decisions are taken and implemented,
- in the way in which power and responsibility are exercised,
- in the degree of openness towards the the outside world, the local area, society, the Church,
- in the way in which the idea of practising interdependence within the Lasallian network is perceived.

4. Providing a better service for young people

Association, in the Lasallian sense, does not exist for its own benefit, is not directed inwards for the benefit of a group of adults, although this benefit exists, but serves rather as a means of providing a better service for young people:

- on the educational, professional and religious level,
- by promoting their personal growth, development and their happiness
- by preparing them also for their life in society, in their profession and in the Church.

5. A school that never stops planning

In touch with contemporary society and the changes that are taking place, the Lasallian school never stops planning. It looks to the future and allows itself to be challenged by what happens in life around it, in society and in the Church. Given this, it would be inconsistent not to have a plan, inspired by the great ideas of De La Salle, but also tailored to the practical needs of the establishment.

A written plan is useful as a reference for the whole of the educational community. It would be inconsistent with the spirit of association if it served simply to bring life to a standstill, to harden its arteries and make its structures too rigid.

The plan has to bear in mind the following points, it would seem, if it is to serve as a moving force:

- it has to show concern for young people. This is ab-

solutely essential

- it has to be drawn up by everybody order to arrive at a sufficiently broad consensus of the educational community
- adequate follow-up structures need to be set up to ensure its implementation
- its implementation needs to be assessed in detail
- it needs to be revised periodically so that it can be improved and brought up to date
- it needs to be compared with those of other establishments in the network. It could be published and discussed with others.

6. A school centred on young people

In many countries nowadays, administrative restrictions do not encourage a form of education that is centred on young people. They normally impose:

- organisational norms in establishments
- contents of curricula
- internal regulations for the running of schools, which can be restrictive
- excessively rigid definition of the terms of service of teachers
- inspections, examinations, qualifications which are not always suitable.

There is a danger that institutional or administrative concerns will oust concern for the individual. The Lasallian school, on the contrary, seeks to envisage and organise school in terms of the needs of young people. It is clear that this has an immediate effect on the various partners of the school community: parents, teachers, educators, administrators. Everybody, in his own place and in his own role, is first and foremost at the service of the young people. This is an inescapable priority.

7. The implications of this priority

We can pick out three important ones:

- (a) People must be really made welcome in the establishment. Young people, first of all, without discrimination. A school that is accessible to all. This welcome must be extended also to the adults belonging to the school community, in particular, to parents and teachers.
- (b) No one should be excluded. By flexibility in organisation, in the courses offered, the methods used, the establishment should make itself capable of:
 - integrating everybody in the school community
 - inviting everybody to accept actively the school plan
 - associating partners in a concrete way in the running of the whole school
 - avoiding the danger of marginalising or excluding.

- (c) Everyone should be valued, adults and young persons, by being recognised, accepted, helped and accompanied in their personal development
 - by promoting friendly relations
 - by appreciating each person's gifts
 - and especially by providing courses that enrich, exploit potential, and increase skills and qualifications.

This centring on individuals

- (a) calls for a constant effort to match intentions and reality, aims and means, theory and practice.
- (b) implies preventive pedagogy

8. Preventive pedagogy

This is a natural consequence of making centring on young people a priority. An analysis of the needs of young people and of their development leads the educational community to devise ways of responding to them.

(a) Ever since the beginning of the Institute, the type of school described in the "Conduct" has proved capable of responding to the economic, cultural, professional, affective, social and spiritual needs of the pupils. The team of teachers was trained to respond to each of these needs by its organisation, the courses it offered and the methods it used, and by its personalised relations with the pupils. If this did not work, the teachers were invited to reflect and see if their attitudes, behaviour or methods were not the reason for this lack of success.

(b) It is still possible nowadays to envisage a school FOR young people, to set up structures, to apportion tasks and responsibilities first and foremost for the benefit of the clientele. This attitude makes it possible to stress prevention to the detriment of correction or remedial action. This is yet another way of demonstrating that the school is there for the young people.

(c) Prevention can take the form of looking ahead, of being vigilant so as to foresee needs or new situations. Instead of continuing to give courses and using teaching methods that are a prisoner of the past or of educational conservatism, members of the educational community should try to anticipate social, technological, scientific and religious changes. They should try to find practical ways of setting free the forces of the imagination and of creativity. Some members of the educational community, working closely with those in charge, could play a particularly important role in ensuring that this process of prevention takes place.

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