

Cahiers of Spirituality - n° 24

SSCC Education



Congregation of the Sacred Hearts

**SSCC EDUCATION -
some key elements**

**Cahiers of Spirituality - n° 24
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Cover photo: Non formal education in Bhubaneswar (India).

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INTRODUCTION

From the outset to the present day, education has been very much part of the mission of the Congregation. At the 2018 General Chapter of the brothers, in the document *Pastoral and Missionary Conversion: New Roads to Emmaus*, we were given some clues in the section Schools and Education:

1. *That our schools and educational activities be true platforms of evangelization, both in secularized societies and in those where education, realistically speaking, is seen to be the only way out of poverty.*
2. *That the pastoral and missionary conversion in SSCC education places the person (students, teachers, families...) at the center of their processes and accompanies them in the academic, pastoral and personal/social development.*
3. *That the SSCC educational offer integrate the demands of the pedagogical area (multiple intelligences, neuroscience, cooperative work, interdisciplinary projects, the adequate use of technology, respect for nature, multilingualism...) with the demands of the pastoral area (the personal encounter with Jesus, the ecclesial experience, the SSCC charism and the vocational response).*

4. *That forms of collaboration be established between the communities, brothers and sisters of the Congregation to facilitate the implementation of this pastoral and missionary conversion in our schools.*

For its part, the 2018 General Chapter of the Sisters also offered some orientations in the section entitled Educational Ministry:

1. *Develop congregational guidelines for the task of education based on our charism, our educational tradition, and the reality of education today; knowing that the Educational Projects of our schools assure an integral, vocational and evangelizing formation.*
2. *Ensure formation in SSCC spirituality for the laity of our educational centres, who collaborate with us in our mission in education.*
3. *Form the hearts of children and young people in educational centres, so that they are sensitive to human suffering.*
4. *Sensitize all the members of the educational communities to the current problems of poverty and injustice, migration, discrimination against women and gender-based violence, global warming... and propose specific projects and actions, as a contribution to the humanization of society.*

5. *Develop activities which promote human development and informal education, open to the needs around us, welcoming cultural and religious diversity.*
6. *Integrate Youth and Vocation Ministry into pastoral work in schools.*

With these chapter orientations as a background, the Commission for Spiritual and Historical Patrimony approaches this important topic from different perspectives ranging from spiritual, pastoral and pedagogical, and including shared experiences of formal and non-formal education, all the time trying to approach education from a synodal perspective. We thank the sisters, brothers and lay people who have contributed to this work which we hope will help and inspire us in our SSCC educational work.

THE EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE SACRED HEARTS CHARISM

Alberto Toutin ssc
Superior General

An important ministry in our congregation is that of education starting with early childhood and finishing with higher education. This ministry takes place through our own schools or through a network of schools in collaboration with the State. This educational vocation has been present from the very beginning of our congregation. Already in the time of our founders, attentive to the needs of the Church and of the society of their time, the communities welcomed children with scarce resources, to provide them with the human and Christian formation that would allow them to develop their potential, putting it at the service of society.

In the variety of countries and contexts in which we find ourselves, we can ask ourselves about the distinctive mark of our educational works. In other words, how does the spirituality of the Sacred Hearts permeate our schools and the communities that comprise them? To answer this question I propose some criteria, which can be enriched with others that you may consider as more relevant or urgent in your reality.

I. SOME ASSUMPTIONS

1. A spirituality centred on the heart: a spirituality centred on one's personal centre, where choices are forged, things are understood from within, sensitivity is refined and trust is placed in other people and in God. That said, the heart is not reached directly - for even the "arrows" or words that go straight to the heart must first pass through the body, the senses, the emotions and intelligence. An educational task centred on the heart is ambitious as it aims to form the unique core of each person. And at the same time, it is a patient task, like refining a rough diamond, which must first be studied well, then polished and cleaned of all debris and impurities to reveal the different facets of the precious crystal.
2. A spirituality centred on the hearts of Jesus and Mary: This is about entering into the sensibility, attitudes, options and tasks exercised by Jesus and Mary. To turn our gaze towards them is not only to have them as external models, but to have companions along the way, and an interior presence, in the sense of "interior masters" whom we discover more and more each day and with whom we enter into a dialogue of the heart.
3. Education is a formative relationship in which many actors are involved, not least teachers, parents and pupils. But there are many others actors: administrative and service personnel, the relationship with the neighbourhood or the

city where the schools are located. Education is a task in which many people converge and each one has a role to play. It is important to ask oneself what one's role is and what is one's contribution to the educational adventure. The answers change as the actors grow together in the educational relationship. In a social context where there is a lot of mobility in space and time, acceleration and whereby society can lose its materiality, its corporeality, the school can offer itself as a space where lasting bonds can be forged that enable all the actors involved to generate ties that enrich and transform the social fabric.

II. SOME FEATURES OF THE SPIRITUALITY AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In the following, I highlight some features of the spirituality of the Sacred Hearts and I offer some "groundings" for the educational task.

1. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary

The spirituality of our congregation is born at the foot of the Cross. There Jesus is crucified, bringing to an end his way of self-giving and loving to the extreme. This is symbolised in the pivotal words put in his mouth: "My God, why have you forsaken me? (Mk 14:34) "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Also, his words to Mary and the beloved

Disciple: "Woman, behold your son" and "Behold your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). Finally: "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit" (Lk 23:46). (Lk 23,46). Here then are the fundamental coordinates of Jesus: his sometimes agonising but always living relationship with God his Father, his radical freedom to give his life where violence rages against him, his openness to forgive those who mock or execute him, and his trusting surrender to the Father in the chiaroscuro of faith. This is all summed up and symbolised in the pierced heart that loves to the end, even to making itself vulnerable to the violence that nestles in our hearts, exposing itself to rejection.

For her part, Mary, who stands at the foot of the Cross, also consents to Jesus' self-giving. And where it seemed that her motherhood was coming to an end, Jesus asks her to welcome the beloved disciple as her son. Mary, disciple of her Son Jesus, collaborates in the formation of new disciples. She does this by accompanying Jesus to the end and by welcoming, as a mother, the other disciples as her children. In this way Mary also consummates her childbirth of Jesus on the cross by letting Him go and handing Him over to the world. And at the hour of his delivery, Jesus renews in Mary his first vocation, which is to be a disciple, that is to say, she listens to the Word and by accepting it and "pondering" it in her heart, this word becomes flesh in her womb, in her life.

How do we approach the Heart of Jesus and Mary?

One way is by retracing the way of Jesus and how He approaches the heart of every man and woman, and the way of Mary who formed the heart of her Son, Jesus. He entered into the various stages of human maturation and appealed to all the resources of human intelligence. This means understanding human learning as something long-term. Education is not a "fast food" service but a "slow cooker".

In a special way we count on the stories of Jesus in the Gospels. They allow us to come closer to Jesus on the way. We can follow in his footsteps. In his encounters, in his words and gestures, we recognise his sensitivity, his way of looking at the world and of welcoming people. We discover his options that move him to act. We also perceive the impact he has on the people who meet him. We are struck by the close way in which he refers to God as his Father, and this is evident in his preaching - the parable of the Merciful Father - in his prayer - "Our Father" - and in his actions, especially with sinners and the marginalised. The joy that God experiences for a sinner who converts is the same joy that Jesus experiences for those who accept his word, as in the house of Zacchaeus. In the parable of the prodigal son, the mercy that moves the Father at the sight of the son returning home is the same mercy that moves Jesus at the sight of the hungry and shepherd-less crowds.

Mary lets go of her son and accompanies him, not always understanding his choices. In fact, some of Jesus' relatives think he has lost his mind - Jesus must not always have been an easy son for his mother! Yet she follows him as a disciple, among the disciples. She is like us, she is one of us who follows Jesus.

And both Jesus and Mary find God in what they see. They allow themselves to be affected by the reality in which they find themselves. They do not live a piety of closed eyes or of reclusion, but one in which eyes remain open and which is rich in encounters, even in the midst of disagreements. It is in all of this that they discover what God wants of them.

Mary is invited to the wedding feast at Cana and realises that the wine is missing. With the authority that only mothers have over their children, she says to Jesus: "They have no wine" (Jn 2,3) and to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 3,5).

As regards Jesus, he rejoices because he can see that it is the simple and the poor who receive his message about the closeness of God the Father. It is Jesus who helps those who follow him to see who their Father is through his preaching in parables and by inviting them to look at nature: a God who makes the sun rise on the good and the bad, who reveals himself by allowing the wheat and the weeds to coexist. And he involves them in his stories by asking them: "What do you think?" or by exhorting them "Look", "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear" And according to Jesus' pedagogy, one only learns what it is that he

wants to say when his listeners puts what he says into practice. "Go and do likewise".

A privileged way to enter into the heart of Jesus and the heart of Mary is through the Gospels. Reaching out to us as we journey, it is a matter of reading them as a letter of love addressed to us and as a map to find Jesus. It is about looking at Jesus and Mary with a heart open to welcoming their invitations and calls to follow Him on our paths today. All that we live is to be illuminated by attentive listening with the heart to the Gospels. It is patient listening and watching that allow us to enter little by little into the hearts of Jesus and Mary, so that they may love and rejoice through our hearts.

Would it not be interesting if every pupil in our schools from their first day received a book of the Gospels to accompany him or her throughout his or her school life. Is it possible for the Gospels to occupy a more important place in the Christian formation of teachers, parents and pupils in our schools, beginning with primary school?

2. Eucharist and adoration

The Congregation is born of Jesus and Mary on the Cross. This "crucial" moment is symbolised in the Eucharist. Jesus wants to help us understand his self-giving on the Cross. For that he is present in a shared meal which, at the same time, is a

sign of his self-giving-until-the-end. Jesus gives his own flesh and blood to the disciples to eat. At the same time, this gesture takes them back to all the moments of Jesus' self-giving throughout his ministry: that time with the disciples when he fed the hungry crowds who followed him, or the time when he ate freely with tax collectors and sinners, or the time when Mary, who was with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry, ensured at a wedding feast that no wine would be lacking. Self-giving, welcoming, feasting, sharing - this is what Jesus leaves us in the Eucharistic meal. And he asks the disciples to remember this gesture when they gather in his name. For then, we not only "remember" what Jesus did, but we "make him present" in his self-giving for us. It is here that we delve into the depth of his pierced Heart: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). This act of self-giving summarises his whole life and anticipates his self-giving on the Cross. So important was this that the early Christian communities understood themselves as communities gathered around the "agape" or "self-giving love" of Jesus" or the "breaking of bread". This celebration nourished - and still nourishes today - the faith of the saints and martyrs.

That is why our founders, Marie-Joseph Coudrin and Henriette Aymer, invited their members to learn and make their own the attitudes of Jesus through celebrating the Eucharist and prolonging it in adoration. To stand before the Blessed Sacrament is to stand before the Lord Jesus who loves me and gives himself for me. There is the source of his and our self-giving, which invites us to love as he did. At the feet of the heart of Jesus in adoration, our

founder established certain criteria for the work of education which he shared with a sister:

"The science of sciences is that of forming the hearts of children to love the good. Excuse their faults, while taking the means to correct them. It is always by speaking of their faults without taking time to make them understand the opposite qualities that you discourage them. One must explain to the children what they should do rather than what they should avoid.

"Train the hearts of youth, and do not neglect anything that could embellish all the qualities and all the virtues, without which instruction is but a fatal gift....Just and equal firmness, joined to goodness, is preferable.

"Let your eye be a mirror where the child can read whether his action is worthy of praise or blame.

"Train your students to pray with reverence and attention. It is preferable that the prayer be short...it is the prayer of the heart and not of the lips that is agreeable to God."¹

I wonder, in these times marked by Covid with its consequences, where in many places there are still restrictions on the

¹ Bernard Couronne, « *Petite vie du Père Marie-Joseph Coudrin* », Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1997, 147.

celebration of the Eucharist, if this might be the moment to cultivate this contemplative and loving dimension of Eucharistic adoration. Might it be possible in our chapels to offer to children that space before the Lord, wherein they can speak from their hearts to the Heart of Jesus. In this regard, I have been very impressed to see the brothers in the Iberian province, introducing children in their schools to adoration to a time called "Oratory". They teach the children to speak to Jesus, with simple words and gestures in the school chapel, which they can also do in any church and in their homes. The brothers and the children speak to Jesus as one does with a friend who knows us well and to whom even our silences speak. And knowing that Jesus is in our hearts, we can talk to him in the silence of our room or in the underground on our way home or in the car or walking in nature. I wonder if it might not also be a time to develop a more domestic life of faith, at home, together, where everyone can in their own words bless the food or give thanks before going to sleep for the day, for health, for work, or pray for the people we care about. Basically, it is about cultivating an attitude or a form of adoration which essentially is to speak to the heart of Jesus at every moment of life.

3. Reparative love

The love of the pierced heart of Jesus and that of his mother at the foot of the Cross is a reparative love because it decides to love us by taking part in our sufferings, in our failures.

Jesus, the "being for others" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), manifests his almighty love by exposing his surrendered body to the point of making himself vulnerable to the violence that leads to him to be crucified and have his heart pierced. It is a way of loving that moves into the gaps and ruptures that arise or are produced in the course of our lives. From there, Jesus takes seriously our freedom and our choices, including rejection, and what he offers is his vulnerability, his forgiveness, his hopeful trust in the Father, as he proclaims from the Cross and Mary collaborates by remaining at his side.

Trusting in the reparative love of Jesus means to accept that he is the one who can help to restore even that which seems irreparable - the loss of a loved one, the violence or abuse one has suffered, or when the trust among a couple has been broken or when trust is questioned, such as is happening with many institutions - including the Church. Jesus moves into these ruptures and offers his reparative love – his Word that emerges from his strong love because he has made himself vulnerable and intercedes for us before the Father: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). His victory over death shines in his wounds and in his open side that he shows to his disciples, including Thomas, filling them with joy. "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn. 10:18).

From this reparative love, from the knowledge that we are his friends if we accept such love for us, he invites us to do the same: "Love one another, as I have loved you". (Jn 13:34). Jesus'

reparative love is a resilient kind of love that takes into account our fallibility, the irreparability of some losses and the damage we may cause to one another and indeed to the pierced heart of Jesus and to Mary's heart as she stands lovingly patient at the foot of the cross. At the same time, it is a modest love, for it remembers that life can no longer be as it was before the rupture or the loss - the wounds and the open side of the body of the Risen Jesus remind us of this. Rather, such love relies on the fact that whoever willingly enters into this dynamic of reparative love on account of his or her fallibility understands that the relationships will not be as they were before but instead may even become better than they were before.

In this sense, Jürgen Habermas, is a shining witness to the diversity and fragility of discourses and horizons of meaning that exist in the present era - that he describes as post-metaphysical. He affirmed that the role of religions in the public sphere, without falling into dogmatism or coercion of the individual conscience, is to offer "the possibility of sufficiently differentiated expression, sensitivity in respect of lives that end badly, social pathologies, failures in individual life projects and the deformities that resulted from distorted life contexts".² This is a wisdom of life that has been lost and which the professional and knowledgeable experts have failed to produce and translate into ongoing and transformative lifestyles.

² Jürgen Habermas – Joseph Ratzinger, *Ragione e fede in dialogo* (A cura di Giancarlo Bosetti), Marilio editori, Veneto 2005, 57.

The capability and pedagogy of reparation

Psychologically speaking, initiating a process of reparation presupposes at least two capabilities: the ability to feel contentment so that the anguish for what has been lost does not end up annihilating the person, and being able to feel loved, which in turn leads to loving others and raises feelings of compassion and guilt towards others for any harm they may have caused you, and towards oneself. Both capacities are built in a patient web of meaningful relationships, in which teachers, students and parents play a special role. In the art of reparation, all the actors involved - the wounder and the wounded - count.

Reparation involves understanding the scope of the harm endured and the harm caused, naming and accepting what has been lost, the humility to recognise the transgression, an ability to empathise with the pain caused to others, being in tune with the other's view of the harm.

It is also a form of liberation from resentment that can become narcissistic when born out of the wounded ego which Pedro Aznar describes in his song "Rencor" as that "most atrocious prison". It can also be described as a detachment from the hatred that Jorge Drexler calls "the blind guide of the cowards" in the song, "Guerrilla de la Concordia".

One speaks of mutual reparation as an intellectual and emotional work - no one 'repairs themselves. It is about making

sure that the damage caused does not generate more damage and hinder future relationships. It is a process of restoration that should be carried out where the crisis occurred - between a couple, (for example, infidelity), or in a relationship with students - wherever there is emotional blockage that impedes learning.

At the level of faith, reparation is welcoming the fact that Jesus has placed himself in the breach before which we feel most powerless, which is sin (the self-sufficiency that closes us in on ourselves without regard for others and for God), finitude and death. Where sin overflowed, grace overflowed in Jesus. In his pierced body, Jesus broke down the wall of enmity that separated us and made of Jews and Gentiles one body. Paul picks up on the reparatory action of Jesus by describing the various breaches that have been filled with his love given on the cross and made present in the Eucharist and contemplated in reparative Eucharistic adoration.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in

all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

Repairing the social fabric

I wonder whether our educational presences can be laboratories for repairing the social fabric that is sometimes weakened and torn due to the daily living together in families or at work. I see them as a means to collaborating in the service of building bridges - where they seem to be broken - among people from different social sectors, where mutual learning and recognition alongside a dialogue respectful of the diversity that exists between people is practised daily, without losing sight of the fact that the other is still a brother and a sister?

In other words, our school communities - that already generate networks of support and solidarity - can come to the aid of those who suffer, those who experience the loss of a loved one, a failure (emotional, family, work), where we also question the causes that produce the social and ecological gaps and fractures in our society and form people in the art of "repairing" so as to bridge these gaps.

4. Loving God by serving one's brother or sister

The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are not objects for mere contemplation from a distance but are Hearts that attract us by their unconditional love and move us to make their feelings, attitudes, choices and ways of acting our own. Following the strict logic of the incarnation, we allow the hearts of Jesus and Mary to love through our capacity to love. We do this as we are, men and women with capabilities and wounds that need to be repaired/forgiven.

It is this resilient way of loving, centred on the good of the other, that Simone Weil discovered in the love lived out by Jesus and in many other figures who in their human existence practised self-giving love, especially women:

"A woman, a bride, who knows that the one she loves is in despair and that she can neither help him nor reach him would at least like to undergo sufferings equivalent to his in order to be less separated from him, to be relieved of the heavy burden of impotent compassion. Whoever loves Christ and represents Him on the Cross must feel a similar relief in the face of the onslaught of misfortune".³

³ Simone Weil, "L'amour de Dieu et le malheur" en *Œuvres* (sous la direction de Florence de Lussy), Gallimard Quarto, Paris 1999, 715.

In a word, the Christian vocation is none other than to love, more and better. It is to love God in each person, in whom there is to be found a presence. This presence is sometimes bright and attractive, and sometimes it is more difficult to recognise. It is the hidden God, the hidden presence in each person, even in those who suffer or cause suffering.

I am reminded of the impressive words of another Dutch Jewish woman, Etty Hillesum, who lived her last years in a concentration camp in Holland and died in Auschwitz at the age of 29. Her service was to discover in her fellow camp inmates and even in her torturers that hidden presence of God, the fragile light in the darkness. In doing so she helped people not to shut themselves up in their own darkness. She also helped God, whose hidden presence was in danger of being extinguished in so many hearts that were being crushed by the evil that surrounded them. This is what she wrote in her diary a year and a half before his death in Auschwitz (30 November 1943).

"We still have to go through a great deal. We shall become poor, then destitute, until in the end, our strength will go. From all sides our destruction creeps up on us ... This much I know: you have to forget your own worries for the sake of others ... All the strength and love and faith in God that one possesses, and which have grown so miraculously in me of late, must be there for everyone who chances to cross one's path and who needs it ... God who we have within us, and who is growing marvellously in me lately, must be made

available to whoever is in need of it ... Out of my love for Him, I must draw strength and love for everyone who needs it ... And you can draw strength even from suffering ... With the love I feel for Him I can nourish a whole life and others along with me".⁴

In other words, when we love our neighbour, we do nothing other than serve the same Lord Jesus who wanted to remain present in his brothers and sisters, the least of our brothers and sisters, an unknown and surprising presence for all, believers or not, in the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the unclothed (cf. Mt. 25, 31-46).

Finally loving our neighbour is not so much an echo of a more or less healthy love of ourselves, but rather we love our neighbour because he or she is simply "like us" (Lev 19.18).

Educational processes centred on the quality of connections

Education in these times of pandemic has taken a qualitative leap in the possibilities of online classes. This has brought about a revolution in our ways of teaching, both for the very young and for those for whom connectivity is a luxury. This is redefining the educational roles of both teachers and parents and guardians.

⁴ Etty Hillesum, 3-7 July 1942 en *Diario 1941-1943*, Adelphi Milano 1985, 138-155, quoted by Alessandro Barban - Antonio Carlo Dall'Acqua, *Etty Hillesum, Osare Dio*, Citadella editrice, Assisi 2013, 234.

Classes have to be prepared and learning processes have to be accompanied in a different way. Above all, this is a powerful invitation to give meaning and density to online meeting spaces, so that they become spaces of proximity, of encounter with others.

At the same time it raises the challenge of the quality of face-to-face times, of knowing how to communicate from within, from the heart, with a grammar that is respectful for the body of the other, their silences, the need for closeness and distance, the gratuitousness of sharing to recreate ties, and to avoid generating a closeness that interferes and challenges our life and our being together.

In many cases, this will mean daring to be close to one another, taking care of the quality of the links between all the members of the school community, especially those in difficult situations of economic or affective fragility. If we give priority to caring for each person in the school community and make them feel that they are not alone, that they can count on us, that they can be supported, loved for who they are, then the school community of our schools can be a small laboratory of the kind of community of citizens and country we want, i.e. where social inequalities are not reproduced and where the unequal distribution of opportunities for all is not reinforced.

Such a community would be a space where everyone counts, where no one is left out or left over, where we all have something to say and can learn from each other. This implies a

huge challenge but it carries with the capability of building a stronger "we" in which everyone can find support.

Inspired by the Sacred Hearts, let us allow ourselves to be touched by the unconditional love they have for each person, for all humanity, for the "common home" that shelters us, and which is entrusted to our care. May all the institutions and educational works of the Congregation interact with the various actors of the Churches and civil societies involved in the dynamics of the Global Compact on Education to which Pope Francis invited us to associate ourselves.

I draw attention to his call to have the courage to form people available to put themselves at the service of the community: "It means bending over those in need and stretching out a hand to them, without calculation, without fear, but with tenderness and understanding, just as people knelt to wash the Apostles' feet. Serving means working beside the neediest of people, establishing with them first and foremost human relationships of closeness and bonds of solidarity."⁵

I conclude with some words from our brother Esteban Gumucio ssc (1914-2001), in which he describes what happens

⁵ Pope Francis, "Message for the launch of the Global Compact on Education" (12 September, 2019) in: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190912_messaggio-patto-educativo.html [Visited 19 August, 2021].

in the life of each one of us when we allow ourselves to be found by Jesus, having a disciple's heart like that of Mary, who recognises in Jesus a God who becomes our neighbour, one like us.

“And now to take the risk of turning everything upside down
the great to serve the little one
the rich made poor to clothe the naked
bread to be shared.

And let no one be stuck in where they have been
so that everyone can be much better than what they have been
and my boat and yours, keel toward the sky, mast in the water
and the world become home for everyone
and brothers you and me and all of you.”

THE SYNOD AND SSCC EDUCATION IN CHILE

Carlos Celedón Riquelme

Rector of the SSCC Padres Franceses School, Viña del Mar

"Any change calls for an educational itinerary that builds new paradigms capable of responding to the challenges and emergencies of the contemporary world, to understand and find solutions to the demands of each generation and to make the humanity of today and tomorrow flourish". (Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the launch of the global compact on education. 12 September, 2019)

This quote gives us a framework for the context in which the SSCC Chile-Argentina Province takes up the challenge of generating policies for educational management by adopting synodality as a particular way of working. In an ecclesiological context, **synodality**

“indicates a specific way for the Church, the people of God, to live and work (*modus vivendi et operandi*) whereby its communion is manifested and concretely realised in walking together, in gathering in assembly and in the active participation of all its members in the evangelising mission. This synodal character, marked by co-responsibility and the participation of all, must be present in this new structure of

educational management, where we all grow in the awareness of walking together and of contributing our personal talents to the achievement of the common mission. Pope Francis tells us that synodality is what God expects of us in this century, it must become the daily way of functioning of the Church, and at the same time, an articulation, organisation or structure of our way of being and acting. Pope Francis highlights two fundamental elements of synodality:

- It starts with an attitude of listening, in order to be able to speak freely.
- The process of synergy or convergence is for the sake of mission. That is to say, it is not a question of changing structures for the sake of changing them; rather, what is sought is that the contribution of each structure converges in a common project, while maintaining its own peculiarity".

(Política para la gestión educativa Provincia Chilena-Argentina, p. 4, Fr. René Mauricio Cabezón Yáñez ssc, Provincial Superior, 14 June 2021)

Both of these focuses, the proposal of Pope Francis and the invitation from our Provincial, supported by the General and Provincial Chapters, have motivated the schools of Chile to participate in an Educational Synod. As Catholic schools having an SSCC stamp and seeking to contribute to the world, to America, to Chile, to our church as well as evaluating and projecting

the formation of the schools for the next twenty years. we draw from the motto "from the heart, we look with gratitude, live with passion and build with hope". This is an ambitious task that must be undertaken with humility but with a firm foundation based on the one hundred and eighty-five years of educational experience of the Congregation in our country.

Thus, with high participation rates - on the part of the different actors that make up the school communities - the journey began in the midst of a context made complex due to the world pandemic, the strong institutional crisis and the situations of abuse revealed in the Chilean church. Despite all this, hundreds of participants have given their opinions, interacted with us and will continue to do so during the first semester of this year 2022.

Chile currently has three public schools in Viña del Mar, Santiago, Concepción and one subsidised private school in Valparaíso. In Argentina, in the city of Buenos Aires, the Congregation is present in the Emmaus School, where it supports the educational community through chaplaincy and recently through a formation program prepared for educators who work in SSCC schools called "Road to Emmaus", which implies a more formal link.

In the year 2021, the community linked to the Congregation in the school world is expressed through the following figures:

	SSCC Concepción	SSCC Manquehue	Colegio San Damián de Molokai Valparaíso	SSCC Padres Franceses Viña del Mar
Students	1330	1937	551	1009
Staff	189	247	57	154
Families	1000	1081	500	727
Religious	02	02	02	01

The Provincial Superior organised the holding of the first SSCC Educational Synod having as its aim seeing, judging (enlightening) and proposing a new understanding of Sacred Hearts education and how this might be translated into a path (trajectory) for the work of education. He also called for the participation of the SSCC brothers, lay people linked to the educational works of the Province and other relevant actors of society who contribute their perspective to the process.

The most relevant methodological aspects that have accompanied this synodal work have been:

- An emphasis on representation, inclusivity and participation. The process is a community co-construction, with all the challenges that this modality of work implies.

- Accounting for a traceability that is marked by defined milestones.
 - Seeing: talking, reflecting, listening
 - Judging: to discern
 - Acting: proposing and renewing

An executive team was proposed to group the results of the conversations and interactions into three categories: findings, emerging approaches and challenges. At this stage of the process, it is difficult to anticipate results, but it is already possible to observe trends that can be ratified by discussion groups that will begin in March 2022: these include feelings of gratitude for the educational work of the Province in Chile, a high appreciation of the formation in values provided in schools, a Sacred Hearts identity, education related to options towards the world of poverty and vulnerability. In view of the above, one of the challenges is to identify how the lines of our educational activity are being reflected in clear social commitments within the different contexts in which the schools operate. Another aspect to be explored is how, within each community, the existing relationships between the different actors are consistent with our declarations and ideals. A third objective is to consider the current global and national situation as an opportunity for our students to contribute to our unique identity.

A valuable clue in this regard was given by Fr. Superior General Alberto Toutin ssc in a talk entitled "What does it mean

to educate in the charism of the Sacred Hearts"? In an open presentation to the school community, he stated "It is also very important to focus especially on the pedagogy used by Jesus, who never showed disregard for the capabilities that people have that enable them to come to understand what it is that he wants to say. Jesus always stimulates and provokes, demonstrating his ability to both understand and believe in people.

Beyond the subject matter that he was able to communicate, what was also important was that the confidence or the act of fundamental faith in Him remained in the heart of each one of his students". It is from this observation that we intend to continue to encourage our educational mission in service of those who need it most, developing to the maximum the gifts received to put them at the service of building a more just and humane society.

This synodal body seeks to find in the community reflections sources of renewal for the educational mission of the Chilean-Argentine province in its schools, thinking all the time in both in the medium and long term, while remaining faithful to the identity proper to an apostolic work of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

A SACRED HEARTS EDUCATION FOR OUR TIMES

Nelson Rivera ssc (Chile-Argentina)

Much has been written about education and values, indeed hundreds of books. The great majority of the writings present well-articulated methodologies, but are weak in the application of context and, therefore, relevance. Almost without exception, they soon fall into disuse or simply do not convince. Generations of learners succeed one another, and creativity is increasingly demanded by a dynamic and ever-challenging world. This reality, common to all educational processes, has been replicated in almost all our countries.

For many years, schools have had, as one of their many objectives, the formation of the Republic. In other words, civic education was to be taught in schools to enable children to be formed in their commitment to the destiny of their country. This objective is still valid, but the current cultural changes, which are unceasing, bring with them a level of uncertainty as to the paths to follow.

In the Western world, value formation resulted from a dialogue between Christianity and Greek culture, which conceived

the *Paideia*⁶ as an educational proposal for its citizens.⁷ During the last century, towards the end of the Second World War, with the phenomenal growth of education in Europe and in the Latin American continent, education became seen as a powerful tool for integration and human promotion.

In many Spanish-speaking countries the Church has had a valuable tradition in education and in many cases in Latin America it has formed generations of intellectuals, businessmen and political leaders. With all the comings and goings of life, the question today does not seem to be so much about forming young people in social commitment, but rather how to educate them in the faith. This question has been around for a long time in Catholic education: How to educate our young people to live and bear witness to their faith?

In our Congregation some orientations were given in an attempt to give a more evangelical stamp to SSCC education. In

⁶ "This term refers to an understanding of the Greeks between the 6th and 4th centuries BC of the purpose of the educational process, with respect only to education under the control of the state (the *polis*). During that time, seven-year-old children belonging to free and propertied families (occasionally the children of slaves, and always sponsored by the slave-owning family of the slave's parents) came under the tutelage of the state to receive the education that the *polis* (its leaders, its assembly and its judges) considered valuable and necessary to be part of the community."

<https://www.fondodeculturaeconomica.com/dife/definicion.aspx?l=P&id=92>

⁷ Jaeger, W. & Frost, E. C. (1974), *Cristianismo Primitivo y Paideia Griega* (Breviarios del FCE. Vol. 182) México: FCE.

1983 Patrick Bradley wrote the letter "Building a More Just World in Solidarity with the Poor". In it he invited all the schools under our responsibility to develop an education for justice. It was a valuable contribution, considering that UNESCO, years later, called for an educational reform, stating that the development of the people was based on education for quality and equity. This confirmed the belief that education is a true process of social promotion and a real possibility of human development.

What possibilities do we see today?

In an increasingly secularised world, the question of faith formation remains urgent. The family convictions that helped us believe and accept without question the faith of our parents, do not exist for today's young people; we must forge them anew; how and from where to begin is the challenge for us. Faced with these questions, the dynamics of education, as an integral and systematic process, can help us to find new paths.

The profound cultural changes we are experiencing today give us an extraordinary opportunity to rethink the kind of education we want and push us to define what we mean by quality. Perhaps, now more than ever, we have the possibility of together looking at Sacred Hearts education and coming up with a proposal that can give meaning to these works that are so traditional and significant in the evangelisation of the Church.

The 39th General Chapter encouraged us to renew our inner self. Undoubtedly, this is one of the great issues that challenges Catholic education. This is not only because of how fundamental faith is to each person, but also because we are facing a secularising process that is affecting the way we evangelise. At times it seems that we have no answer to the advance of desecralisation.

For this reason, it seems important to look at the pedagogical processes and determine how systematic they are and to address the fundamental reality of the teaching and learning process in every school. In order to tackle this task, we can draw on important findings from cognitive psychology and neuroscience that can help us to establish a more lucid path in faith formation.

The contribution of the scientific world

The brain remains a mystery to science. It is the human organ about which the least is known. Unravelling how it works is an enormous challenge. It is currently being studied in the most prestigious universities and its research has become state policy.⁸ In biological terms, we do not know how consciousness and thought are generated, nor do we know how we learn. There are proposals that attempt to explain these phenomena, but we

⁸ On 2 March 2014, in the White House, President Barack Obama announced funding for a programme to research the workings of the brain in search of answers that will lead to unravelling the causes of major diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

do not yet have the scientific evidence to support them. What is known, however, is that the brain has a plasticity that allows it to adapt and learn throughout life. The best time is during the years of childhood and youth. Our brain is ready to learn and does so in a frenetic way. Brain activity during these years awakens the awareness of the self, develops decision-making and generates the social awareness of the "we".

Today it is clear that in the process of human development, from the foetal stage onwards, the senses are the first to develop. For example: the senses of touch, smell and hearing. The foetus needs these senses to communicate and understand the world with which it begins to interact. Taste and sight will come later. The child knows the voice of its parents from the womb and when it is born it knows the smell of its parents. Touch becomes a vital need for communication of affection and protection. When a parent holds the baby and puts it to the breast, the baby is reassured, the sound of the heart gives it peace and brings it back to the protection of the mother's womb. For this reason, cuddling and caressing become so human and necessary for them. Thus begins a long and profound process of human development that will manifest and consolidate the particularity of the personality of each human being.

From the perspective of faith, the findings of scientists lead us to value certain ongoing processes of formation. Today, science suggests that the human brain reaches biological maturity at around the age of 25. Our schools accompany this process until

the age of 18, the time of full adolescence, which involves the search for and consolidation of personal identity. During this time, so-called neural pruning occurs,⁹ which defines behaviour and powerfully influences the way students act and think. In other research, the North American psychologist Augusto Blasi¹⁰ has described moral identity as the process in which the young person reaches a synthesis of his life that leads him to make decisions that will guide the rest of his life. This occurs around the age of 24, that is, in the years of higher education.

Challenges for an SSCC education

A fundamental premise in any formative process that seeks to be meaningful, is the conviction that we educate as a school community. This means that we are all part of the so-called Sacred Hearts curriculum: caretakers, assistants, administrators, teachers, students and families. All must participate in a coherent process that is properly designed to generate processes of human growth in all. By being clear about this formative dynamic, we will be able to advance in the formation of values in our schools.

⁹ Neuronal or synaptic pruning is a biological process where neurons are removed in order to improve synaptic transmission. It occurs in the early childhood and adolescent years.

¹⁰ Blasi, A. (2005). Carácter moral: un enfoque psicológico. In DK Lapsley & FC Power (Eds.), *Psicología del carácter y educación del carácter* (pages. 67-100). Published by Notre Dame University.

In the midst of a fraternal atmosphere, we try to educate by proposing meaningful experiences to form social conscience. This raises a question: how significant are these experiences for their faith and how deep is their encounter with the Christ within them? Although we are convinced of the need for them to live the social reality, often such a question can be an opportunity to reflect – at any given moment.

A possible way to educate faith and values in the perspective of SSCC education

In the apostolic exhortation "Querida Amazonia" Pope Francis invites us to educate our young people in ecological sensitivity. But what does it mean to educate in ecological sensitivity?

Following the exhortation, it is necessary to change both the language and the timing of what we do in view of a more integral and adequate formation of the new generations. For this it is necessary to revise our curricula and depend less on educational rankings that are market-orientated and really have little to do with the human being that the Gospel speaks to us about. This does not mean that our Sacred Hearts education is less rigorous or less original, but it is necessary to focus on what is fundamental: the integral development of persons.

Emotions and sensitivity are deeply human characteristics that are manifested from an early age. It is clear that motivation

and learning are closely related to emotions. Indeed, meaningful learning is related to what we feel and is expressed in our bodies; joy generates commitment and willingness to learn. In turn, sensitivity has to do with the senses, with the ability to perceive the world around us.

The five senses, which we experience on a daily basis, are the most basic way to feel part of a world that needs us and that we need. Hence the importance of ecological sensitivity. We belong to this world and we are responsible for it.

Research in neuroscience concludes the importance of art in education: music, painting, poetry, literature; in the same way and in another area of learning, sport is very relevant. The values that are spontaneously formed in each of these disciplines are fundamental in the structuring of the personality.¹¹ Through them, students express themselves as they are, and are thereby encouraged to recognise themselves. Even more does this happen if we accompany the students from an early age, valuing their creativity¹² and their emotions: teaching them the value of silence, contemplation and prayer – all according to their age. It is not possible

¹¹ Fernández, S. (2018), *Music and Brain Development*. *Pediatric annals*, 47 (8), e306-e308, in: <https://doi.org/10.3928/19382359-20180710-01>

¹² Beaty, R. E., Benedek, M., Silvia, P. J., & Schacter, D. L. (2016), *Creative Cognition and Brain Network Dynamics*. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 20(2), 87-95, in:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.10.004>

to teach silence in exactly the same way to a child, an adolescent or an adult.

All education is a formative process that must be continuous and systematic. In this way, the development of the inner life is seen as a necessary way to help answer transcendental questions that students ask themselves and that the current formative processes answer only partially or not at all. With this in mind, it is necessary to distance oneself from current forms of education, their emphases and methodologies.

Being formed in artistic sensitivity generates an inner life, makes people more empathetic, and helps the students develop discipline, rigour and the ability to work in a team.¹³

The Argentinian theologian Cecilia Avenatti¹⁴ argues that the arts will be the language of God in this century. If we properly educate students to listen, to see and to taste, then learning to love in the style of Jesus might be less complicated. By including these emphases in the formative processes of our schools, we would be closer to young people, helping them to answer their questions and elicit in them a meaningful experience of God. Thus,

¹³ Atherton, R. P., Chrobak, Q. M., Rauscher, F. H., Karst, A. T., Hanson, M. D., Steinert, S. W., & Bowe, K. L. (2018). Shared Processing of Language and Music. *Experimental psychology*, 65 (1), 40-48, in:

<https://doi.org/10.1027/1618-3169/a000388>

¹⁴ Avenatti P, Cecilia. (2007). *Los lenguajes de Dios en el siglo XXI*. Edições Subiaco.

perhaps, passages like the following may have a deeper impact on their spiritual life: "Lord, make me see",¹⁵ "Speak Lord, your servant is listening",¹⁶ "Taste and see how good the Lord is"¹⁷ or "You shall love your neighbour as yourself".¹⁸

The great challenge for a Sacred Hearts education, that includes being formed for justice, is to awaken in students an experience that allows them to encounter Jesus Christ and, as a result, to make a commitment to the world. To this end, our schools should generate educational projects that transmit a deep spirituality, form a thoughtful faith and generate a social conscience that allows us to realise the inescapable condition of Christianity: our faith is always a faith incarnated in the world and in history.

As one might expect, we cannot ask schools for everything. We cannot form a Christian believing that when they leave our schools they have everything they need, on account of our having given them all we have. The challenge clearly continues after the school stage.

All formation processes are ongoing and people can change a lot in the years that follow. Another challenge will be to propose

¹⁵ Luke 18: 35.

¹⁶ 1 Sam3:10.

¹⁷ Psalms 34:8.

¹⁸ Mt 22:37-39.

an interdependent formation in all our works. It is a question of offering our lay people a systematic formation in accordance with their spiritual searches, so that they can grow in faith at all stages of their lives.

PASTORAL CARE IN SSCC SCHOOLS

María García Olloqui ssc (Spain)

Pastoral care in schools has been and always will be for us a call, a constant search, and a priority when it comes to organising educational centres. In my opinion, no matter how hard we try, it is impossible to exercise a neutral education, that is to say, whenever we educate, we appreciate, we transmit values and beliefs, from an anthropological point of view. To educate is to teach how to see the world and how to live in it. This is the essence of our Sacred Hearts educational projects.

We teach to read not only the words written in books but the Word with a capital letter that is being written in our lives. By this we do not mean a pastoral ministry that is diluted, not very explicit or taken for granted. On the contrary, educational pastoral care must be choral, that is, a resonance or synergy exists between all the elements that make up our Ministries.

Our SSCC vocation urges us to proclaim the Good News. We obviously ask ourselves: How are our centres the heralds of this Good News? The Good News is the Love of God incarnated in the

union of the hearts of Jesus and Mary. How can we introduce them to this experience of Love?

First, I would like every person who comes to our centre, even if it is just to ask the secretary about something, to leave with the feeling of having perceived in some way the joy of the Gospel, manifested in a humane treatment that cares for, accompanies and respects the life of each person, always opening up a horizon of hope for the future. Above all, that the students receive the Good News of a God who loves, sustains, and accompanies our steps, who dedicates a Word of Love to each one of us. The Good News that nothing is lost and that a new dawn is always possible.

In the SSCC DNA

This is what is in our SSCC DNA: the zeal and passion to proclaim a Love that is overflowing in us. Pastoral care in an educational centre is everything that helps us to seek ways to organise the proclamation of the Gospel. From this perspective, we could say that everything we do in the school can be pastoral, but, as we said, we run the risk of a certain relativism.

Evidently, everything we do in the school can have a pastoral focus: we educate for life, we understand life from the Gospel. Therefore, we can say that pastoral care in a school is a noun, a clear and explicit content of faith. It is an adjective: it accompanies,

focuses, and gives meaning. And it is an adverb because it gives a specific imprint to our way of doing things.

The Gospel makes it easy and, at the same time, very difficult. The experience of encountering Jesus transforms, moves the person to follow in his footsteps and adhere to him. We only have to facilitate this encounter; we only have to put in place the necessary conditions to enable the person to be close to Jesus. As our founders invited us to do, it is a matter of entering into the heart of Jesus, of allowing ourselves to be formed by him. In John's Gospel there is a precious chain of testimonies in which the disciples present Jesus as the Lamb of God. We evangelise from our own experience, we are intermediaries in everything we do, we recount how God comes to us. Pastoral care needs witnesses.

We can also think about how we equip our students for this encounter, how we present Jesus to them, in their contexts and cultures, in their life situations ranging from childhood to adolescence. Perhaps this is where we can frame the work of interiority as a space that creates within us silence, opening a way to the heart, where true encounter becomes possible. The path to travel is the path to the heart, which somehow awakens the capacity for wonder and contemplation in the face of creation. In my opinion, the greatest enemy of Christian education and even of pastoral care is superficiality. Learning to live deeply allows us to live from the heart.

Our educational communities are Christocentric, we propose as a criterion of discernment to fix our eyes on Jesus. How do we present Jesus as a model of life? We can help in a simple way to cultivate the contrasting of our life with the attitudes and options of Jesus. Even the pastoral care in a centre should think about what life references are presented, St. Damien, the founders... other people near and far especially are models of life that today can inspire our own path. In such a confusing world, how good it is to have clear points of reference!

Everyday witnesses

School is like Easter, that is, an intermediate stage that prepares us to face reality. Education is not an end in itself, but teaches us how to live, equips us to be able to achieve a life project. As human beings we all project ourselves into the future and in some way, we need to find meaning in what we do. We are people of destiny. The school stage is the time to sow vocational seeds, understanding our life from the sense of project, as a life lived as a mission. The vocational proposal from the point of view of faith does not admit dichotomies or separations but affects the whole person. There are many ways of sowing these vocational seeds: how we understand personal capacities, what is fulfilment or what is a successful life or a fulfilled life. The questions are inscribed in the heart: how do we handle them; how do we sustain them and what channels do we use to find answers? Are we attentive so that we can go out to meet them

when we are at a crossroads? School pastoral care can sow anthropological foundations that open the door to a Jesus who calls us to join him in building the Kingdom. It is not a question of dualism but, on the contrary, it is that the human and the theological grow together. In these times when vocation is so blurred, we can present life lived as mission. We all know from experience that pastoral work for vocations needs human, daily, inspiring witnesses ... Those who spend a lot of time talking, who take an interest, who meet each other in everyday conversations, sharing the right word that inspire.

Any pupil who passes through our schools will spend many hours in them, and many of their memories or biographical events will be inseparably linked to the educational activity. The school constitutes an ecosystem that extends far beyond its walls, where the pupil grows up. School pastoral care is, therefore, a pastoral care of environments, whereby the elements that make up the environment are, from a faith perspective, critically reviewed and redeveloped. It is about getting to know nature from the perspective of creation, exercising the ability to recognise the mystery that inhabits the sciences we study, reading the news, understanding social reality and history from the perspective of faith, relating to others in charity and solidarity, and opening up to a world that is both mystery and opportunity. With this approach, pastoral care is breathed, touched, spoken, smelt, and tasted. Coherence impacts, educates, and evangelises.

All of us who live together, especially educators, contribute in some way to creating this environment. No one can be a stranger to it. Environments need time, they need exchange and daily coexistence. We know how much we are influenced by the environment and the culture in which we grow up. We can make the educational centre live out of the culture of the Gospel. This pastoral care requires prioritising, putting first things first, without tensions, nor conquests, simply naming our mission. Pastoral care gives meaning to what we do and is our *raison d'être* as schools.

We uphold an integral vision of the believer, moving away from the fragmentation or rupture so present in our times. The dynamism of God's love unifies us. We cannot conceive of a pastoral ministry that is distant from reality, disincarnated, that is mere doctrine. Contemplation of the pierced heart of Jesus leads us to be a channel of his healing Love. This implies pastoral care that is in touch with the reality of the world, that proposes experiences of approaching suffering, that educates the heart for compassion and mercy. A charitable pastoral care that helps students to recognise the dignity of each person and enables them to encounter God in reality, fragility, and in the mysterious.

It is a pastoral care that deepens the experience of service, as a source of light and an answer to the questions that trouble human beings. It is about learning to make one's way to God in how we do things, dedicating time to what happens afterwards,

asking oneself questions, leaving space to name in one's own way this God, whom one discovers in the most vulnerable.

Outrage at abuses

Charity also needs justice, and pastoral care also addresses how to live it, how to articulate it and how to commit oneself to it. We are well aware that the children and young people of today will have the challenge of contributing to the construction of the society of the future. They need to be taught how to cultivate a sensitivity that is indignant in the face of abuses, that is constructive in offering alternatives that generates humane ways of relating to others and that seeks a place for all. Some of our students will occupy positions of responsibility; perhaps we can help them to think of themselves as sons and brothers.

The union of the hearts of Jesus and Mary invites us to a union of hearts, to become experts in welcoming what beats in the story that each person is building, to perceive even the echo of unspoken words or half-spoken desires. Our pastoral care is accompanied by the attitudes of the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Increasingly, in all areas, not only in schools, accompaniment has become present in pastoral care, as a way of relating to human life in a profoundly respectful way. In schools we receive more and more students who are deeply vulnerable and wounded,

ashamed and guilty through no fault of their own. The way of approaching and relating to each other is healthy, conducive to growth and allows for openness to the Mystery.

The lives of our students ask of us presence, fidelity that does not abandon, support and witness to the hope of a God who speaks to us in the little stories we are able to express. They ask of us a deep faith, as well as the patience to know how to be, to wait and to hold. Our meetings and conversations reflect how Life flows from a pierced heart.

Port of entry

School ministry is a gateway, almost like a crack open to the grace that allows us to move from small affiliations to larger affiliations. Families may not choose us because of our ideology or our pastoral care, and some may even be alienated from God and the Church. Belonging to the school as an open and safe home can open the way to an experience of God, where the initial motivation and identity are strengthened by a greater attachment to the Congregation and the Church.

School ministry, depending on the context, can be a channel for a first proclamation and a visible face of an ecclesial, plural, and welcoming community for living and sharing the faith. However, pastoral care in schools never remains closed in on

itself, but rather grows and in so doing breaks down its own barriers, to accompany the faith of young people in other spaces.

As we have been maintaining throughout this article, pastoral ministry is the responsibility of the whole educational community. We need the contemplation, witness and prophecy of each one. It is undoubtedly a challenge how to build this SSCC community, especially with all the staff, and how to make it possible for each one to take his or her place to contribute the best of himself or herself.

We can divide up the tasks, but we cannot delegate the proclamation as an intrinsic vocation to our SSCC educators. In some way, we are also called to deepen, care for, and unfold this vocation in the pastoral ministry. I think I am not saying anything new when I say that accompanying the processes and the incorporation of personnel into our educational centres is a great challenge.

Finally, I want to underline the question of evaluation. As teachers we spend all day giving marks, so we also must evaluate the activities, celebrations and so on. Sometimes we may refer to the behaviour of the pupils, to the aesthetics, even to whether they have been well received, or sometimes only to external issues.

Besides these considerations, it is important that we do not lose sight of where we are going, and that we are able to grasp

whether what we have experienced generates movement and process. Evaluating in pastoral care requires analysis and much contemplation. All of us who dedicate ourselves to pastoral work dream that one day our students will confess, "I knew you by hearsay, but now my eyes have seen you."

Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI): NON FORMAL EDUCATION

Alexis Nayak ssc (India)

Introduction

Non-formal Education, otherwise called Informal Education is an educational project of Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in the Region of India. The stakeholders or the beneficiaries of this educational project are the children of poor families in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages. In a world of educational competitiveness that involves smart and online educational systems in the building of life and careers of students so as to live life as an “educated” and “cultured” human persons in today’s society, the children from these poor families or the guardians of these children can hardly afford to be part of this ever-evolving educational system.

The children from such poor families can hardly compete with or integrate themselves, with any degree of self-confidence, with their peers who come from more fortunate families in formal

schools. They find themselves nowhere near and are left behind in the system completely!

Therefore, the non-formal or informal education project of Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) is a humble effort with a goal of educating, equipping and empowering poor children so that they can participate in the process of their education in formal schools and gain a certain self-confidence and dignity when they join their peers coming from fortunate families.

The “Why” of such a Project:

The situational analyses of the geographical areas where DSDI carries out the Non-Formal Education Project reveal that most children in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages are either early school dropouts or are not able to go beyond high school education. Some children even remain uneducated! And the reason: the poverty of their parents/guardians. Most parents/guardians of the children are either daily wage labourers or small farmers or even beggars in the case of parents/guardians in leprosy colonies.

In this context, the parents/guardians have either no financial means to support their children for higher education or motivation to send their children to formal schools. Some parents/guardians do not even have the awareness of the importance of education in the shaping of the lives and growth of their children. There

is also another prevailing social and cultural context: that is, the traditional cultural mind-set of traditional and uneducated parents/guardians who discriminate between male and female children, giving preference only to boys in the field of education, resulting in the issue of gender inequality. Such social realities lead the children in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages to drop out of school and adopt anti-social behaviours, or they can be forced to work or be given over as children to marriage.

Agents and Protagonists of Non-Formal Education

Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) carries out the Non-Formal Education project in fifteen different Non-Formal Education centres in urban slums and villages, and in leprosy colonies in and around the cities of Bhubaneswar in the district of Khurda, Choudwar in the district of Cuttack, Pipili in the district of Puri, and in the rural villages of Ludru Mission and in Kattama in the district of Gajapati in the state of Odisha.

In all these Non-Formal Education Centres, the agents and protagonists of education are the parents/guardians of the children and the children themselves. Each Non-Formal Education Centre is assigned and entrusted with a teacher who accompanies the children daily two hours either before the formal schooling class hours or after the formal schooling class hours in the process of

their education and learning. Each year an average of 575 children participate in the education and learning process.

Making the parents/guardians of the children and the children themselves protagonists of education in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages is a challenging task as has been shared in “the why of such a project”. However, in conjunction with the teachers in the Non-Formal Education centres and with the elders of slums, villages, and in leprosy colonies, DSDI administration carries out periodical educational awareness programs for the parents/guardians and children in order to help them become aware and understand the importance of education for the lives of the children in today’s world. The parents/guardians are encouraged and motivated to send their children to Non-Formal Education Centres and to formal schools. The children too are encouraged and motivated to grow in their interest in education and thus grow interested in going to schools.

The Non-formal Education teachers and DSDI administration also carry out educational awareness programs for the parents/guardians and children on the social issues of anti-social behaviours of children, forced child labour and child marriage so that both the parents and children grow in the awareness of the issues and their consequences in their families and in the lives of their children.

Such educational interventions and capacity building through periodical educational awareness and motivational programs continue to yield positive fruits and change of mind-set among the parents/guardians and the children. As result, there has been a growing positive response from them in their participation in the educational process and demand for Non-Formal Education Project in the urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages.

The Pedagogy of Non-Formal Education

DSDI Non-Formal Education for children in slums, villages and in leprosy colonies is conducted in very non-formal classroom settings as against formal class room settings in formal schools. In a non-formal class room setting, the pedagogy of Non-Formal Education of children in different Non-Formal Education centres is two-fold: preparing the first timer children for formal schooling and accompanying formal schooling children in different levels of their studies through daily two hours tuition classes (coaching classes) by the non-formal education teachers in order to help the children excel in their formal schooling.

The variety of activities that are carried out in aiding the children in their education and learning process are: orientation programs both for parents and children, daily tutorial classes and accompaniment, human value education, extracurricular skills and talents sessions, science exhibition, educational and

cultural tours to museums, parks and places of historical importance, monitoring the children in preparation for their formal schooling examinations and celebration of annual fest. Besides such pedagogical activities, periodical evaluative meetings are held with parents, children and teachers for the improvement of the educational project. Educational workshops are also conducted for the non-formal education teachers as part of their on-going formation and learning in the art of teaching and imparting knowledge to children.

Empowering and Transforming

About eleven years ago when I was the Regional Superior of SSCC Region of India, I stated in one of my communication to the Brothers of our Region: “we are not social workers, but we are pastors who are called to empower and transform the lives of the people of God we commit ourselves to serve them in our ministries according to the model of Jesus.” The model of Jesus’ mission was to encounter, empower and transform those who were on the peripheries of society. In the proclamation of the good news, people on the margins of society were made the centre of the good news of salvation. Hence, the goal and vision of DSDI Non-Formal Education project has been to empower and to transform the stakeholders/beneficiaries, namely the children and their parents/guardians. Along with the children and guardians, the non-formal education teachers (the co-

workers of DSDI) are also empowered and transformed and in turn dedicate themselves to the transformation of society.

One unique thing which both the children and the non-formal education teachers learn from the DSDI Non-Formal Education project is how to be “human with human values” and live one’s life with respect, dignity and meaningfulness. In this way, the pedagogy is not just “academic” but academic with “value education” for a life of respect, dignity and meaningfulness. This is something which they appreciate and are grateful for as they “encounter” the gospel through the Non-Formal Education project (Our beneficiaries, and both the children and the non-formal education teachers are 100% Hindus).

The children and teachers themselves tell the tale of how they have been empowered and their lives transformed by the Non-Formal Education project and by their “encounter” with the “Fathers” which, as they say, they would not have or get in any other place.

Challenges of Non-Formal Education Project

There are two existential challenges confronted by DSDI Non-Formal Education among the children in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages: the on-going impact of the Covid-19 and Omicron pandemic and the changing socio-political scenario in India. The schools and colleges have

remained closed now for more than two years due to the long drawn and on-going impact of the Covid-19 and Omicron pandemic. Such a prolonged closure of schools and colleges have irreparably interrupted and impacted the academic life of children and students all over the world. The interruption and impact are not only of the academic life of children and students, but also their psycho-social and psycho-emotional life.

The same is true for the children of the DSDI Non-Formal Education project in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages. Removed from their formal schooling for such a long time, the children and parents find it very difficult and stressful, and challenging to cope with. The introduction of online class and online learning has added to the misery of children and parents. For the children in urban slums and villages, in leprosy colonies and in rural villages, availing of smart phones and having access to online classes is beyond their reach. Learning has been interrupted! Learning has stopped! It has been a herculean task for non-formal education teachers to put the children in the path of learning once again.

In the changing socio-political situation in India and ever since the nationalist political party came into power to govern the country in 2014, there has been a growing intolerance, hostility and hatred towards minorities, such as Muslims and Christians. Christians and Christian institutions are constantly and falsely being accused with the bogus accusation of seeking the religious conversion of Hindus.

Such accusations are leading to an increase in violent attacks against Christians and their institutions in India. Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) being a Christian institute carrying out Non-Formal Education among the 100% Hindu children in slums and villages and in leprosy colonies could be falsely accused of religious conversion and also attract violent attacks. Hence we need to be very careful and vigilant! However, even in such challenging circumstances, DSDI continues to commit itself to the education of children through Non-Formal Education Project.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to say that Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) is proud to be part of the educational empowering and transforming mission of the Sacred Hearts Congregation. It is our great satisfaction and joy to educate and build the lives of children in the margins of our society through Non-Formal Education so that they can grow in self-confidence, excel in their formal schooling and in career building, and live a meaningful life as human persons with self-respect and dignity.

This is what the parents want their children to be: to become better “human beings” in order to build better families and better society. In the midst of challenges, Damien Social Development Institute (DSDI) remains committed to this mission of the Congregation in India.

Key elements of education in the Lar Mamana wa Kurula Reception Centre

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EDUCATE ON A DAILY BASIS?

Brigida Macamo ssc
Director of Lar Mamana wa Kurula (Mozambique)

Introduction

Before we start talking about education at home, with our girls, it is important to introduce ourselves, to explain ***who we are***.

The *Lar Mamana wa Kurula* Reception Centre is a social project that takes the form of a residence created for the reception of girls and young women between five and eighteen years of age who are in a situation of risk and vulnerability. The centre has a capacity for 40 girls. It is located 7 km from the town of Boane, in the Province of Maputo.

The Lar was created in 2010 as a response to the strong impact of HIV-AIDS in the region, that had left many children

orphaned and in a situation of extreme vulnerability. The impact was most felt by young girls who, in the case of death or illness of a family member, were expected to take care of the house and the family. In many cases, these household tasks prevented girls from going to school to further their education and growth and in some ways deprived them of their rights as children.

The reasons that justify the admission and subsequent initiation in the accompaniment process of these minors are varied: life stories marked by situations of vulnerability, negligence on the part of caregivers who do not respect fundamental human rights. In this sense, we can say that our girls and young women need special attention and care in terms of support, security, affection and pedagogical follow-up. But, above all, they lack love, accompaniment and self-esteem. In dialogue and joint research with the local Social Action Services, it was considered opportune and appropriate to create this work in order to respond to a need that concerned everyone.

What do we understand by education?

To educate is to transmit the customs and ways that allow an individual to adapt and live in a society. We also understand that to educate is to stimulate, develop and guide a child's aptitudes, in accordance with the ideals of a given society. It is to improve and develop the child's physical, intellectual and

moral faculties,¹⁹ it is to prepare a child for life. To educate is to teach, to transmit knowledge, to instruct and to offer norms that determine basic relations for a good coexistence. We can say, in other words, that to be educated is to learn to live together, to love one's neighbour, to know how to take an interest in others and to make others feel good with small acts of kindness and gentleness.

Our mission here at the centre is to help the girls to socialise, to instruct them, to accompany them so that they can acquire knowledge in all areas and to equip them with personal tools so that they can face the life that awaits them outside our home when it is time to leave. It is our responsibility to initiate them into life, to guide them, to encourage them because they often arrive shattered and wounded, disappointed with the inhuman reality they have lived through. Behind every girl that comes to us there is a sad and difficult story. Educating for us means trying to give the girls back the smile that robbed them of their lives.

Normally we have to initiate them and accompany them in everything, from basic hygiene habits such as brushing their teeth or combing their hair, getting dressed, using the toilets ... until they learn to make decisions for themselves. By this we mean that education here at the home touches all aspects and

¹⁹ Dictionary, *A Enciclopedia*, volume 7, Ed. Verbo, p. 2965.

all areas of life, all spaces and moments of the day. From the moment they get up until they go to bed, they are being educated.

Some key elements to education

In educating girls who come and live with us for years, there are some key elements that we think are essential:

Love

The first key element for education is love. When the girls come to our home, what they need most is affection and attention. This love leads us to be with them, to feel with them, to love them despite the history they carry with them, a hard and sad history, sometimes even a tragic one. And when they perceive and feel the affection, the empathy, they come to understand that our intention is really to help them, to be with them. Then they open up, trusting and responding to what is proposed to them.

I think we all experience that love heals, healing the wounds we carry inside. When things are done with love, we learn with more enthusiasm. St. Paul tells us: "love is patient, it is kind ... it forgives all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things".²⁰ Experience leads us to affirm that girls need to feel

²⁰ Cf. 1 Cor 13: 4.7.

loved, wanted and it is this that makes them overcome or "forget" the tragic past they have lived through. Many did not have the opportunity to feel loved or to hear a word of appreciation. Love awakens new forms in them; it helps them to look at themselves with love, with dignity and to value themselves for who they are.

A sincere love that manifests itself in concrete actions is the most persuasive. When the girls perceive this disinterested love in us, sister educators who want to help, who want the best for them ... they are moved, they recognise themselves, they feel loved and then they gain self-confidence. They discover that they can do much more, go further. The first impressions they receive and perceive are important because these remain engraved for life. The love that they experience daily generates trust and friendship in them, which at the same time leads them to collaborate with each other, to create a home and a family.

Family spirit

The "family spirit" makes us closer to the girls, it moves us to accept and integrate each girl with her differences; to welcome and love them as they are. A family spirit results in each girl feeling at home. By being valued, respected and accepted, it is possible for each girl to find her place at home. Our effort, our daily work is to ensure that the centre becomes the "home" that educates, the playground that welcomes, the place for dialogues,

the "family" where each one feels loved and respected and stimulated; and where they learn to love and respect.

The "family" relationship that we create with the children is important for education, because it can facilitate or hinder the learning process of the girls, since to learn they need to feel trust and love with their educator. Educating girls is not an easy task. As educators we also learn with them every day, always having to adapt to their realities and needs. All this requires a lot of attention and patience, knowing how to start again whenever things do not go according to plan. This task requires a lot of love, dedication, affection and sometimes a lot of sacrifice.

We learn every day to be true mothers. We learn to integrate the functions of educating and caring, committing ourselves to the integral development of girls in the various aspects of their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. When the family environment is favourable, they learn to live together, to accept differences, to accept others and to be supportive and receptive. It is very beautiful to see the family atmosphere being created and how the girls develop and respond, and how they themselves take care that this family spirit prevails, with beautiful attitudes of dialogue, forgiveness, fraternal correction, restarting life after an argument. Theirs is a simple and humble way that so often teaches and challenges us as sisters regarding how we live the family spirit so important in our religious family.

Caring

Caring is another key element that we believe is important, as it implies providing what is necessary for the life of the girls. The image of Jesus as the good shepherd²¹ sheds much light on this task. The good shepherd strives to provide what is necessary for the life of his flock. And he takes care that none of them get lost, defending, and caring for the flock, leading it to the most beautiful pastures ...

We also understand care as providing and offering the basics needed to live with dignity; from food, clothing, home, health, hygiene..., thus creating the conditions for the human and religious growth of the girls. We know that young girls without a home, who are hungry or cold, left without stimuli are unable to learn and relate to others.

We also understand care as valuing and helping girls to develop skills and potentialities that facilitate their integration in a group and their being able to live well with others. In this sense, care encompasses a lot; it involves affects, attitudes, emotions and the recognition and acceptance of oneself, one's own body, the acceptance of one's own reality. All the activities related to the protection and care that is necessary for the daily life of any girl - protecting, comforting, accompanying, teaching,

²¹ John 10.

studying, helping with schoolwork – all this "care" is an integral part of what we consider to be education.

To care requires, above all, to be committed or interested in the growth of the life of the other, in this case the girls we have here with us; to support their needs and trust in their abilities. This means that as caregivers, we must not be self-centred, but we must be more receptive, open, attentive and sensitive to what each girl needs. It is on the basis of what each girl needs that we accompany and educate her. For better care, it is important and necessary to know each girl and this requires a lot of closeness, time, attention, dedication, patience and observation.

Presence / being

“Being” is very important in education because this is where one can follow through and consolidate what a person has learnt over time. It is by being with the girls that we get to know each of them and how they do things. This also helps us to have the necessary clues for the educational dynamics that ensue. By being with them, we can see what their attitudes towards others are like, how they welcome and accept others, how they treat each other. It is in this "being" that new spaces and opportunities appear that help “correct” the girls and prevent them from making serious mistakes.

Being present, spending time with the girls, allows us to accompany the situations and life experiences that appear sponta-

neously, or to simply discover how what they have learnt is put into practice. We can see what it is they have understood, and how they are applying it or not in their daily lives. A day-to-day presence in the girls' activities also gives them a certain security and confidence and motivates them to practice what they have learnt, because they want and like to "show us that they have learnt well".

The quality of presence counts a lot, a presence where a girl feels accompanied, understood, where she feels in tune with the sister caregiver; a presence that stimulates, encourages, corrects, supports, teaches, a presence that is interested in their homework, in knowing how they did at school. These are the moments that make the girls feel very good and make them feel excited and stimulated to continue and to get the best out of themselves. When our presence is good, it facilitates the child's ability to learn.

This requires us to be in a permanent state of observation and vigilance so that the activities do not become mechanised routines, guided by rules. As educators, we who work with girls must take care that the pedagogical practices we propose for children do not become mechanised actions, guided by rules, because caring and educating are two practices that must go hand in hand in a pleasant and creative way, allowing the two activities to develop as they should without suffocating or intimidating the children. It is a path we take every day and reality is our best teacher.

To conclude, we can say that to educate is to provide situations that may include games or other varied activities oriented towards integral learning. These can contribute to the development of the girls' abilities in interpersonal relationships, in their way of being and being with others in acquiring an attitude of acceptance, respect and trust. We take advantage of all the means and moments within our reach to offer or transmit education. Therefore, games, songs, competitions, poetry, theatres, handicrafts, everyday conversations, crafts, visualisation, conflicts, fights ... All these moments are excellent spaces for us to educate our children. And with them we learn a lot and work daily on the attitudes that are essential to care for and live together as a family.

