

A NEW PEDAGOGICAL READING OF DE LA SALLE AS AN INNOVATIVE FORCE FOR THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

**Bro. Diego A. Muñoz León fsc
ULSA Chihuahua, México**

A. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of his experience as an educator, John Baptist De La Salle became aware of the deficiencies of teachers in the small schools that were being organized under the sponsorship of the parishes of France in the XVII century. This preoccupation arose during his school meetings in 1679 and that fact “. provoked a commitment in himself towards a path of formation of teachers for 40 years...” (Laurarie, 2001:217), living and feeling with them, in the flesh, all the vicissitudes of the scholastic world (cf, Hengemüle, 2000:139). This was the determining aspect for the construction of a charismatic educational community, sustained in the quality of a generation of teachers that learned to develop an innovative project working around three main axes: inner directed thoughts, self-control and educational compromise (cf. Lauraire, 2001:221).

The main aim of this presentation is to prompt a new pedagogical reading of Lasallian thought, since it encloses in itself an innovative force that is capable of revitalizing life within our university communities. As an experience, we share the testimony of the teaching staff at ULSA Chihuahua, which has gone through a Lasallian transformation process and that, thanks to the contact with our Founder, is influencing the educational processes in our university.

B. INNOVATION IS PERTINENT TO LASALLIAN THOUGHT

If anything can characterize the movement that gave birth to Christian schools, it is its innovative drive. John Baptist De La Salle, upon making contact with the educational world, realized that there was a lack of teachers, that is, “ the quantitative shortage and the qualitative deficiency ...” (Hengemüle, 2000:140) that made impossible any attempt to develop an educational project. It is from there that his initial, definitive and founding commitment was to develop a pedagogical and spiritual accompaniment system directed towards the formation of a teaching community aware of their mission as Christians. The end result of this action was the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

From its origin, the binomial formation-context was consistent. In the contact with the realities inflicted daily on schools, De La Salle understood that schools needed to have stable communities –conformed by men of thought, action and community faith- capable of understanding, based on the Mystery of the Trinity, God’s salvific plan, that desires that all men be saved and arrive at the knowledge of truth. (cf. De La Salle, MTR 193, III). Within this framework, the generation of pedagogical-spiritual thought and an educational proposal was possible.

We understand pedagogical-spiritual thought as the reflection elaborated by De La Salle and his Brothers regarding the educational task, conceived as a transdisciplinary experience taken from transcendence, open to complexity and in complete dialog with reality. In itself it constitutes an educational utopia for all committed to Christian education. In this way, the book, **Meditations for the Time of Retreat**, represents the key work that expresses and consolidates this effort.

On the other hand, when we talk about an educational proposal, we refer to the systemization of the educational experience that led De La Salle and his Brothers to write such a classic text as **The Conduct of Schools**, which specifies for a certain reality a way

to work within a school, so that its use is limited to a society and to an era that no longer correspond to our concerns. It picks up the educational experience in a society characterized by containment, appearances, poverty and insecurity.

Now then, how can this reflective-formation experience be read from perspectives that influence education nowadays?

C. ASSOCIATIVE DIMENSION IN EDUCATION TODAY

Universities today are acquiring a moral awareness, facing the multitude of demands of society which, to develop its substantive faculties, must possess an organizational culture open to the personal experiences of dynamic and fraternal academic communities and also articulated to processes of change. The goal is to not only carry out an educational project, but to generate as well pertinent knowledge that opens up new paths in pedagogical reflection. For all of us Lasallians, it is not just a matter of working, but of providing reasons that encourage hope from an epistemological vision that is coherent with the Christian anthropological alternative.

Under the teaching-learning paradigm, universities are understood as human spaces where ideas and learning resources are shared and where it is possible to participate in the realization of common projects, all of this focusing on the creation of knowledge and exchange of information (cf. Vizcaíno Cova, 2006:301). It is the way in which one can acquire and use knowledge, skills, manners and values to stimulate new working methods and specific expertise, to increase expectations and to develop educational organizations (cf. Murillo, 2006:45). Paquay (2005:124) notes that, from the perspective of learning organizations, the involvement of people is a priority. There is no collective learning if there is no collective and strategic actor capable of developing a distributive and democratic leadership sustained in a strong organizational culture. This is the crucial point that was evident to De La Salle more than 300 years ago and that makes the dynamics of innovation relevant within our institutions, if we truly assume the charismatic consequences of Lasallian association.

In fact, we asked ourselves a lot of questions: how to create the acceptable conditions so our teachers can learn to learn from their experiences, organize multiple sources of information, learn to discard and to forget –when necessary- in order to make room for new learning (cf. Carneiro, 2004:37); how to prepare our new Teachers so they can develop, not only new professional and vocational competencies, but also new attitudes and intellectual and ministerial competencies, "... new ways to live in societies mobilized through the greater meaning of values such as justice, freedom, solidarity and acknowledgement of differences, as well as from a sense of equality and the common good, new ways to relate ourselves to our own collective memory, to the world we live in , to others and to ourselves..." (Télez y González, cited by Vizcaíno Cova, 2006:317).

D. A FORMATION TO INNOVATE

When we initiated an academic degree in Lasallian Formation in ULSA Chihuahua, we started to unleash a process which awakened self contemplation, criticism, self understanding and, consequently, the beginning of an associative itinerary that has served as the generating center of life within our university. From the dynamics of innovation, we would like to highlight the following:

- a. The presence of a community of Teachers that understands itself as a subject that learns, with a positive attitude towards processes of change and committed to the improvement of the formation process and its end results.
- b. The revision of the scholastic praxis sustained as much on the pedagogical as the organizational. "The pedagogical without the organizational is inviable and the

organizational without the pedagogical is ineffective.” (Murillo, 2006:26). De La Salle has been read based on our context, from the reality of our classrooms, in order to recreate the pedagogical-spiritual intuitions of his book, **Meditations for the Time of Retreat**, for the specific context of Chihuahua, even from the historical comprehension of **The Conduct of Schools**.

- c. The perception of a historical project, a Christian vision, where the university has taken on meaning as a space for Christian inspiration, committed to offering a renewed synthesis of faith and culture.

What have we achieved? Nothing less than a testimonial community that is comprised of teachers capable of knowing themselves, who have rediscovered new dimensions of their interior based on their being as educators and who today are committed to a project of Christian education. We are on the path towards the consolidation of an academic community with the capacity of transforming itself and its surroundings, provided that it develop its capacity to respond to the urgencies of reality: openness, flexibility, creativeness, testimonial ministry. It is a new organizational culture, torn from Christian anthropology, giving meaning to the human reality in which we live, close to the charismatic dynamic that brought it forth. For us, being faithful to that dynamic has become a sign of vitality and a vow for the future (cf. Capelle, 2003:19).

E. CONCLUSION

In this Postmodern era we can't lose sight of the fact that discussions help to determine who we are. The Lasallian pedagogical- spiritual reflection can become an innovative discourse within our university communities that, upon recreating itself, can unleash dynamisms of change through its capacity to connect the person of Teacher to the school environment. The centrality of the student is evident and determining in order to learn, unlearn and relearn, such as reality demands today. Even though it may seem paradoxical at first glance, the experience of returning to the sources that gave origin to Lasallian pedagogical-spiritual thought can be the starting point of a process of innovative education in our universities, promoting a community of learning capable of recreating an organizational culture of Christian inspiration and with a vision of salvation. De La Salle, teacher of teachers, has the answer.

Bibliographical References

- Capelle, Nicolas (2003). *La innovación educativa lasaliana*. Roma: Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas. Cuadernos MEL N° 4.
- Carneiro, Roberto (2004). Educação 2000. *PRELAC* N° 0. (Available at: http://www.unesco.cl/medios/biblioteca/documentos/educacao_2000_sobre_conhecimento_aprendizagem_para_novo_milenio_roberto_carneiro_revista_prelac_portugues_0.pdf?menu=/ing/biblio/docdig/) [Consultado 01/8/2006].
- Lauraire, Léon (2001). *La Conduite, approche contextuelle*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean Baptiste De La Salle. Cahiers Lasalliens 61.
- Hengemüle, Edgard (2000). *La Salle. Uma leitura de Leituras. O Padroeiro dos Professores na História da Educação*. Canoas: Centro Universitário La Salle.
- Murillo Torrecilla, F. Javier (2006). Panorámica general de las aportaciones innovadoras. En: Oficina Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe. *Modelos innovadores en la formación inicial docente*. Chile: UNESCO. Pp. 19-56.
- Paquay, Léopold (2005). Devenir des enseignants et formateurs professionnels dans une 'organisation apprenante'? De l'utopie à la réalité! *European Journal of Teaching Education*, Vol. 28, N° 2, pp. 111-128.
- Vizcaíno Cova, Ascensión (2006). Propuesta de Glosario Regional de América Latina sobre la Educación Superior. En: Instituto Internacional de la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (IESALC). *Informe sobre la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe 2000-2005. La metamorfosis de la Educación Superior*. Caracas: author, pp. 285-348.



De La Salle

100

UN SIGLO QUE TRASCIENDE

1905-2005



**A NEW PEDAGOGICAL READING OF DE LA SALLE
AS AN INNOVATIVE FORCE
FOR THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY**

**Diego A. Muñoz León fsc
Universidad La Salle Chihuahua**



INTRODUCTION

John Baptist De La Salle became aware of the shortage of qualified teachers and this concern became his committment to teacher formation for 40 years

We want to activate a new pedagogological reading of Lasallian thought because it contains a renovating force capable of revitalizing our universities

INNOVATION IS PERTINENT TO LASALLIAN THOUGHT

Without teachers there was no viable educational project

**DEVELOPMENT OF A PEDAGOGICAL-SPIRITUAL
ACCOMPANIMENT
BASED ON THE FORMATION-CONTEXT BINOMIAL**

**A stable community of
common thought, action and faith**

**PEDAGOGICAL-SPIRITUAL
THOUGHT**

**transdisciplinary experience taken
from open transcendence
to complexity of dialog
with reality**

Meditations for the Time of Retreat

EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL
**Systemization of the
scholastic experience
based on a specific culture**

The Conduct of Schools

THE ASSOCIATIVE DIMENSION OF EDUCATION TODAY

**Universities must depend on
a renewed organizational culture;
open to the experience of dynamic, flexible academic
communities receptive to processes of change.**

THE PARADIGM OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES UNIVERSITIES AS ORGANIZATIONS THAT LEARN

**Conditions to learn to learn
Development of multifactor competencies
Greater meaning to values
Relationship to the collective memory
Reasons that inspire hope**



FORMATION FOR INNOVATION

**This represents the beginning of an associative itinerary
that is based on a life-generating nucleus**



**A community as the subject that is committed to
learn in a process of change**

**A revision of the scholastic praxis based on the pedagogical and
organizational taken in context from the Meditations for the Time of Retreat**

**The perception of a Christian historical project
with the university as the space of Christian inspiration**



**We are on the road towards the consolidation of a testimonial community-
capable of responding to the urgencies of reality,
close to the charismatic dynamic that brought it forth.**

CONCLUSION

The Lasallian pedagogical- spiritual reflection can become an innovative discourse capable of unleashing dynamisms of change through its ability to connect the figure of the Teacher to his community and school environment.



***De La Salle
Teacher of teachers
Has the answer ...***