

**A CONTEXTUAL READING
OF THE PEDAGOGIC LASALLIAN ITINERARY
BETWEEN THE 17th AND 19th CENTURIES IN FRANCE**
*The hard balance between maintaining an educational heritage
and responding to new challenges*

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What were the key ideas that defined the educational identity of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in late nineteenth century France?

1. Pedagogy involves guiding children in their growth within an explicitly Christian aim.
 - a. Pedagogy is both science and art; science as a reasoned knowledge of the fundamental principles of education; art as in how to implement them. Science or art, the purpose of pedagogy is to educate, that is to guide the child completely, directing all his powers towards a greater good, towards God.
 - b. The purpose of education is the formation of the man and the Christian. A complete man should come from a child, where all physical, intellectual and moral faculties have been harmoniously developed; a useful citizen to society, able to fulfill all of his social duties; a sincere Christian, that is, a religious and moral man who believes in a supernatural end and acts accordingly, one who has faith in Jesus Christ and observes his precepts.
 - c. Education motivates and leads the free activity of man in order to help him acquire all the perfection that his nature demands. It is the continuous development of his potential and his abilities, until he has turned into the natural and supernatural ideal which God has assigned to him. And to the extent that man achieves this he will be able to know God, love Him, and serve Him in this world, therefore gaining eternal life.

2. A child needs guidance by an adult who is able to carry the sacred name of Christian teacher in a dignified way.
 - a. All the sophistry of *Emilio* by Rousseau leads to this erroneous principle: "Man is born good." Common sense tells us that, by himself, a child is unable to develop his full potential. He behaves as a consequence of original sin: good and evil coexist in him. Hence he must fight and, as far as it is possible, destroy the bad instincts within himself in order to ensure the development and triumph of good. This cannot be achieved only by instruction; moral education is necessary.
 - b. The educator is called to know his students. From one student to the other, there are many differences in temperament and physical constitution, moral character, the provisions of spirit, the will and the heart. The teacher can get to know students better not only by studying child psychology and taking permanent notes about their attitude, but also by remembering his own experience as a student.
 - c. The teacher is aware that virtue is inspired, rather than taught, and that it is inspired by example. In the guidance of a virtuous teacher there is a clarity that allows us to understand the beauty of duty, an attraction that makes us want to practice good and a persuasion that tends to subdue the will of authority figures. A teacher is that which he wants his disciples to be. Thus, his behavior will be an eloquent exhortation to do good.

3. The school must use all available resources to form well-integrated students. It is more worthy to have well-made heads than well-filled heads ("il vaut mieux des têtes bien faites que des têtes bien pleines").

- a. The body is the organ of the soul and participates in its dignity. Therefore, physical education should work with this purpose aided by the importance of personal hygiene, gymnastics, games, and the education of the senses.
- b. Intellectual education should provide students with the necessary tools to assimilate and engage the lessons taught. The lessons should enrich perception, bring culture to reason, enrich memory and the association of ideas, and cultivate imagination, attention and abstract thought's own operations, such as judgment, reasoning and language skills.
- c. Moral education has as its objective to clarify consciousness and strengthen the child's will, all from the model of Jesus Christ. Each child has a particular character, determined by his temperament and habits. Education should influence the direction of his ideas and his practical judgment, the management of his emotions and the development of actions. Meanwhile, the teacher must be aware that virtues and good habits are learned primarily by imitation within an appropriate environment.
- d. Social education must start the child and young person's journey in their rights and duties as a citizen. Profound social, economic and political changes require the school to prepare students in the mutual and constant practice of charity and fraternal life, in order to force them to leave their selfish indifference behind and to live in the communion of outlooks among their fellow-citizens and compatriots.
- e. Religious education has to do with the development of the natural and supernatural provisions that lead a child to love God and to live under his law. Through this, the child will learn to know Jesus Christ, Mediator and Savior, to venerate the Church, and to esteem the grace and the sacraments. They are thus initiated into the practice of Christian virtues.
- f. The first teaching of Christian schools consists of religious instruction. A disciple of J. B. de La Salle should be concerned above all with developing Christians. That is the primary objective of their mission.

4. Education should adapt to the needs of the child: "The school is for the child and not the child for the school" ("L'école est pour l'enfant et non l'enfant pour l'école").

- a. Teaching is the methodical communication of a body of knowledge, realized by the teacher instructing students. The value of education depends primarily on the excellence of the intended aim and of certain general conditions.
- b. Instruction consists of a set of precise and coordinated knowledge elements that the student assimilates through personal work. But the school does not prepare students for exams or contests, rather for social life. It is not a person instructed in bookish notions who is better prepared to succeed in a given career. It is a person who comes to understand ideas, shares them, and enriches them with their own experience and that of others.
- c. The main concern of current teaching is to be practical; that is, to adapt to the needs of life and to be able to respond to them from knowledge acquired at school. Passivity in the classroom should be avoided. In order to do this, the teacher must ensure student collaboration as content is addressed, developing as far as possible all of his faculties harmoniously.
- d. The teaching unit has its purpose in the common spirit that drives it, which is none other than the Christian spirit. This will also be achieved to the extent that the teacher understands that no specialty is dissociated from the rest. Nothing is an end in itself. All knowledge is interconnected and works together in educating an integrated child.

- e. Teaching should be rational and adapted to the intelligence of the students. It is alive and active, progressive, applied and controlled, supported by well-studied methods, practical, moral and Christian. The art of teaching is learned through good pedagogy, seeking and developing key principles and implementing the best teaching methods. Such rules lie in the very nature of the human spirit and are the essence of things that are the subject of such activity.

5. Teachers will build their common educational endeavors through association, learning from each other through educational conferences and pedagogical memoirs. This exercise works in concert with the vitality of *The Conduct of Christian Schools* and exercises its permanent renewal.

- a. An educational conference is an established debate among teachers who, under the chairmanship of an experienced teacher, discuss issues related to education or training. Among some advantages of educational conferences we find: they offer teachers the opportunity to question professional issues and to share ideas, procedures and satisfactory results; to renew in some the desire of fulfilling their duties of state, a desire that monotony itself tends to reduce every day; they allow the president of these meetings to offer advice as necessary.
- b. Pedagogical memoirs are written for educational purposes and in a simple literal way. Its main merit is the correctness of insights and the practical nature of its conclusions. After being read in an educational conference, a discussion is proposed, during which everyone gives their opinion in total freedom, indicating that which seems particularly important and the points in which they disagree with the author. They defend their opinion if the arguments of their opponents are not convincing. Finally, the president summarizes the observations and formulates his own judgment.