

De La Salle's Unique Educational Pedagogy

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Abstract

De La Salle, which is Mandatory in all the schools run by the brothers. It also brings out his profuse thinking on the conduct of the Christian schools and voices the pains undertaken by him to groom teachers into role models. It also gives a graphic picture of the learning process, the curriculum vitae to be adopted. The La Salle instinct which believes in the flexible, management of school hours highlights his emancipated thinking. A highly personalized teaching programme is compulsory for all teachers towards both enlightening, disciplining children and also providing them an atmosphere of ambience. Religious instruction is the nucleus of De La Salle's education of Philosophy. A holistic approach is considered very important in handling students hailing from different stratas of society. Individual attention to the students is considered a must towards their evolvment into full fledged citizens of the future.

KEYWORDS: De La Salle, Schools, Brothers, Religious, Philosophy

Introduction

To be a missionary icon is forging an identity. It gets manifested in the task embarked upon, in the formation of relationships, to achieve the inner being, in the symphony of creation. The level of dimension that De La Salle has attained is unique. It is formulated on a hierarchy of values that has its effect not only on his own identity but also what takes place within the classrooms (George Van Grieken, 1703).

When De La Salle began to conceive and develop his educational programme he realized it could be brought to fruition with educators by vocation. For this vital reason, he personally dedicated himself to cultivate the identity of the educator. He again realized that this formed part of a broader programme his grand scheme of education (Bedel, Henri, 1726).

This scheme is built upon three irreplaceable pillars. He sensitised thoroughly, and distinguished between the superficial and be authentic. He responded to the needs of others and be acutely aware of the presence of God, among in the children and young people and he is called upon to serve. Secondly he should be a man of professional conscience who feels it is his special task to acquire an excellent preparation to fully accomplish the goals he has set for himself. What is very crucial about his role is – he is a mediator “a mediator of Jesus Christ and the Church”. Thus it turns out to be his life vocation, a dedication which goes beyond merely earning a living (Bryk, 1984).

Pedagogical experiences:

Thus the teacher becomes a fraternal sign by which teachers relate to one another, the students, share their lives and live the Gospel. The community becomes the teacher of teachers. They encourage the exchange of pedagogical experiences and search for the most effective methods of

communication. It rests in the acquisition of values which will be passed on to the students. It promotes a reflection on the reality of youth and their corresponding educational demands. The community is the authentic protagonist of the educational plan and it is the one factor that can guarantee the continuity of the work of education (Buetow, 1988).

Thus the Lasallian plan of education, which is practical in structure, caters to the service of the poor, although open to all. It is a school where boys are happy, for it is a school of quality and one that prepares for life's unknown eventualities. It is subject to the full development of each and every student and is not iron-bound by traditional programmes. Above all it imparts a Christian education based on the criteria and values of the Gospel. Its ultimate objective is "to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children and young people". Thus it is a life-long, never ending journey. It is both a conversion and transformation of persons which does not happen overnight (Campos and Miguel, 1975). It is more or less a process everyone should undergo. It includes those who are discovering their vocation as educators as well as those who are experienced in their vocation. The process does not end but the horizons are always changing and demanding new answers. De La Salle's perspective has also strong currents of the teacher-biologist. As scientist the teacher who is empathetic has to objectively analyse the real environs, his successes and failures, his tendencies and possibilities. It is his duty to arrange the proper conditions that will achieve the desired results. He has to consciously study his protege's behaviour and dispassionately point out and control the lapses. The detachment can also help him to categorize and classify those entrusted to his care. It involves selection and prevents waste of time. The trouble shooters can be controlled and it need be rooted out. The attitude is based on logic. It has however its shortcomings. It is bind to the mystery of God's grace which is capable of detecting surprises in mental, emotional and spiritual growth of students (De La Salle and John Baptist, 1993).

The word 'education' is derived from the Latin word 'Educare' which means to educate. The process of education includes conservation, transmission and renewal of culture. In conserving and transmitting the inherent quality of a conservative society, the dynamic aspect of education requires that in addition to conserving and transmitting, it should also renew the culture by modifying, supplementing and displacing it. Such conservation, transmission and renewal of culture need to be consistent (De La Salle and John Baptist, 1988). It is a radical challenge to individuals. Therefore, "Education is concerned with the modification of behaviour. Education is a life long process commencing from the cradle to the grave. Life is education and education is life. Whatever broadens the horizon deepens the insights, refines the reactions stimulates the thoughts and feelings in Education. Every human situation is an educational situation. Living itself becomes learning. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said, 'Education is the process by which one conserves valuable elements in our culture and discards the waste. By means of it, we help the young to become good citizens of the country, what in simpler societies was done by the family, the religious, social and political institutions has to be done by the educational institutions today. Thus Education is the sum total of all the processes by means of which a person cultivates abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive value in the society in which he lives (Deville, Raymond, 1994).

It is the reshaping of Life's forms with end (meaning) and without end (termination). Education is dealing critically and creatively with reality and the discovery of how to communicate. Education is the name of that constant reshaping or transforming in which embodied meanings emerge and gets uncovered (Lewis and Warren Hamilton, 1978).

It is a work especially concerned with creation, re-creation, fashioning and refashioning of form. Form is not an arbitrary element of organisation, but rather an arrangement in due order with relationship to one another. Thus it gets transforms into discipline, an art, a fashioning according to needs which sets boundaries and limits (Koch and Carl, 1990).

Human development process:

Human development is a complex process, which is subject to heredity and environment. The role of education is the direct growth, resulting in the creation of socially outstanding individuals. Ideal growth includes increased qualitative improvement harmonious development and patterned co-ordination. In short education results in preplanned and directed growth (Laube and Robert, 1970).

According to Vatican-II it is a document pertaining to Catholic Church. True education aims at the all-round formation of the human personalities. It blossoms the intellectual faculties to judge rightly, to hand over the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a respect for values and to endeavor creative and aesthetic faculties to equip them in their professional life (Mann and William, 1992). Education is training the sense to be receptive, sensitive and discriminative to give right direction and bodies to be able host self. That is, education educates the mind to recognize body only as host of the self in outlook.

Life is often compared to a journey or pilgrimage. The job of educate is to ensure that the past pilgrimage is intentionally remembered and made valid for the present promising to move towards a future. Education is often viewed to be synonymous with learning as the required experience of any sort intellectual, emotions or sensory. Most education is a product of experience. It is the process by perceptions, the experience of the person. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are transmitted to the members of the community (McCabe and Herbert, 1986).

Thus looked upon, education may be defined as learning acquired through formal and informal processes. At the formal level it is learning from a teacher, mentor, priest or other adult specifically charged with instructional duties and informal acquisition of learning through interaction with family peer group and community. In modern societies education encompasses books, magazines, radio, television and computer networks. But normal education is not accomplished by purely mental instruction on exhortation out of a text-book. The heart must be sensitised and engaged. It is good, if the teacher proves himself to be a good example. It is from the example of noble men that nobility is learned, and extraordinary role models of wisdom emerge (Luke and Salm, 1992).

Very often we are misled by what is called quality education. It does not refer to a system that is glued to competition, grading, standardizing and herding of children, making machines out of men so that they become 'Producers and consumers', lop-sided creatures, power-hungry leaders who learn from each other how to excel in corruption. Quality education in the true

sense produces persons with thoughts and feelings with eagerness to taste the elixir of life (Flavien, 1959).

The Christian perspective usually refers to an existential acceptance (faith) of an event. The event in question is God's self communication in history which cultivates in Jesus Christ (Revelation). This same acceptance holds that revelation is crystalised and handed on in the books of the old testament and the new testament and the life of the believing community (Tradition). The active response of those who listen to this message will bring about renewal of all things in Christ. This faith event becomes the interpretative frame work of every Christian and perfect relationship with Jesus Christ becomes the quest for fullness of life (Bernard, 1721).

Christian education:

Education according to the Christian self understanding is to be engaged in participation in God's own plan and action, viewed not in its starting point, but in its on going process towards its goal (La Salle and Jean Baptist de, 1963). The Christian understanding of education is holistic and signifies far more than merely intellectual instruction or an instruction to moral values, or classes of catechism. It aims at introducing persons to a new significance of human life and initiating them, placing God at the center and bringing the individual into a right relationship with God and fellow beings (La Salle and Jean Baptist de, 1963).

Education needs ministry in order to remind believers that the gifts are to be used for common purpose. Education needs ministry to recall the fallible condition of the human person and the partial nature of knowledge. Education is ministerial to the extent it rejects self sufficiency promotes the yearning for the transcendent. Education is ministerial when it cultivates both memory and insight, ensures information and appreciation. It causes both proficiency and reverence; matures both learning and faith generates both skills and inner disposition (Collectif et al., 1974). However, the contemporary nature of education and ministry must not be lost sight of. It should keep pace with the times and answer to the demands of the existing scenario.

Dream and Epiphany of De La Salle:

John Baptist De La Salle was deeply moved by the way in which 'the children of the artisans and the poor' were abandoned and left to themselves. As a practical response to his prayerful and reflective consideration of this fact in relation to God's plan of salvation, he came to discern, in faith, what God wanted the mission of his schools to be (Collectif et al., 1974). In order to respond to this divine plan and also to situations of distress similar to those that he knew, his vision desired to be present to the geographical situation where he lived, "as part of church's work in spreading the Gospel". His educational vision was 'concerned above all with the educational needs of the poor as they strive to become aware of their dignity and to live and to be recognized as human beings and children of God (Maurice).

He envisioned that his teachers 'participate in the Church's Mission by consecrating their lives to God in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world' as ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ. He envisioned educational activity as a 'Ministry': The application of the word Ministry for the educational activities indicates that his vision is based on the Gospel values. He considered the Teachers as "Ambassadors and Ministers of Jesus Christ. He appealed them to act as 'representing Jesus Christ himself'.

Therefore, for De La Salle, a teacher 'to be imbibed with the spirit of Faith, contemplate in his prayer under the guidance of the Holy spirit the mystery of Christ and the unique plan of God who reveals himself in life and who wishes the same all in Christ. That demands inturn attentiveness to each of the students especially to those most in need, availability to all in an attitude of brotherly companionship, helping them to discover, appreciate and assimilate both human and Gospel values and making them to realize that they are children of God. The teachers have to provide neither a narrow 'religious' education nor a purely 'secular' one. De La Salle makes no distinction between search for salvation and professional obligations. Similarly ascetical or professional practices are not the matters he calls into the process of Judgment. They had to lead the young people to be good Christians and responsible citizens.

His educational policies centered on the young, adapted to the times in which they lived and designed to prepare them to take their rightful place in society. Teach them without using clever words, lest the cross of Christ, source of our sanctification, becomes void of meaning: Nothing you say would produce any fruit in their minds or hearts. For these children are simple and for the most part poorly brought up. Those who help them to save themselves must speak simply, so that every word will be clear and easy to understand. His vision was characterized by the determination to make the means of salvation available to the young people through quality education and by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ (Tome, 1963).

Salvation:

For John Baptist de La Salle, his schools must be Christian, so visibly Christian that they be 'signs of the Kingdom of God' and 'means of salvation'. Salvation does not necessarily mean in religious sense and it could mean uplifting towards human advancement in all sense. John Baptist De La Salle believed that teaching children was above all a question of hearts and that was essential to establish bond of affection and cordiality with all the pupils. A pedagogy which was essentially preventive provides a vigilant 'Good shepherd' a model portrayed in the Gospel a practical psycho-pedagogy, and a discerning manner to act towards them. The vision of De La Salle, is touching hearts, teaching minds and transforming lives (Tome, 1963).

The Canallian Pedagogy constitutes the core of his entire thinking on education. De La Salle's approach and his insights into the real life of children in his schools have resulted in the development of texts that remarkably mirror on the work of educational ministers today. DLS and his first bunch of brother teachers anticipate, the present experiences of teachers and students. His profuse dealing with the "Conduct of the Christian schools" summarizes the pain of De La Salle and his devoted teachers developed towards developing the conduct to be followed in running schools". However the book the conduct of schools is not solely the work of De La Salle. In fact it is an end product, emerging out of the living experiences of the early brothers. "It is a product of the collective teaching experiences of the first brothers and it evolves through the interactions of these men with De La Salle" (La Salle).

Conduct of Schools: An insight

The conduct of schools was introduced as a collection of Personal Recommendations by the Missionary educationist De La Salle. The text was supplemented by suggestions from the Brothers who penned down their

personal experiences towards influencing and benefiting one another. The conduct was intended as a guideline for teachers towards achieving their goals. At the same time it had a far-ranging effect. It produced uniformity in both thought and learning processes (Maurice).

Again this written advice motivated De La Salle to make two important innovations. Individual Teaching was substituted by a whole class teaching. Individual instruction gave way to simultaneous teaching where students were considered a single unit. This drove out prejudices, partiality and preferences which were detrimental to a classroom atmosphere. The second innovation was the use of the mother tongue instead of the traditional Latin instruction (Poutet et al., 1950).

Guidelines for education:

Thus ‘The Conduct of Schools’ was a collection of Guidelines for teachers, headmasters and inspectors touching upon four major areas.

- a) Curriculum
- b) Teaching methods
- c) Social Organisation
- d) The virtues and qualities of a teacher

The conduct of schools followed up-to-date teaching methods of the time. It was a Socratic method, comprising observation, comprehension, repetition and memorising. He paid special emphasis to the appointment of teachers. The system of School Management described in the conduct is valuable even today. However the earliest version of the conduct was on the dogmatic side and recommended syllabus be prescribed in detail. However, this religious strait-jacket attitude is unacceptable to the students of today. “Shared Mission – a new strategic option was approved for the first time by the General chapter in 1993. Among the La Salle Brothers the real break through and renewal in thinking came about in the New Rule in 1996. It was to include Lay people in the Lasallian foundation.

Lasallian foundation:

- 1) The association of Brothers and Lay People
- 2) Preparing people for the common mission
- 3) A community of those who wished to associate themselves with the idea
- 4) In culturation of the common mission
- 5) The Lasallian family as the embodiment of the shared mission (Campos Marino and Miguel-Adolfo)

It outlines the precedent towards running schools and disciplinary measures to be adopted. In fact the text of the Manuscript of 1706 was determined 15 years before its first printing in 1720. The text developed in the Institute is a dialectic attitude which has never been opposed since inception. It voices the need to have clear practical adapted conditions for putting the rules to practice. Again the rule formulated by him subjected him to frequent questioning and reformulation of them. De La Salle and brothers felt this freedom demanded regulations often rendered an educational tradition perennial. Therefore this text is deemed to be one of the great sources of the Lasallian project (Campos Marino and Miguel-Adolfo).

The project is both pragmatic and inductive born of the needs of the children. Hence the learning processes were divided into lessons and levels. This inturn facilitated the division of children in groups that suited the needs.

Again a flexible management of school time was considered to be an important pre-requisition. The teachers had to learn the rudiments of class room management. They were also responsible for establishing the psychological, social and moral atmosphere conducive towards making the environment pleasant and informative. A strict regimentation was followed throughout the day with nothing left to chance. It was very vital that students were kept focused on their goals. Besides, individual student placements learning activities promotion were carefully monitored (Rodrigue et al., 1988).

The brothers were instructed to follow a Personalised Teaching Programme. Students were seated on the basis of their background and merit. This practice enabled light hearted students to benefit by seating themselves between two serious students (Aroz and Louis-Marie). De La Salle also emphasized on the assignments given to each student taking into account his calibre and aptitude. The inspector of schools had duties assigned to students based on the information obtained from both parent registration interview and placement examination. New places were assigned to students every month based on the results of monthly examination. Thus this flexibility enhanced personalised teaching.

This is the most detailed chapter in his part. The teaching of writing is viewed as a type of apprenticeship for the student. The writing program focused upon the corrective role of the teacher, emphasizing proper care for the tools of writing by the student, and highlighted the necessity of good working conditions. There were two lessons in writing, block style writing and slanted style writing however each lesson is divided into six levels (Campos and Miguel).

Spelling and arithmetic are also taught with an emphasis on practical application. In learning to spell, students were involved in fine activities. Copying, keeping a note book, doing home work, taking dictation, legal documents, leases, deeds and official reports. A four step approach is used in the teaching of arithmetic. First, a model example is presented in the blackboard and copied by the students in their notebook. Spelling and arithmetic are kept in the same notebook. These notebooks are corrected weekly by the teacher. Secondly the students follow the solution of each example problem presented on the blackboard. Numbers are changed to make the examples progressively more difficult. Thirdly the teacher is responsible to keep a record of the students who work problems on the blackboard; this guarantees that all the students have a turn at blackboard work. Fourthly students are assigned to create and solve new problems for home work (Poutet and Yves).

Religion and religious instruction were essential in De La Salle's education of philosophy and religion was the major focus in the school programme. The day began with and ended with prayer and prayer played a major part in the schedule. The chapter in Part I of the catechism is a pedagogical one. Traditional recitation is transformed into a fine art of questioning. Sensibility and concern is to be shown for the slow learner, De La Salle is more concerned in the teaching of catechism with teacher – student interaction than with a body of doctrine. The teaching of the catechism is the only time when all of the students of the class follow the same lesson. There are no levels in the catechism lesson; and the catechism lesson concludes with the personal application or resolution, and not with the usual review.

“In the conduct of schools, the pupil’s day began and ended with a characteristic ‘exercise’ one of whose aims was the teaching of interior life. It is therefore, something very typical of De La Salle’s thinking. It reflects his wish to take into account the whole person with a view to a ‘unified’ education. The exercise was particularly for the more interior mind, to the extent that it developed a real and lucid self awareness. In fact, it served to reinforce the sense of one’s responsibility in the conduct of one’s own life”.

Importance of vigilance:

The importance given to ‘vigilance’ may be thought surprising today. But it is interesting to note that the first condition for a school to run well, according to the founder is essentially the quality of educational relationship and not the structures, the regulations, the discipline, even if these aspects have their place in his work³³. According to ‘Nouveau Dictionnaire Francais’ of Pierre Richelt (1709), the definition for vigilance is “The great attention one gives to looking at something. Behavior of a person who is alert and who is keeping watch over something so that all goes well as one would like”. In Lasallian tradition, several texts of the Founder are based upon writers commenting on ‘Vigilance’, he insists on the educational aspects of this attitude. Vigilance is also seeing the young person with eyes of faith, and this gives it a spiritual dimension. According to Brother Agathon’s commentary (18th C), “this attention must therefore, be peaceful, not agitated, not uneasy, not constraining and without partiality. All this makes it more perfect”. It is therefore, an attitude connected with the exercise of the educational profession. It is the realization on the part of the educator of his responsibility. It is a conscious and generous commitment to the educational relationship. For De La Salle, vigilance is the art of attending to details (Pungier and Jean).

John Baptist De La Salle sees vigilance as being very much more than supervision. He makes it an essential component of the exercise of the Ministry of Christian education. It is seen as a pastoral attitude par excellence, to invite him and help him achieve high quality of spiritual growth. It is nothing but to educate the student in true personal freedom and responsible independence, in an atmosphere of mutual trust (Divers, 1914).

De La Salle understood the importance of the thorough personal knowledge of each pupil with their psychological differences, which made it possible to adapt teaching to his ability. Certainly such knowledge would help the kind of attention being focused on the student. Teacher relationship thus turns out to be a moving force behind centering the school on the students (Pedro and Gil, 1994).

Personal characterization of education:

De La Salle favored associative dynamism in classroom situation. He implemented this objective by a system of assignments which involve the students in the management of the school and in turn taught them their responsibilities. This method facilitated an impartial treatment of all the children in accordance with their age and personal characteristics (Henri Bedel, 1997).

Participation implied content and sustained activity by each person. It was virtually a process of apprenticeship. At certain movements participation was a form of group exercises, when errors were corrected and proper answers were listed out. Thus in the Lasallian schools, the pupil was never found to be a passive listener (Henri Bedel, 1997). It was participation born of solidarity.

Officers were selected by the students themselves but De La Salle opposed giving the student officers total freedom. In fact he spelt out certain restrictions. Hence a Lassallian associative dynamism was introduced at the very inception of the institute. La Salle was also against corporal punishment.

He cautioned the brothers to be controlled and moderate in the use of punishment. This message is crystal clear. In case the teacher has problems with discipline, it is imperative they do a bit of self appraisal and then take on the responsibility of disciplining problem children. De La Salle also insisted on developing soft strategies for students who were slow to learning process. In one of his Meditations he says that winning the heart of the child is nothing short of a miracle. Thus De La Salle's pedagogical genius has immense value for teachers. In the history of the brothers of the Christian schools four administrative positions constitute the teacher support system. They were in the community director, director of Novices, the supervisor of the new teacher and inspector of schools (Henri Bedel, 1997).

The supervisor of new teachers was supposed to possess ethical and professional standards that can help them to manage people from different strata of societies. The community director was in charge of the community house. He delegated his authority to the inspector of schools. The inspector of the schools was selected on a rotational basis. In his absence a principal teacher was designated to function in his place. The inspectors of teachers not only teach but also drafted the curriculum. De La Salle's commitment to collaborating with the entire schools community is dynamic and Christian aimed at reaching goals that were Hellenistic in character (Jean-Louis, 2006).

What is vital to remember and accept a Christian Association is always a collective thing – very often a family set-up. A series of local bodies meeting was organised involving Brothers and Lay colleagues, head teachers, directors, teachers, governors, pupils. Hence all those who are involved are expected to act with thoughtfulness, foresightedness commitment and perseverance exemplified in De La Salle and to meet with the demands of a rapidly changing society.

Conclusion

I recommended my soul to God and next all the brothers of the society of the Christian schools with whom he has associated me. La Salle's educational philosophy is remarkable for it is innovative adjustable and flexible. It can best be described as experimental training which results in intellectual, spiritual and personal growth. This is manifested in the schools where students are led to cultivate a natural boldness, a sense of adventure and a power of imagination exhibiting inturn firmness and a sense of adventure to discovering the creativity and presence of God in the world around them. The modern global scenario is one of cut throat competition where the thrust area is consumerism, money multiplication and power politics. The Lasallian School is worth cherishing in this context. Its aim and vision is valve oriented. Its focus is on educating young souls, sensitizing their hearts towards evolving them to be God's special children spelling out the catholic pedagogy of love through the lens of compassion.

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