

WHAT TO BE DONE?

Each country, each region has a culture, traditions and a way of thinking which, in the course of time, have shaped a personal and collective approach to the reality of the child and the young person. Societies are very different on this point.

As lasallians though we can suggest several possible avenues of commitment.

1. To know our national or regional reality.

That means: contacting the national or international bodies which are working on the topic. In each country which has signed up, a government group is working solely on the Convention, its application, its consistency with the national laws. Each country has had to face up to the Convention. It is useful to know what *reserves* your country has set aside for ratifying the Convention and why.

Furthermore, it can be very worthwhile to contact specialist jurists who are reframing national laws or are members of the body supervising what each country has had to put in place.

This first step is important. It ensures one's participation in the long term and in the structural changes because the defence of the Rights of the Child is made mainly in the juridical field. We have to be there.

In certain countries the municipalities have all the representatives of the Rights of the Child. We could be there in a systematic way, consistent with a district plan.

2. To make aware and to form.

The Convention is hardly known among us; we think that our ordinary educational commitment is sufficient. It certainly has its importance and shares in the defence and promotion of children and young people. It can, however, receive new blood in the Convention procedure and can be enriched by a universal consensus.

It seems very normal to suggest the organisation of a cycle of improving awareness of and formation in the rights of the child to the profit of the members of the educational communities. As this effort in increasing awareness is founded in lasallian spirituality, it ought to concern all members of the lasallian family: communities of Brothers, establishments, bodies of lasallian formation, etc.

3. To know the needs

We can go about this work of finding needs within each of our establishments, but also outside them, case by case, in order to bring adapted answers (for example, search out the youngsters who do not eat in the morning or at midday; those who arrive tired in the morning because they work before class or late in the evening; those who are responsible for the family; those who carry burdens which are too heavy to speak about...).

It is, though, equally proper to draw up a state of the more general areas of needs of young people within each of the Districts, in the form of a report. Such a locating is written into the logic of proposal 14 already quoted: "to identify the violations of the rights of the child in the immediate locality". The proposal speaks in terms of violation, but to start with it may be easier to speak in terms of locating needs.

In this respect it can be stated that the Australian lasallians have worked remarkably for 12 years with the telephone line Kids/Help Line which is open 24 hours a day: 80 operators receive 30,000 calls a week from all over the continent!

4. Participating in the restoring of self-esteem

Studies have shown how certain youngsters who were among the most disadvantaged and excluded, underwent real narcissistic suffering: who am I that society does not respect me, and does not give me a chance? Living in difficult areas, often from immigrant backgrounds, these youngsters, feeling excluded from society, with no self-esteem, end by dropping out of school at an early age. They see no future for themselves, and quickly descend into drug-taking, delinquency, etc. Some of these young people are in our establishments. The narcissistic suffering can also stem from painful family situations: who am I that my parents take so little account of me?

These young people must be helped to regain their self-confidence and to raise their self-esteem above their sufferings and their frustrations: "you are so precious in my eyes". This task requires among other things that members of the educational community should be trained in the techniques of **resilience**. To see a child through spectacles of resilience helps us not to reduce him to a problem, never to make "a case" out of him, but to reveal and develop his potential, to use it to help him to rebuild his life. It is to be hoped that there would be at least one person, trained to listen to the young, present in each of our establishments.

5. To comfort the families

To help the young recover their self-esteem can also mean helping their parents to face up to the new challenges whatever form they take.

There lies a real urgency and the Colloquium 'The Families' has already given possible lines of action (cf N° 245 of the Bulletin of the Institute p. 14-17).

Moreover, why not go further down the little known road of "schools for parents" which would offer parents who wished a place for reflection where they would be helped to solve one or other problem? The lasallians of Andalusia in Spain have a lot of experience in this.

Ireland has provided educators to ensure the link between college and family. Brothers are working among them.

6. To help young mothers in distress

Article 6 of the Convention declares that '**every child has an inherent right to life**'.

This article has been the object of discussion. We are going further by saying that 'the unborn child has a right to life'. It is a great debate in which we have very little presence; and yet we must take our place there, respecting personal decisions.

Lasallians have developed very conclusive initiatives for young mothers seeking their bearings and immediate help: in France the teams of Br Auguste Théron give information, find accommodation, listen and give legal help; in Australia lasallians have opened a day centre and a crèche for 25 mothers and a small residential centre for 11 mothers and their babies.

It is a vital stage for a welcome worthy of the unborn child or already born.

7. To promote courses of sexual and affective education

It is often in the years at college, high school, university, higher education that convictions are formed about loving relationships, respect for partners, commitment as a couple, responsible parenting... a whole human ecology waiting to welcome the child.

In the Cameroons a project of long duration has been organized by Brother Roque Delud.

We have a serious educational and Christian responsibility in these matters. What are our policies in the educational establishments and in the district? What process have we in place? With whom?

8. To promote the education of girls

This is a great international concern.

For two reasons: firstly because developing countries, bogged down with financial problems, overlook the formation of girls; then because it is proved that lasting social changes, particularly in these countries, are the result of patient, specific, determined action by groups of educated women.

We see a good example in India with the work of Brother Sebastian and his teams who work with 10000 women.

An estimated 78% of women in Afghanistan cannot read or write. Worldwide, an estimated 580 million women and girls cannot read or write.

With reference to our local situation, what must we decide?

9. To put culture within the reach of the most disadvantaged groups and those who are excluded.

This is exactly what the first Brothers did, in company with John Baptist de La Salle in Rheims, Rouen, Paris and elsewhere. Our schools are certainly fulfilling this mission in part today, by admitting young people of all sociological-professional categories and offering them formation in general, technological and professional teaching. In these schools, though, we must make these young people more welcome, improve the ways of helping their education when they have a great deal to catch up, or are excluded from the educational system or are having difficulty in integrating socially.

In certain cases a good quality boarding school can be a good substitute for a deficient family life. It is true that more and more social educators prefer to leave young people in the family. However, it has to be admitted that sometimes the youngster needs to rebuild his life in a more peaceful and structured environment. The lasallians of the Balearics and Australia have pondered this question.

Equally, a welcome can be arranged for young members of social minorities who are often victims of discriminatory practices: travellers, youngsters in the suburbs, young who are handicapped, children who are in hospital for long periods, youngsters in prison... For each of these groups there can be one proposal or another adapted for teaching or accompaniment. The lasallians of New Zealand have adapted for the numerous minority groups they receive in their three establishments: as also the lasallians of Papua-New Guinea, of Cameroun. Examples could be multiplied from Bolivia, Guatemala, Colombia, India, the Philippines, the Ivory Coast, Italy, Palencia in Spain...

There are some prophetic actions seen occasionally, such as the uprooting of an establishment in the town centre towards a suburb or the opening of small primary schools as the lasallians of Turkey have done voluntarily with their eight recent elementary schools.

Some help and school support by associations can certainly be easily started and responsibility accepted and maintained by an establishment (not simply on a financial level, but a human one too: calling on the older students for some teaching, on teachers for organising, etc.) Facilities of this kind exist in France, Belgium, California with the Leo Center, and elsewhere.

10. To make basic experiences happen.

Before becoming someone in the town, the child needs to grow, to be surrounded by adults who suggest aims and plans. The Convention certainly gives the family this role in education, but the young person – especially the most disadvantaged – must complete family support by basic experiences outside the family circle. This young person must be urged on, called upon at his/her liveliest: that is done by projects. taking risks, an appeal to share in, to his/her own strengths.

The network of San Miguel Schools in the United States has gambled on this vital dynamism. And it is working!

11. To educate for solidarity, for social justice and peace.

Finally, all that has been said would have no meaning if a true education for solidarity, social justice and peace were not at the heart of our establishments. Education for solidarity represents the corollary of all pedagogy based on the welcome of the most disadvantaged young people: what use would it be to pay particular attention to the poor without at the same time educating the body of pupils we receive, to solidarity with them? Particular attention to the poor and educational service of the poor, the promotion of rights of the child

and respect for his dignity must not be written into a vertical structure of the exchange, which would amount to no more than a form of outdated paternalism. We must be constantly seeking a horizontal exchange. This horizontal exchange means that if our attention is attracted by poverty, it must also be attracted by a solidarity which we are educating towards. Poverty is not solely a measurable objective reality, it is also and above all the object of a struggle and a fight to make this evil disappear on a long-term basis.

What programs and processes are we developing in the educational centres? What projects of solidarity are we suggesting to the young people we live with? In these areas the work being done by inter-district exchange groups (France, England, USA with Asia, Africa, Central America...) bear lasting fruit in the minds of the young people and adults who benefit from it.