

OUR EXISTENCE: RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS A GIFT THAT GENERATES MEANING



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The work of education is, in reality, an enormous adventure, a search of ways and paths by which human beings definitively get closer to the essence of things, of beings, of life. It is an enormous process without beginning or end in which the human being who from childhood started off with an almost absolute dependence on others, can (must?) become a mature human being, able to define his freedom and exercise it to continue growing.

The field where the educator works is amazing: as opposed to biological and social determinism, it is necessary to reclaim what it means to be a human being characterized by multiplicity, versatility, flexibility and a vast array of potentials. In a society where the development of knowledge depends on the "objective, the human operation, the intimate characteristics of feelings, thoughts, values, etc.," that development often does not take place, limiting the knowledge of the person and his growth. However, it also confirms our hope: with the human person everything is possible.

This individual's existence obliges the educational process to confront an irregular, multiple, changing, but enormously enriching reality.

An educator must realize that his/her work is a profession in the most classical sense of the term. "Profession" derives from "to profess" and implies a kind of vocation, altruism, and generous self-giving intrinsic to certain activities. The greatness and the enormous responsibility of professions, is rooted in the recognition that society gives "permission" to certain subjects, professionals, to play a role of certain influence in others' lives. In the tradition of some professions: judges, doctors, priest... access to intimate and personal aspects or the exercise of power over the lives of others is allowed, solely on the basis of a specific and restricted preparation and a recognized and demanding morality.

Nowadays, educators are placed, rightly so and together with others, in this category of professionals. The opportunity to take part in the vital growth process of another person, the opportunity that allows the educator to project his own life in reaching out to the lives of many others entails sacrifice (understood as self-giving, with an always unpredictable compensation). And there always remains the obligation of excellence in the professional exercise (that implies a careful and continued theoretical and moral preparation and practice).

The demands of a profession are always enormous, as much so as the gratification that can and must be presumed by the possibility of participating in so many lives and in influencing them, together with the responsibility that this entails.

One of the components that helps confront this challenge of education is to clarify the aims and means of education. Although we are not going to go into in depth here, I believe that it is important to emphasize that education must help human beings understand the preeminence of the "being" over the "having". This must necessarily incorporate facts and values in an integral way going beyond an inhuman "technologicalization" and search for an objectivity that ignores the importance and the reality of subjective values. Even if we were to adopt a faith-less view of the world, from a humanistic vision values are not only essential but an inseparable ingredient of any other form of knowledge. It will be necessary

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to take care that those values promote human dignity and are respectful of non-negotiable principles like fairness and equity based on mutual respect and solidarity.

Development in the work of education must face many difficulties in the 21st century. The changes we see in the family structure, the sense of the transcendence, and the role of faith and of beliefs, in general seem minor; our young people often seem disoriented and group interaction in the classroom often surpasses the capacity of teachers and the educational centers...

This condition can make us think, as it seems to happen when one celebrates birthdays, that bygone days are better and that it is no longer possible to exercise teaching, but that it is a matter of survival in a jungle, of an structureless reality. Some educators speak to us of the absence of parents, of the problems of establishing limits and obtaining a minimum discipline, of the immediacy that our children and adolescents live, of their low tolerance for frustration or the dysfunctional behavior in the centers. In a generic sense, schools live in environments of violence, of discrimination, scenarios of failures and suffering.

But we cannot put the accent on the "half-empty bottle": educational centers are also places of discovery: from the immensity of the universe to the concrete reality of a friend, where one plays with others, learns teamwork, laughs; where many fall in love for the first time, where new knowledge and perspectives that lead to growth are revealed. This is the "half-full bottle" that is filled only through contact and encounter with others. And we must not forget that children pass a good part of their waking time in school and other educational centers.

In a situation such as this, only one message is appropriate: we need educators who accept this reality, prepare for it and can face it with suitable skills and attitudes.

There are certain essential components needed in carrying out the educational task: on the one hand, the curriculum of the educator must more and more incorporate elements of sociology and psychology, along with knowledge in specific areas; on the other hand, a seemingly increasing important demand is that an educator engage in an introspective process that allows him/her to identify his motivations and fears, to analyze in a critically constructive way the mechanisms by which he faces them. It is important for him/her to reflect on his/her own evolution as educator and as a human person in relation to others thus more readily become aware of his own difficulties and able to find strategies to face and overcome them. One of the components that can condition an educator to "lose his focus" is to work without the sense of vocation. Therefore, it ceases to be a reason for joy, benefit, personal projection. The conflict arises when the reality does not respond to our expectations and hopes. We must be able to review them and to make the necessary adjustments.

Like our children and adolescents, we as educators must also overcome the desire for immediate results, to see the effect of our work. When we consider the human being as "person" in his totality, we cannot see him but only within his personal project, in his projection towards the future, in what he is capable of becoming, as an end in himself but aiming towards the future, without limits, until the last moment. This allows us to achieve two truths: change is possible until the last breath, and each step constitutes the way. The educator has something to offer, for the good or for bad, whether he is aware of it or not. What he does, what he says, what he does not do or does not say, is integrated, often unconsciously like many of our experiences, in the vital experience of others. It may be that at times we do not see the purpose it serves, but there is no doubt that it will come together in the results that will take place.

And something that I consider important is that those whom we educate, those with whom we work, even those who can not benefit from our influence, will always receive our love, our self-less interest, our compassion and our availability. This is an inestimable reality that helps us grow towards maturity.

In exchange for what we give of ourselves, we who have worked with others receive the gift of being with them; we receive through what we give in many different ways. If we become victims of fatigue, it is important to take some time off, to share the conflicts and to replenish our energies without feeling guilty; to look back on what we have done, appreciate it and review what we have learned, allowing ourselves to grow as well. Those callings which imply the care of others is a gift, sometimes with rough edges, but with meaning. We have it all when we work with other human beings.

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