

## **LASALLIAN PEDAGOGY: EPISTEMOLOGICAL STATUS AND CURRENT SITUATION**

***Dr. Mary Rangel***

*Instituto Superior La Salle – Niterói  
Brazil*

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to build up a coherent argument with the principles which characterize the epistemological status of Lasallian Pedagogy and the possibilities for its applications, present-day and contextualized, and for its principles. The research which contributed to this discussion is of a qualitative nature, including the revision of the literature and the analysis of the contents of theoretical contributions. In the course of the analysis, the concept of the pedagogy is understood as a field in which the foundations of human development which orientate educational practices are consolidated and deepened. With this conceptual framework, Lasallian education is understood as a field of knowledge in which are consolidated and deepened its foundations inspired by Christian humanism and by mystical pedagogical realism. These foundations and principles characterize the epistemological status of Lasallian pedagogy and have important applications at the present time, exemplified in this study. Finally, there is emphasis on the importance of research in widening the present visibility of Lasallian Pedagogy and its contributions.

**Key words:** Lasallian Pedagogy, foundations, epistemological status, present-day situation.

### **Introduction**

This article has as its aim to analyze the foundations which characterize Lasallian Pedagogy and to build an argument on its epistemological status and its present-day situation. The research which serves as a basis for the said argument was of a qualitative nature, implemented through drawing up a biographical list and analyzing the contents of the theoretical and conceptual contributions which support the said arguments (Santos, 2002; Bardin, 1979). The analysis and arguments do not claim to reach definitive conclusions; rather, they propose the continuity and deepening of the studies. As a result, the analysis begins with the recognition of the epistemological status of Lasallian pedagogy.

The theoretical and conceptual recognition supported by the epistemological status of a field of knowledge refers, among other factors, to its origin (Laville and Dionne, 2000). With this premise one covers initially the origin of pedagogy, with a view to supporting an argument of identity of Lasallian Pedagogy in order to recognize, in this way, its epistemological status.

We begin, therefore, observing that, in its origins, Pedagogy does *not* attribute to itself the status of a science (due to the fact that it does not count on a specific theoretical body), but rather that it characterizes itself as a field or area of studies and research of the construction of theoretical, paradigmatic bases of human formation and the educational practices which promote it (Machado, 2000; Laville and Dionne, 2000). One understands, in this way, that the exercise of the magisterium requires pedagogical formation which empowers educational professionals and orientates them in their teaching practices. Setting out from this conceptual reference, one can not only identify the epistemology of Lasallian Pedagogy but also the up to date nature of its principles.

Lasallian Pedagogy can then be understood as a field of knowledge in which the Lasallian foundations of human formation which orientate educational practices, are structured, systematized and deepened through studies and research. The epistemological construction of these foundations are found in the philosophical principles of Christian humanism and pedagogical realism; the latter, inspired by Christian spirituality, can be understood as mystical realism.

Studies and research such as those of: Hengemüle, E. fsc (2000; 2007); Justo, H. fsc (2003); Cervantes, J. fsc (2006, 2009 and 2010); Aguiar R. da S.(2000); Trezzi, C. fsc (2010); Rangel, M. and Weschenfelder, I. (2010a and 2010b); Corsatto, M. L.(2007); Nery, I. fsc (2005); Nicodem, E. fsc (2010), Gómez Restrepo, C. fsc (2010); Muñoz, D. fsc (2010), in addition to other works within Lasallian writings, go deeply into the philosophical foundations in which are met the parameters of the epistemological construction of Lasallian Pedagogy.

### **The philosophical foundations which clarify the epistemological nature of Lasallian Pedagogy**

One observes in the philosophical foundations which define the parameters of the epistemological construction of Lasallian Pedagogy *a coherence and consistency which is both theoretical and conceptual*. Both are expressed in the confluence of principles based on Christian humanism and mystical realism.

The coherence and the consistency of the philosophical principles not only support the original paradigmatic bases of Lasallian Pedagogy, but furthermore contribute to its continuity and transcendence. Both preserve a unity of objectives and an identity, which is maintained nowadays in contextualized experiences in agreement with contemporary circumstances and necessities. Thus, Lasallian Pedagogy arrives at the year 2000 updated, without deforming or destroying the philosophical principles which have characterized its epistemological status.

In this way, it is possible today, as it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, to identify the epistemological bases of Lasallian Pedagogy, recognizing that its principles and its humanist and realist proposal support its mission at the present time, which is full of urgent socio-educative needs.

Hengemüle (2007) corroborates this analysis, indicating that la Salle, inspired in his spiritual and humanist mission, understood education as a process linked to social necessities and demands,

such as those related to preparation for life; he observed, from his real context, the importance of formation for work.

Christian humanism and mystical pedagogical realism lead to the theoretical, paradigmatic construction of Lasallian Pedagogy, parameters of compatibility between faith and life, which orientated its origins and continue to orientate today practices which characterize an *inclusive education*; the said education unites the responsibility and competence of the one teaching with a good running of the school, apart from the sociopolitical responsibility expected from the emancipation of working- class sectors.

The proposition of *inclusion*, based on Christian humanism which inspired the creation of the schools, is therefore *reaffirmed*, in its origin and nowadays; and furthermore, pedagogic realism, which associates the humanist importance of knowledge of truth and of the living of the faith to the socio-political importance of the knowledge which prepares for the real context of life and professions. It is not, however, considered that the present day bases of Lasallian Pedagogy are different from the original ones, but that, *maintained and contextualized*, they await present-day socio-educational demands from the circumstances of each country in which the network of Lasallian schools extends, without losing the foundations that define and express its identity.

As a result, the bases of Lasallian Pedagogy are associated with the importance of the *liberation* from ignorance of the faith and of the contents necessary for access to the world of work and, in addition, to the search for the conditions of the quality and dignity of life.

The relation between the humanist and realist perspective is maintained today, with this same coherence, in recognizing that the conflicts which loom over the world today call for Christian principles of solidarity, fraternity, transcendence and that the realist principles of emancipation, of *liberation* from poverty and overcoming social inequality are also waiting for the appeals, ever more intense and burning from the world of today.

In this same sense, Cervantes (2009) takes up again, from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, a reflection of La Salle aimed at the teachers and situates it in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

*Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work (De La Salle, MR 194.1) It would seem as if De la Salle were writing this for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Today, as in the Middle Ages, large masses of young people go from one place to another [...]. The phenomenon of “children and young people of the street” is typically ours (Cervantes, 2009:25).*

It can be observed, however, that the epistemological *nature* of Lasallian Pedagogy, as a field of knowledge in which are structured, systematized and deepened the foundations which orientate education, is maintained in the year 2000, with evident and necessary *present-day bases*.

One can, therefore, *reaffirm* that Lasallian Pedagogy preserves at the present day, the philosophical foundation characterized in Christian humanism and in mystical pedagogical realism, whose coherence and consistency characterize the nature of its paradigmatic principles

and its epistemological status. With this foundation and the nature of principles, Lasallian Pedagogy finds a significant applicability in the present context of society and the school.

In Lasallian Pedagogy there is made evident a sense of *multidimensionality*. In this sense, the dimension of teaching competence (necessary in the school so that it may ‘run well’) is founded in the spiritual, human and ethic-moral dimensions which are associated, in their turn, with the socio-political dimension and which has to go along with attention to the poor and their emancipation. Therefore, teaching competence is consolidated in the links which unite the multiple dimensions, in the educational commitment to liberation from poverty in its material, cultural, moral and spiritual senses. It is opportune to observe that all these forms of poverty coexist and that furthermore, they have intensified in our contemporary times: times which require the values proper to the Lasallian paradigm.

*As an international Institute and as a Lasallian Family, we are called upon not to enclose ourselves within our own little horizon, but to feel ourselves part of an organism which opens our hearts to the dimensions of the world* (Rodríguez Echeverría, 2009:113).

Beyond these considerations, the examples which are presented demonstrate the up to date nature of the principles of Lasallian Pedagogy which are applied to the teacher-pupil relationship and to practices in the classroom, oriented towards the teaching action.

### **The up to date nature of the Lasallian Pedagogical Principles which orientate the teaching action: some examples.**

It is appropriate, initially, to observe that the extent of the scope of Lasallian Pedagogy does not recommend defining predetermined limits to its present day applications. The scope and the depth of the Lasallian paradigms do not fall within predefined, detailed, descriptive limits. Thus, one is invited above all to ensure the continuity of the research which makes visible, in a wider sense, its present day contributions.

Starting out from bibliographical research and the analysis of the theoretical contributions achieved in this study, there are presented below the emblematic principles of the epistemological bases of Lasallian Pedagogy which do not exhaust but rather *exemplify and demonstrate*, in a significant way, its up to date nature.

#### ***The principle of discipline and of moderation***

*Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over the children confided to you, that you will that you will take every possible precaution to shield them from serious faults. Ask him to be such good guides for them through the light which you will procure for yourselves by recourse to God and by the fidelity with which you do your work, that you will see well every obstacle to the good of their souls and keep away from the path of their salvation everything that could harm them* (MR 197.3.2).

In these times of increasing violence, we more and more recognize the socio-educative importance of discipline and of the definition of limits as significant factors in the educational

formation of pupils. We also observe that discipline, order and organization constitute necessary conditions for study, since these same conditions are required so that the assimilation and the cognitive production of knowledge. 38

*If it happens that you have been aroused by some passion, avoid making any correction while you experience this emotion, because then the correction would be very harmful to your disciples as well as to yourself (MR 204.2.2).*

*The more tenderness you have for the members of Jesus Christ and of the Church which are entrusted to you, the more God will produce in them the wonderful effects of his grace (MF 134.2.2).*

The moderation of the teacher in his action to maintain and *teach* the value of discipline is necessary for its acceptance by the pupils. A positive relation between teachers and pupils is current principle which is at present receiving special consideration in educational practices and in the formation of teachers. If there are no positive links or if they are broken through coarseness of words or attitudes, it will be difficult to maintain a necessary educational relation for the learning of knowledge and values.

### ***The principle of affection associated with attention to the poor***

*In today's Gospel Jesus Christ compares those who have charge of souls to a good shepherd who has great care for his sheep. One quality which he must possess, according to our Saviour, is to know each one of them individually. This should also be one of the main concerns of those who instruct others: to be able to understand their pupils and to discern the right way to guide them (MD 33.1).*

*You are under the obligation to instruct the children of the poor. You should, consequently, cultivate a very special tenderness for them and procure their spiritual welfare s far as you will be able, considering them as members of Jesus Christ and his well-beloved [...] By the care you have for them, show how truly dear they are to you (MF 80.3).*

The recognition of the importance of affection as a value or a requisite in educational relations is reaffirmed and consolidated at the present time and incorporated into concepts of inclusive educational practices. This claims to drive or encourage from normative educational parameters of social and political commitment; to this is added preoccupation with the emancipation of working class sectors with poor resources, with special attention to pupils who, because of various factors, show learning difficulties. Standing out, more and more, is the importance of "moving hearts" (Cervantes, 2010:15).

### ***The principle of the "attractive teacher"***

*The remedies for this sort of absence will be for the teachers to endeavour to be very pleasant and to acquire a polite, affable, and frank appearance, without, however, assuming an undignified or familiar manner (Conduct of the Schools 16.2.16).*

*The fourth reason why students absent themselves is that they have little affection for their teacher. This is due to the fact that the teacher is not pleasant and does not know how to win the students (Conduct of the Schools 16.2.15).*

The contradiction and incoherence between what the teacher is saying and his example make his words empty and also remove the trust of the pupils. Therefore, the attitude of the teacher – his example of life and of the values he is teaching – are indispensable for his credibility to operate on the pupils, the families and also on the other teachers. The conduct of the teacher has a significant influence in making what he says legitimate, as well as his social image, which is projected from the school.

### ***The principle of accessible language***

*Teach them these truths, not with learned words [...] is so simple a manner that every word will be clear and easy for them to understand. Be faithful to this practice, then, in order to contribute as far as you are able to the salvation of those he has entrusted to you (M 193.3).*

Confusing explanations in a vocabulary not easily accessible to the pupils significantly harms their learning, their access to knowledge. Failure and absenteeism result, among other factors, from difficulties generated by the way in which knowledge is presented to the pupils, both by the teacher and by the textbooks. In the same way, an affected or "learned" use of language in the formulation of examination questions is one of the main factors in disapproval.

### ***Concluding commentary***

Although I have barely managed to exemplify the up to date nature of some pedagogical principles of La Salle – and , therefore, have not reached, in theory and in practice, a complete vision of the situations in which this 'up-to-dateness' in the education of today can be seen - in this study one can reaffirm, essentially, the coherence of the philosophical fundamentals which characterize the epistemological status of Lasallian Pedagogy and its potential for contributing to the formation of pupils and teachers. Commitment to these fundamentals, not only identifies Lasallian schools, their proposals for and practice of formation, their pedagogical project, but also offers important helps for the principles and practices of other schools.

The same coherence and consistency of its fundamentals orientates nowadays the Educational Plans and Projects of the Lasallian Districts. Curricular innovations as well as the contextualization of its practices, based on local circumstances and needs, take place in the Lasallian schools of diverse countries and regions, *without prejudice to these fundamentals*.

Thus, in the various countries through which the network of Lasallian schools extends, in its curricular and didactic innovations, in its contextualization, the unity of principles is preserved and the epistemological status of Lasallian Pedagogy is consolidated. Also preserved and consolidated is the relation between faith, culture and life. This relation inspires Lasallian education projects as in the case of Chile, in which there stand out, in the theoretical, doctrinal

framework of the Pastoral Mission, elements such as love, announcement, communion and celebration. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2000).

The union of the Brothers, their lives in community (“in common unity”) are also principles which inspire present day projects, such as the integration of the Lasallian Districts of Brazil and Chile, consolidated in 2011 and the Project for La Salle Regional Education in Latin America (PERLA), consolidated between 2010 and 2011.

*Since God has given you the grace of calling you to live in community, there is nothing that you should more earnestly ask of him than this union of mind and heart with your Brothers. Only by means of this union will you acquire that peace which ought to be all the joy of your life. Entreat the God of hearts to keep your heart and those of your Brothers one in the heart of Jesus (MD 39.3).*

This meditation of De La Salle confirms the meaning of the “common unity” of the Brothers, which continues in the building of their work and lives it in their communities, carrying out, following his example, the mission which has been entrusted to them. In the continuity of the work, contextualized in time and place, one can encounter innovations which show that the Lasallians nowadays are attentive to these contexts and contribute to the evolution of science and technology. Still, what allows for the continuity and transcendence of the Lasallian work is the fact that its bases are founded on Christian humanism and mystical realism inspired by the Christian faith, unity defines the nature of Lasallian epistemological pedagogy.

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