

TEACHING FAITHFULNESS TO AN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT. EDUCATING THE CITIZENS OF TODAY. INVITATIONS FROM THE LASALLIAN PROJECT

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SUMMARY

As the Lasallian educational project was created in the modern day, the reading of its commitment to the education of citizens from the social epistemology of education is proposed. In order to do this, the knowledge, educational practices, languages and mediations which enabled a type of model citizen in the past are discussed, and are presented in five principal themes for the education of the 21st-century citizen, in relation to the foundational model.

Key words: citizen education, Lasallian educational project, social epistemology of education, modernity, modern Catholic citizen, participation, coexistence, global and multicultural citizenship, sustainable development, environmental ethics.

Introduction

In the context of the tercentenary of St Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, different ways of celebrating this important historical event are beginning to emerge in the Lasallian world. There is no doubt that one way to do this is to recognize the significant impact of his pedagogical and spiritual legacy through conscientious reflection on his contributions to the education of yesterday, today, and of the future.

This article, together with the others which make up this monographic issue, attempts to add to the voices and views around aspects which are considered to be points of reflection, and to link with the Lasallian educational project. One of these aspects is the education of the citizen of today and its implications in social, political, and educational terms. Because of its relevance, many academics have studied it and there are also many publications that address it (Camps, 2010, Cortina, 2009, Gutman, 2001, Naval, 2003).

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For this reason, it is necessary to admit that many of the questions posed by various citizenship scholars can become points of convergence on which to consider and present the Lasallian presence in today's world. Some of those questions are: What kind of citizen is it necessary to educate today? How can we educate for the exercise of citizenship in the reality of the 21st century? With which methodologies is it feasible to educate citizens? For what kind of society are today's citizens educated?

Due to the caliber, implications and particular relevance of these questions, the ideas which I will present below will only be a starting point for our reflection. Therefore, the central purpose of this text is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of the suggested topic; on the contrary, it is to propose analytical elements through which to envision possible courses of action and which open spaces for discussion.

In order to fulfill this purpose, at least from the perspective which I would like to propose here, it is necessary to make some initial epistemological notes in the first section of the article. In this section, I would like to acknowledge the historical, immanent and contingent nature of the Lasallian educational project by drawing upon a social epistemology of education (Popkewitz, 1997, 1998, 2014). The fundamental purpose of this approach is merely analytical; therefore, these ideas do not seek to displace or ignore the theological-spiritual content of the Lasallian educational project in any way.

This reflective effort is a way of elucidating and understanding how the pedagogical and theological-spiritual content of such a project, which is assembled as a whole and achieved in the context of spatial-temporal coordinates whose circumstances, agents, and configuring dynamics have been converted into its conditions of possibility. Adopting an angle of analysis relating to the contingent and historical nature of Lasallian school practices is a way of introducing an unconventional approach to their contributions and contents.

The main reason why I adopt this type of analytical view is that, by recognizing the historical, contextual, and contingent nature of the Lasallian educational project, one can see that its origin, identity and consolidation are integrated into the socio-cultural matrix of modernity. Therefore, the type of citizenship present in this socio-cultural matrix is congruent with its ideals, practices, and languages.

Consequently, thinking about today's citizenship education should lead us to explore our ideals, practices and languages. In the same way, it will place us in a complex world which configures its own socio-cultural matrix, into which deeds and situations are integrated which would be absolutely unusual for modernity. For example, aspects related to biotechnology, the use of Artificial Intelligence, coping with climate change, among others. In this way, there is a difference between educating citizens for modernity and educating them for the challenging and complex reality of today's world.

In the second section of this article I will postulate some ideas which can serve as ideas for reflection on education for exercising citizenship from the perspective of the Lasallian educational project. In this time of crisis that humanity is experiencing, and in which even the organizational

systems and political and social structure are fractured, the concept and practices of citizenship are under severe criticism and questioning.

People have even affirmed the existence of democracies without citizens (Camps, Rius, Farrés, Puyol, Vergés, Gamper, Riba, & Gauchet, 2010); of governance and politics without citizen participation (Castillo, 2017); of citizenship without political rights (Rincón, 2014); and, to announce the decline of citizenship which, with an increasing separation from the political world, loses awareness of its responsibility and commitment (Camps, 2010).

Three hundred years after the Founder's death, the Lasallian educational project faces a major challenge: to go beyond what Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle envisaged as a path of education and salvation, anchored to the historical-cultural matrix of modernity, and to respond with a creative spirit to the challenges of an uncertain world in which education for citizenship is more necessary than ever.

The above supposes a double challenge. On the one hand, to maintain and use the wealth of its spiritual and pedagogical legacy, from which a very different type of citizen was educated to the one required today; and on the other, to create new concepts and educational practices that recognize those ethical-political beliefs that affirm the human, participatory, community, and critical dimension which should characterize citizenship in the present day.

Modernity and the Lasallian educational project: from the viewpoint of the social epistemology of education

Assuming this perspective for analysis, the Lasallian educational project can be located historically and can be identified as a system of educational practices that remains in constant openness and redefinition, based on its historical conditions. In this sense, the knowledge, educational practices, languages and mediations which identify this project are situated in the socio-historical framework of a time which favored its origin and evolution.

An example of this is when we understand the Lasallian educational project as being part of the processes of schooling produced by modernity. From this perspective it could be said that such a project took shape and identity not only because of the ingenuity, intuition, spiritual and pedagogical sensitivity of the Founder and the first Brothers, but also because of the conditions of modernity which made it possible.

In other words, returning to the analysis by Pineau (2001), it is important to understand that schooling is the business and expression of modernity. The Lasallian school does not escape the processes by which schooling originated. On the contrary, it was consolidated over time thanks to the fact that modernity conferred it historic material nature.

Some of the elements and modern aspects which were incorporated by the Lasallian school in its educational proposal were: the ideal of progress, discipline of the body, organization of time, control and monitoring of school spaces, the conservation and dissemination of diverse knowledge, the creation of curricula and teaching practices of universal and uniform character, the adoption of

religious beliefs and behaviors, an idea of nation and a believing citizen (Díaz, Jiménez, & Turriago, 2006).

As can be seen, the education of the believing citizen - and his connection to a nation which is ordered and governed by the principles of morality and the Christian doctrine - were relevant in the Lasallian educational project of yesteryear. The knowledge and practices that enabled this type of citizen underlie notions of society and citizens which were consistent with the maxims of modernity.

On the one hand, the ideal of citizenship and society which the Lasallian school envisaged and implemented in its classrooms brought with it educational practices based on objective rationality and trust in science and technology as clear ways to achieve progress. The transition from teaching methods based on a rational psychology to a scientific and experimental one is evidenced in Bruño's pedagogy manuals and in some serial publications of the early twentieth century (Díaz, Jiménez, Turriago, 2006).

On the other hand, the idea of a disciplined, civic, respectful, believing and obedient society was central to the Lasallian school. Although modernity was developed in the search for, and affirmation of, values such as freedom, national identity, the exercise of political and civil rights and the creation of secular states, the Lasallian school remained adept at a tradition which protected and consolidated its Christian identity and allowed it to study and appropriate such values.

When approaching some of the textbooks, pedagogy and didactic manuals edited under the Bruño seal, as well as newsletters and pedagogical journals published locally by different Lasallian educational works at the beginning of the 20th century, it is possible to analyze how customs, values, and languages pertaining to the education of the modern Catholic citizen were put into practice (Díaz, 2006).

A striking aspect of these manuals and textbooks relates to the production of their contents. The permanent reflection on what took place at the school and the revision of the things that generated positive results in the classroom was a distinctive process experienced by the Brothers. It was in this way that the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* became a universal pedagogical reference for the Lasallian world. This book contains many components and characteristics of modernity which were taking on various forms and expressions with the advent of the French Revolution, the industrial revolution and the emergence of nation-states.

A look through the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* and Bruño's *Manual of Pedagogy* allows one to establish that the modern Catholic citizen attending the Lasallian school was educated to practice religion, respect his country, recognize authority, use science and reason, discipline the body and be a productive subject (Díaz, Jiménez, Turriago, 2006). Perhaps elements of modernity still survive in our schools.

The important thing, beyond whether we still have characteristic aspects of modernity, is to question ourselves about the type of citizen we want to educate (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and the contribution we want to make through citizenship education. The Lasallian educational project faces the challenge of educating citizens in a time which is very different from that of the Founder.

For this reason, today more than ever, we need to assume the educational task for a citizenship which is located at this moment in history.

Planning education for a 21st-century citizenship

Today we are going through a time of deep crisis. Massive migrations, the fragility of economic systems, the negative effects of existing totalitarian governments, aimless democracies, poverty, a cruel inequality and social exclusion, the progressive advance of climate change, *Brexit*, the resurgence of far-right groups and the emergence of *fake news* and *alternative facts*, among many others, are things which reflect the intricate times that humanity is going through.

Faced with this scenario, the burning question is, in what sense and in what way can the Lasallian educational project make a relevant contribution to confronting the problems which characterize the current times. As a course of action for the Lasallian world, education for the citizenship is presented as an opportunity to contribute to contemporary societies by preparing people who are capable of actively participating in their communities, purposefully constructing spaces of coexistence and thinking critically about themselves and their responsibilities as citizens.

After underlining the relevance which education for citizenship has, in the following I will propose five ideas which can be explored, discussed, corrected and expanded. My intention is far from exhausting the subject through such ideas. On the contrary, my wish is to open the discussion about what the Lasallian educational project could put in place in terms of the implications derived from an education for 21st-century citizenship.

In this sense, the education for citizenship required for this century, and which we could assume from the Lasallian educational project, should prepare current and future generations for:

- Ethical-political, critical and responsible participation:

Education for the citizens of this century requires educating current and future citizens in real participation within the spaces which are essential for the consolidation of democratic societies. Although it may appear obvious, it is important to insist that the active participation of citizens in different spheres of political life is key in the process of living and establishing democracy.

Therefore, participating is much more than being part of a determined social and political community. In a much broader sense, participation means assuming individual responsibility to contribute and recognize the rights and duties inherent to the subject as a political and social agent, in connection with matters related to justice, human dignity, equity, and quality of life for citizens in the context of a democratic society (Echavarría, 2012).

To participate in a critical and responsible way is to be aware of oneself as a political subject with the ability to question, contribute and deliberate. It is to use reason and public discussion to scrutinize those aspects of social, political, economic, and cultural life which are important because they impact people's lives. A democratic society is open to its citizens thinking, discussing and

arguing their views on issues and situations which are considered to be of great value and significance to its members.

Consequently, given the decline in citizen participation and the lack of interest of many citizens in taking part in political life (Camps, 2010), there is no more pertinent alternative than providing education for ethical-political participation through which the *ethos* of the democratic citizen can be affirmed (Cortina, 2011), and encouraging critical thinking that allows the carrying out of responsible actions which contribute to building fairer, more inclusive and equitable societies.

This entails incorporating a concept of ethics, justice, and politics which aligns with the fundamental values and choices of the Lasallian educational project. Democracy is built on the basis of the citizens' active participation. However, this participation must be a substantial contribution right from the critical-social thinking that establishes democracy as a process in permanent construction and not as a simple system of organization and government based on previously established criteria.

In this manner, critical and responsible participation in the construction of democratic societies implies a set of values and conceptions that support it. For example, values such as justice and solidarity must be based on the active and critical participation of citizens. In turn, a broad and diverse conception of democracy is also necessary. This is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004) called demo-diversity, a search for other types of democracy which equally empower other forms of participation.

- Coexistence based on respect, acceptance and affirmation of difference:

A return to racist, exclusionary and xenophobic ideologies is being experienced in many contemporary societies. For various reasons, differences of race, gender, religion or origin are perceived by many as a threat to one's own identity, history and national sense of belonging. This is an unhealthy situation for a citizenship that views itself as democratic.

In this sense, it is necessary to strengthen spaces and school mediations for coexistence based on respect, acceptance, recognition and affirmation of the difference in essential values for coexistence. Given that, in democratic societies, citizens have the right to participate in the deliberation of issues that are central to their individual and collective life, it is in this experience that difference takes shape in different ways.

Thinking of oneself as part of a diverse citizenship in which organizations, ethnic groups, languages, norms, beliefs and visions of reality come together in a complex system of coexistence, must lead current and future citizens to create political and social communities in which dialogue and public deliberation open spaces for listening within the diversity. In this way, difference becomes wealth, participation becomes commitment and politics begins to make decisions which are fundamental to the lives of people.

Respect supposes the recognition of others, of their distinctiveness, limitations and possibilities. In their alterity, and its affirmation, democratic societies become viable and thereby constitute themselves into a historical project. In this way, incorporating a politics of difference (Taylor,

2009) in our schools would allow us not only to recognize the cultural richness and the socio-political potential which underlies the presence of diversity and of "otherness" as opportunities to live together and in this way, build democratic societies.

An education in universal rights and guarantees from a policy of egalitarian dignity (Taylor, 2009) is required. All human beings share the same condition and, therefore, we are subjects of universal rights. However, we are also individuals with particular characteristics associated with contexts, languages, beliefs and diverse cultural ways of life. It is here that we need to recognize the value of difference. What makes us equal is that we are all different. Hence, 21st-century citizenship needs to be constructed from processes of coexistence based on the recognition and affirmation of difference.

- The experience of a global and multicultural citizenship:

Equally important for a 21st century citizenship is to understand that the education of its citizens is a priority which seeks to educate people in order to provide them with global perspective and sensitivity (Cortina, 2009, Hoyos, 2010, Nussbaum, 2002). In other words, within a more Lasallian sense preparing citizens, not for a nation, but for the world. This supposes placing ourselves within the complexities of the global-local dynamic in which numerous aspects of political, social, cultural and economic order of complex characteristics come into play.

Considering the limits and possibilities of the global would help us to understand that the digital world, knowledge societies and international economic dynamics, among other aspects, are inherent to the process of transition from a localized world to one of global implications. Although there may be deep discussions for and against this point, there is no doubt that a global-local vision is necessary today.

From this perspective, a global and multicultural citizenship would aim to recognize that, in the first instance, we are citizens of the world (Cortina, 2009) and secondly, because of this fact, that we come from diverse cultural contexts. A global orientation assumes that, as citizens, we are interested in what happens to the human race, regardless of nationality, political affiliation or religious belief. This is the creation of a moral bond with the citizens who are part of a global society.

On the other hand, multiculturalism as a fundamental condition and a feature of today's societies may lead us to understand that globality has little to do with ethnic, political, social, cultural, economic and religious homogeneity and uniformity. On the contrary, globality is intersected by features of diversity and by nuances which reveal that we are different in every sense. Are we prepared to live in global and diverse societies?

The previous questioning raises the urgent need to educate for a global and multicultural world. As indicated by Ferrete (2011), "Educating to live with others in a global world defines a new way of being, and of feeling like a cosmopolitan citizen" (p.96). However, it is not easy to achieve the education of this type of citizen. There are numerous challenges and barriers to overcome, given that the nationalist discourse, the dominant capitalist system, the rejection and disregard of

indigenous peoples and of economically disadvantaged countries, as well as the lack of acceptance and recognition of other religious and cultural visions, makes this task more complex.

This continues to be an urgent call for the Lasallian school during this century: Educating citizens so that they feel a bond with other human beings and, in this way, participate in specific common projects which are oriented towards a more supportive and just world for all (Ferrete, 2011). Following the same line of reflection, recovering a sense of multiculturalism is essential in order to consolidate global democratic societies and to educate a citizenship for the 21st century.

- The adoption of lifestyles that promote sustainable development and environmental ethics:

Environmental management, the conservation of species and the mitigation of climate change are some of the greatest challenges faced by humanity during this decade. There is no doubt that the planet is changing due to human factors. The significant impact caused by excess consumption behaviors - and the lack of awareness of the negative influence being caused by economic and food systems - highlights the urgent need to change our perception of ourselves and the planet.

A radical, anthropocentric and selfish mentality, strengthened by an economy and deeply-rooted in consumption is pushing today's societies towards a bleak future. However, faced with this reality, there are many things which can be done. An education for the citizenship of the 21st century must involve the adoption of healthy, protective and sustainable lifestyles. Technological and scientific advances guided by ethics are essential for achieving improved quality of life through many efficient ways of managing energy resources with low environmental impacts.

A 21st-century citizenship is not focused on itself. On the contrary, it is integrated into a whole, within a system that makes it viable to share goods and products generated in a sustainable way by communities who maintain lifestyles which respect, care for and preserve the environment. Educating for the rational use of resources and for the generation of new sources of energy, as well as placing humans within the great assemblage of living beings, will allow the citizens of this century to progressively move towards a biocentrism that will overcome the attitudes and selfish behavior derived from the anthropocentrism of modernity (Gudynas, 2010).

Individual and collective practices aimed at consuming less and taking more care, protecting the environment and respecting the rights of non-human living beings are required from those who inhabit and are citizens in these times. The enlightenment and adjustment of educational processes developed within our schools, in line with an ecological ethic, is urgently required. In other words, we need to educate in order to forge a sustainable character (Ferrete, 2005).

According to Ferrete (2005), the above essentially means teaching abilities related to environmentally correct actions and to awareness. The former allude to the promotion of actions of environmental responsibility, such as reducing, recycling and reusing, as well as promoting virtues such as self-control, self-restraint, moderation, caution and prudence (Ferrete, 2005). The latter seeks to "educate an active awareness which discovers certain features, reflections or behaviors in the complexity of the social and natural world, which are essential to later make decisions and to motivate environmentally-friendly actions" (p. 404).

As can be seen, sustainable lifestyles and ecological ethics are key aspects in the conception of 21st-century citizenship. To educate so that this becomes a reality in our schools is to respond to the challenges facing us in today's world. In other words, it is about reading the environmental crisis which humanity is going through and reacting to it, as the Founder did more than three hundred years ago when responding to the challenges and situations of his time.

By way of conclusion, it could be said that there are numerous commitments which we could assume as a Lasallian school in order to continue being faithful to the founding inspiration of Saint John-Baptiste de La Salle and the first Brothers. Educating for a 21st-century citizenship is one of these commitments. This requires a seasoned creative spirit which affirms the Lasallian tradition and, at the same time, widens its horizons to the complexities of today's world. Here is the task, here is the action.

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