

# EDUCATION

A black and white photograph of a man in a dark suit, possibly a priest or a speaker, addressing a crowd of people outdoors. He is gesturing with his right hand. The background shows a large, dark evergreen tree and a hazy, wooded area. In the foreground, the heads and shoulders of several people are visible, including a man in a white shirt and sunglasses on the left.

DISCOVERING  
THE PROMISE OF  
REALITY



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*Exhibit presented at the New York Encounter, Jan 2017*

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## **The Risk of Education**

*Conference given by Msgr. Luigi Giussani,*

*Santa Maria della Passione, June 6th, 1985.....*41

# REDISCOVERING THE EDUCATIONAL EVENT

What kind of education is beneficial to the human person? Is it possible to educate in a genuinely human way in the current context?



*Andrew Wyeth, Wind from the Sea, 1947 National Gallery of Art  
© Andrew Wyeth*

Amidst decades-long cries of an American educational crisis, this exhibit invites visitors into a conversation about American education, what education has to do with life, and the nature of education as experience. Developed by educators from across the U.S. who, through the perspective of Luigi Giussani's pedagogy, have discovered that crisis is not a limit, but the path to a broader horizon, this exhibit offers a space for hopeful dialogue about possibilities for education in present day America. Without reducing the scope of the issue to endorsements of specific teaching techniques or school systems, this exhibit documents an approach to educating the human person which supersedes the boundaries of any particular educational environment.

# EVENTS THAT SHAPED AMERICAN SCHOOLS

and attempts to address the crisis

**1837** Massachusetts creates the nation's first board of education, with Horace Mann as its secretary. The Common School Movement, compulsory education and standardized teacher training begins. Mann was instrumental in the decision to adopt the Prussian education system in Massachusetts. This system evolved by the late 19th century into what later became known as factory model schools, referring to both a curriculum model and architecture type that would last until the 21st century.

**1880s** Most states passed a constitutional amendment, called the Blaine Amendment, forbidding tax money be used to fund parochial schools. Blaine Amendments were passed as a direct result of the nativist, anti-Catholic sentiment that was a recurring theme in American politics during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

**1904** Catholic educators formed an organization to coordinate their efforts on a national scale. The Catholic Educational Association later changed its name to the National Catholic Educational Association.

**1925** Supreme Court decision *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters* declares unconstitutional an Oregon law that required public school attendance, thus securing the rights of religious and private schools to exist in the US. Public funding for such schools still prohibited

**1938** John Dewey publishes *Experience and Education*, ushering in a call for education reform based on experiential learning.



Norman Rockwell, "Boy Graduate",  
1959, *Saturday Evening Post*

**1954** *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision declares state-sanctioned segregation of public schools is a violation of the 14th amendment and is therefore unconstitutional. Desegregation of schools begin.

**1970s** The term "achievement gap" is first used in an academic journal to refer to a widening achievement gap between [whites and nonwhites] as the general level of education increases.

**1983** *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* report is published by President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report contributed to the ever-growing assertion that American schools were failing, and it touched off a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts.

**1980s** The popularity of the Constructivist theory and practices in education grows.

**2000** Widespread closure of Catholic schools begins. Nearly 2000 Catholic schools close in the first two decades of the new century.

**2002** *No Child Left Behind Act* is signed into law. The NCLB significantly increases the federal role in holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students. It put a special focus on ensuring that states and schools boost the performance of certain groups of students, such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children.

**2009** *Race to the Top* grant is announced fostering charter expansion. United States Department of Education announces competitive grants created to spur and reward innovation and reforms in state and local district K-12 education. States are awarded grants for satisfying certain educational policies, such as performance-based evaluations for teachers and principals based on multiple measures of educator effectiveness, adopting common standards, adoption of policies that do not prohibit the expansion of charter schools, turning around the lowest-performing schools, and building and using data systems.

**2010**

Common Core State Standards for English and Math are released. CCSS is an educational initiative that details what content and skills K-12 students should master in English language arts and

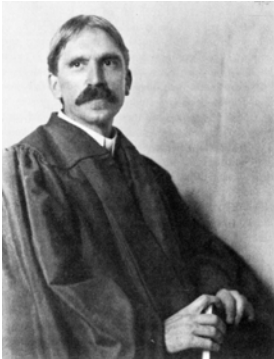
mathematics at the end of each grade. It seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states. The CCSS are adopted by 42 states.

**2012** Next Generation Science Standards are released and adopted by 16 states, while other states have adopted very similar standards. The guidelines are based on a three-dimensional framework, binding core content to scientific practices and crosscutting concepts, or recurring patterns. Curricula based on the standards may cover fewer topics, but delves more deeply into specific topics, encouraging students to make connections to real-world issues and across scientific disciplines, and to employ skills such as primary investigation, analysis, and critical thinking.

# PRESUPPOSITIONS OF AMERICAN PEDAGOGY

## Experimentalism and Constructivism

What role does experience play in an education?  
How do I make sense of my experiences?



*John Dewey, 1902,  
Wikimedia Commons*

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher and psychologist; however, he is most well known for his publications and influence on American education. Theories that ring as hallmarks of John Dewey's work include pragmatism, progressive education (the counterpoint to "traditional," didactic education), and democracy. In particular, his ideas about democracy and the social order have left a profound imprint on American public education which, in its beginnings and continuing today, saw that the educational system's primary and markedly patriotic objective was to form good citizens. This resonated with Dewey because he understood the aim of education not as a vehicle to simply transmit content knowledge or certain skills, but to help young people learn and reflect on their experience, so they may live and move in society in service of its good.

John Dewey called for school reform of "traditional schools" based on his theory of experience: "Progressive education requires, in an urgent degree, a philosophy of education based on a philosophy of experience"<sup>1</sup>

For Dewey, the point of human experience is to help the student reach his full potential, which is, "to prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities."<sup>2</sup>

However, not all experiences are educative for Dewey. Rather, experience that is worthwhile is experience that allows a person to

1 Dewey, John. Experience and Education. Johannesburg: MTM, 2015. Computer file, p.10

2 Dewey, John. "My Pedagogical Creed." School Journal, vol. 54, January 1897, p. 77



construct a better plan for a method of action in the future. This plan for the future he calls the formation of purpose.

The formation of purposes is, then, a rather complex intellectual operation. It involves (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the information, advice, and warning of those who have had a wider experience; and (3) judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of acting under given observed conditions in a certain way.<sup>3</sup>

*Children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves, and each time that we try to teach them too quickly, we keep them from reinventing it themselves. ~ Jean Piaget<sup>4</sup>*

Piaget and Vygotsky's theories of knowledge construction became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively, and continue to influence the American educational environment and educational jargon that has been dominant through the 1990s. Constructivism is generally the theory that learning happens when the individual subject constructs knowledge on his own rather than as a result of the direct or didactic influence of others.



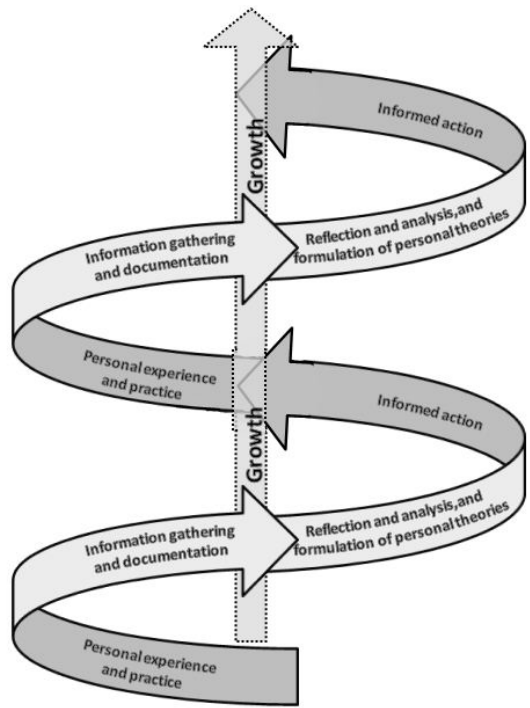
*"Children business"*

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a Swiss clinical psychologist known for his pioneering work in child development; he is also considered to have originated the constructivist theory of knowing. For Piaget, the student creates knowledge, and subsequently meaning, based on his experiences. Piaget's focus was on the act of learning, rather than what influences learning, which was more the concern of Vygotsky's work.

3 Dewey, Experience & Education, 1938, p.29

4 Papert, Seymour."The Century's Greatest Minds." Time Magazine, vol 153, no 12, 1999 p 105.

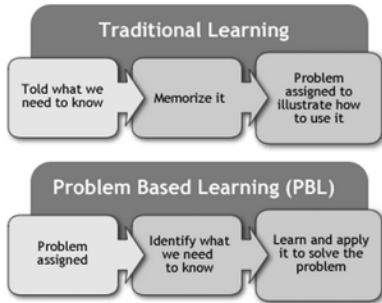
Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Soviet psychologist who is also associated with constructivist pedagogy, but as social constructivism. He understood culture as playing a primary role in learning, which he believed to be the internalization of social experiences. He is also known for his concept of "zone of proximal development" which is a way of describing how new knowledge depends on previous knowledge gained in a social context; students can master concepts with the help of others which they could not have understood on their own. Vygotsky died at the age of 38 in 1934, and most of his publications did not appear in English until after 1960.



# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS

## Project-Based Learning

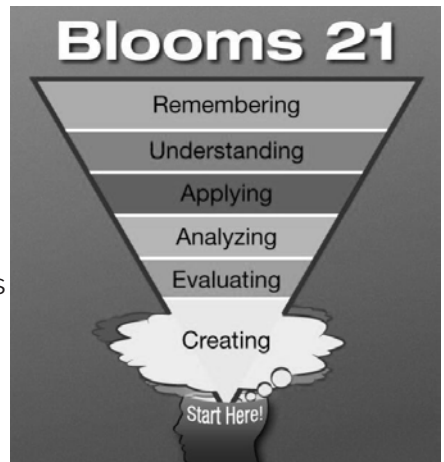
Experience based learning models dominate current teacher training programs, emphasizing "student-centered" and "inquiry-based" teaching methodologies. Recently developed standards, such as the Common Core in Math and Language Arts and Next Generation Science Standards, aim at facilitating classroom practices that focus on experiential learning and critical thinking.



"Project Based Learning helps make learning relevant to students by establishing connections to life outside the classroom and by addressing real world issues. In the classroom, PBL gives teachers an opportunity to build relationships with students by acting as their coach, facilitator, and co-learner."<sup>1</sup> the National Education Association

Constructivist theory flips Bloom's Taxonomy (right) upside down. Within project- or problem-based learning models, students create in order to remember.<sup>2</sup>

"We remember information because we have 'worked' to use it in a meaningful way. Challenge a student to evaluate, and he will have to synthesize, analyze, apply, comprehend and utilize information... Challenge students to evaluate why an apple falls from a tree and they will function in all classifications of Bloom's Taxonomy."  
Institute for Learner-Centered Education

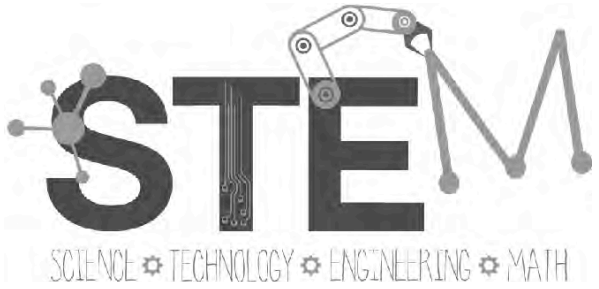


1 "Research Spotlight on Project-Based Learning," NEA. National Education Association, n.d. Web. 28 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.nea.org/tools/16963.htm>>.

2 "Constructivist Design Conference." The Institute for Learning Centered Education, n.d. Web. 28 Dec. 2016. <[http://www.learnercentered.org/constr\\_what.html](http://www.learnercentered.org/constr_what.html)>.

# Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

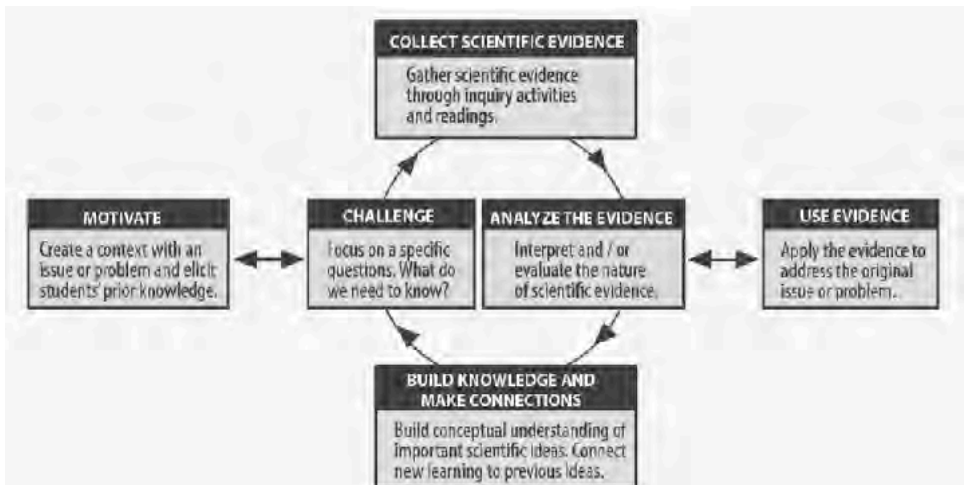
The recent adoption of the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) has coincided with a rise in STEM education, which calls for the integration of science and math content with technology and engineering skills. Various experiential learning methods have emerged from within the STEM and NGSS umbrella.



The 5E's Learning Model (right) grows out of the constructivist approach. Students progress through five engaging phases of learning in order to build on and expand prior knowledge.



The SEPUP Instructional Model (below) similarly engages students, while taking an issue-oriented approach that is deeply rooted in discussion and evidence-based reasoning.

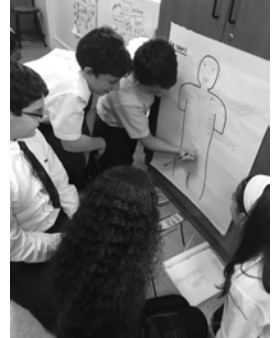




I want to communicate to my students that the world around them is fascinating, so that they might feel the natural compulsion to engage with it themselves. What is more worthwhile: forcing my students to remember a series of seemingly irrelevant and disconnected facts, or inviting them to join me in making connections and building knowledge based on past experiences? While both methods lead to basic knowledge, the latter has the potential to give the subject a sense of meaning and connection with respect to the world. For this reason, one of the most fulfilling aspects of my career has been to watch my students become increasingly engaged with reality.

- Christina Zaccagnino, Science Teacher, St. Bernadette Catholic Academy, Brooklyn

*Photos (clockwise from upper-left) - St. Joseph High School, Brooklyn, NY; Notre Dame Academy, Los Angeles, CA; PS112Q, Queens, NY; PS112Q, Queens, NY; Third row: St. Bernadette Catholic Academy, Brooklyn, NY; St. Bernadette Catholic Academy, Brooklyn, NY; St. Benedict's Prep, Newark, NJ; St. Joseph High School, Brooklyn, NY; St. Bernadette Catholic Academy, Brooklyn, NY*



# MARIA MONTESSORI

Maria Montessori observed that children learned through tangible experiences of reality, by understanding the interrelatedness of all things, and discovering their center in the plan of God.

*The stars, earth, stones, life of all kinds form a whole in relationship with all other things, and this relationship is so close that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun!...A great curiosity*



*Maria Montessori and a class*

*arises, which can never be satisfied; so it will last a lifetime. The laws governing the universe can be made interesting and wonderful to a child, more interesting even than things in themselves, and he begins to ask: "Who am I?"<sup>1</sup>*



*Maria Montessori, 1933*

Maria Montessori, a 20th century medical doctor and pedagogue, also posited that the key to education lay in the experience of the child. In 1906, Montessori took on the care of a group of about 50 working-class children up to seven years old in a tenement in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. She established her first classroom, calling it the Casa dei Bambini, or Children's House. Here, Montessori made many of the observations that led her to develop the educational approach that would make her famous.

<sup>1</sup> Montessori, Maria. To Educate the Human Potential. Madras: Kalakshetra Publications, 1967. Internet resource. P.13

Some of her innovations from that time included: a mixed-age classroom; student liberty to choose work and to pursue it without interruption; freedom of movement within the classroom environment, didactic materials for student use developed through research, observation, and experimentation; materials for care of the classroom environment, such as brooms and mops; activities for the development of physical abilities, such as pouring and fastening buttons; child-sized furniture and child-accessible equipment; a new conception of the adult role as observer and guide rather than direct instructor.

Today there are about 4,500 schools in the U.S. that claim to use the Montessori method.

One of Montessori's foundational educational tenants is that the individual's most important formation happens during the first stages of life. Emphasis in her pedagogy is on the attention given to the first six years of a child's life.

According to Montessori, the teacher serves as the link between the learner and the world, lighting the fire of curiosity in the student so that the he may enter into and begin to discover reality for himself.

Grades, teacher led learning exercises, homework, rewards and punishments, rows of desks, and other elements common to the American classroom, are not found in a Montessori school environment. The goal is to create an environment that allows students to discover the world for themselves and to share their discoveries with one another.<sup>2</sup>



*Rossella Carone's Montessori classroom*

*"As a Montessori teacher, because we don't use homework or punitive methods, I am able to tell my students: "You have a value because you are, not because of what you do."*

*- Rossella Carone, teacher at Ave Maria Montessori school, Florida*

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<sup>2</sup> "Montessori in the United States." The Montessori Observer. N.p., 2013. Web. 28 Dec. 2016. <<https://montessorioobserver.com/the-montessori-movement/montessori-in-the-united-states/>>.

# CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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religious education rooted in the Montessori method

If you place confidence in children, you will give them a start in dealing by themselves with God. In silence and recollection they will not delay in finding their way to Him, and they will arrive at religious experiences which would astound even those who are proficient in the spiritual life.

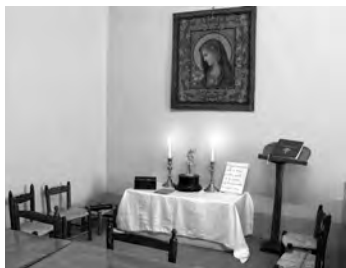
- Sofia Cavalletti<sup>1</sup>

Sofia Cavalletti (1917 - 2011) developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, along with her colleague Gianna Gobbi. Cavalletti was a native of Rome, Italy, and a Hebrew scholar. Her approach to religious education relies heavily on the Montessori Method. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd aims to help children have "an encounter with the living God."



*Sophia Cavalletti with students*

Cavalletti taught that the child's first exposure to the faith should be centered in the person of Jesus. From her research she found that the aspect of Christ that most speaks to the young child is Jesus the Good Shepherd, who calls his sheep by name creating a personal relationship with him, who lays down his life for the sheep, nurtures and protects them. Because of this emphasis on



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<sup>1</sup> Cavalletti, S., & Gobbi, G. (1964). *Teaching Doctrine and Liturgy: The Montessori Approach*. Staten Island, NY: Alba House. p. 131.



Jesus the Good Shepherd, through this method, children soon realize that he is the center of the Christian faith.

In the Atrium, we learn  
from Jesus  
- Georgia Ann, age six

*The atrium of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a specially prepared environment in which the furnishings are scaled to the size of the child. In this space children and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church and other social spheres. The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer. The atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.*



*The Atrium at St. Patrick Parish, Brooklyn, NY*



*The Atrium at St. Patrick Parish, Brooklyn, NY*

- From the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.<sup>2</sup>

In the atrium, we work  
with Jesus  
- Michele, age six

<sup>2</sup> "The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd." The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd the United States. Web. 28 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.cgsusa.org/about/default.aspx>>.

# LUIGI GIUSSANI

an education of the heart

*I found them so unaware of the most elementary things and so indifferent to them, that I felt an uncontrollable desire to share my experience with them. I wanted them to have, as I had had, the experience of the 'beautiful day'.*

*- Luigi Giussani, How a Movement is Born<sup>1</sup>*



*Luigi Giussani and students*

Fr. Luigi Giussani, a young priest from the north of Italy, took a train ride in 1954 that would change his life, and the world. He met some teenagers on that train and was moved by the fact that their formal knowledge of the Christian faith was completely abstracted from the reality of their lives. This encounter provoked pity and compassion in him for those young people. He wanted them to know more; he wanted them to know what had been given to him. And so, he requested to leave teaching in the seminary and began teaching and accompanying high school students.

From the relationships that formed around this young priest, a movement was born. That movement spread out from Italy to the whole world and reached us here in America. Fr. Giussani's intuition on that train trip in 1954 was that these young people could know more; that theirs was a problem of a lack of experience of the faith. Thus, Giussani's educational method has, at its heart, a concept of experience that implies a relationship between teacher and student, in which the teacher becomes a living proposal for the student to verify

<sup>1</sup> Giussani, Luigi. "How a Movement Is Born." 30 Days, 2 (1990): 62-71. [Translation].

within his or her own experience. But what is experience?

*As I climbed for the first time the three steps at the entrance to Berchet High School, where I had been sent to teach religion, it was clear to me, although I was aware of my limitations, that this was a matter of re-launching the announcement of Christianity as a present event of human interest and suitable for anyone who does not want to renounce the fulfillment of his or her hopes and expectations, as well as the use, without diminishment of the gift of reason.*  
~Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*<sup>2</sup>



*Students at Berchet High School in Milan*

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<sup>2</sup> Giussani, Luigi. *The journey to Truth Is an Experience*. Translated by John Zucchi and Patrick Stevenson, Montreal: McGill-Queen's U Press, 2006. Print. p. 4

an expanded definition of

## EXPERIENCE

*True experience throws us into the rhythms of the real, drawing us irresistibly toward our union with the ultimate aspect of things and their true, definitive meaning.*

*Luigi Giussani, The Risk of Education<sup>1</sup>*

Fr. Giussani, like other prominent pedagogs of the 20th century, recognized human experience as the terrain in which education takes place. But his understanding of experience bursts the categories of environment, reflective thought, and the perfection of behavior in order to master circumstances, to which it had been

relegated. Giussani describes human experience as the discovery of something both promising and mysterious within reality. This discovery, in some way, matches up with the expectations inherent in the human person. In order for this discovery to take place, and therefore for experience to become educative, the person must make a critical judgment about what is happening.

*He taught us a method for approaching the world, for being happy. It consisted of comparing every proposal—whether coming from him or the other teachers—with our profound humanity. But in order to do this, a new concept of reason was needed, understood as an openness to all of reality, as a tension toward the ultimate meaning of reality, against every rationalistic reduction. I am always moved by the memory of the lesson in which he defined this concept of reason.*

*- Excerpted from an interview with one of Fr. Giussani's first students, Fr. Luigi Negri, "That First Hour", Traces Magazine<sup>2</sup>*



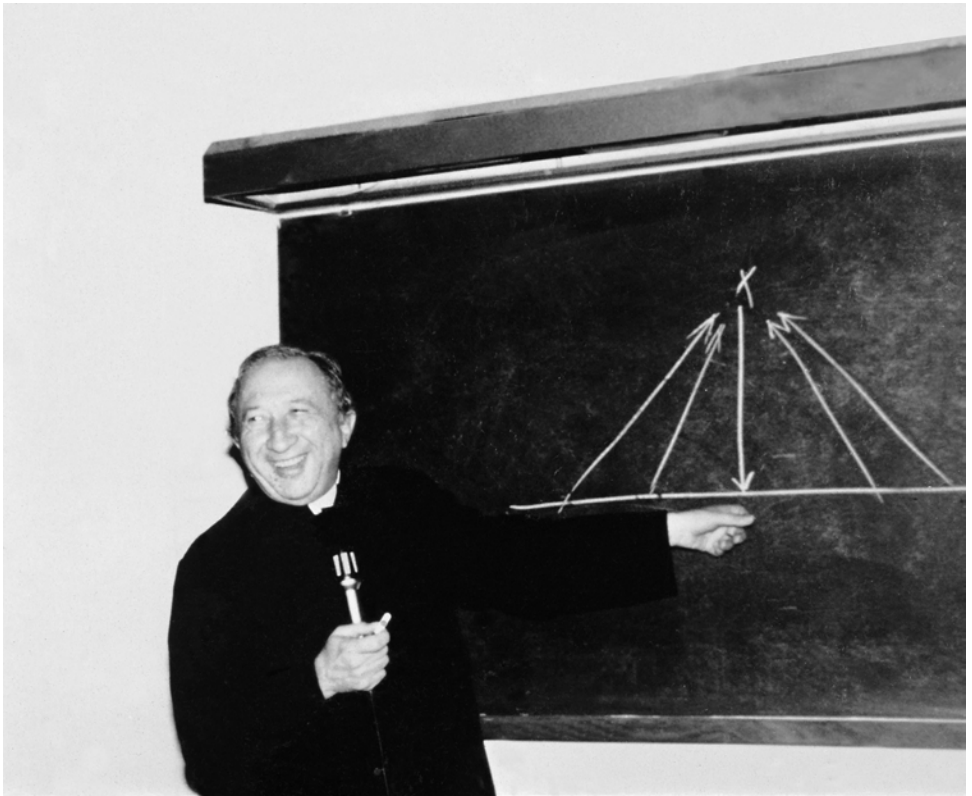
*Salvador Dali, "Woman at the Window"*

<sup>1</sup> Giussani, Luigi. *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*. New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2001. Print. p.99

<sup>2</sup> Bergamini, Paola. "That first Hour of School." *Traces Magazine*, n.d. Web. 28 Dec. 2016. <<http://>

*"Experience certainly means "trying" something, but primarily it coincides with a judgement we make about what we try. Above all, the person is self-awareness. Thus, what characterizes experience is not so much action, that is, mechanically establishing relations with reality: what defines experience is understanding something, discovering its meaning. "*

*- Luigi Giussani, The Religious Sense<sup>3</sup>*



*Luigi Giussani*

# THE TEACHER

Who educates?

What does it mean to be a teacher?

Where do I find proposals about the meaning of things? Who do I trust?



The overall education of children is a "most serious duty" and at the same time a "primary right" of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: "all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization." Still, "a rift has opened up between the family and society, between family and



the school; the educational pact today has been broken and thus the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis".

- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*<sup>1</sup>

1 Pope Francis. *Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family: Apostolic Exhortation*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2016. p.66 Print.

education happens within a

## RELATIONSHIP

Is it necessary for teachers to engage themselves in a relationship with their students?

What role does our humanity play in the educational process?

*Q. Do you desire your sight more than anything else in the world?*

*A. No! No! I would rather walk with a friend in the dark than walk alone in the light. (from an interview with Helen Keller)<sup>1</sup>*

At my school, one of my duties is to give a week of short reflections once a month at boys' morning prayer. I used to hate preparing and giving these talks. But at the beginning of this school year, I re-read *The Religious Sense* by Fr. Giussani, and found myself, for the first time, wanting to share what I was reading with my students; I wanted to share what I was learning about my heart, my desire. I noticed that preparing and giving my reflections went from being a burden to a joy - I was sharing what I was trying to live with these people that I have come to love. I wasn't sure whether my reflections were helping my students, but for the first time they were helping me.

On the first day one of the older students asked me to talk with him more about my reflection. The conversation ended with him saying "I want to start asking why about everything I'm doing!" A couple days later, I had a discussion with one of my classes about why they are so concerned about grades. One student surprised me with how involved he was with the conversation. In the following weeks, there was a change in his attitude - he was more engaged in class, more

<sup>1</sup> Lash, Joseph P. *Helen and Teacher: the Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980. Print.



*Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan*



*Patrick Tomassi on a backpacking trip with students*

curious about the subject matter, and more cheerful at school. The next time it was my turn to give the morning prayer reflections, he got really excited. I asked him what had changed, and he said "I decided to take the risk that what you were teaching us might actually be interesting. What I discovered is that it's amazing! So I care

more because I found something to care about."

- Patrick Tomassi, Math and Science Teacher at Trinity Academy

*To say dialogue is an educative environment is to say that it is always an exchange between the I (the educator who proposes, and proposes himself), the you (the person to be educated who is introduced to total reality) and the very reality that can never be mechanically grasped because of its character as sign. There is no true dialogue if the freedom of the educator and the student does not come into play in ceaseless comparison with the real.*

*Excerpted from "Education and Integral Experience" by Angelo Scola<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Scola, Angelo. "Education and Integral Experience." *Communio*, vol 30.1, Spring, 2003.



# EDUCATION IS AN INVITATION

to discover the fulness of life



The comprehensibility of the world seems to me a wonder or eternal secret. Here lies the sense of wonder which increases even more with the development of our knowledge.

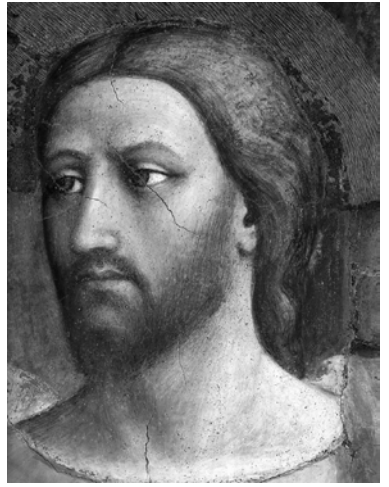
- Albert Einstein<sup>1</sup>

*Beyond the dramatic tensions that run through it, beyond its finitude, the real is a good. Education is an introduction to total reality precisely because total reality corresponds to the human person's heart (to his constitutive needs). It corresponds because it is for his good. It is therefore something positive. Here we have the keystone of Msgr. Giussani's educational proposal, and, therefore, of his thought. The mystery of being gives itself in the real. Each manifestation of the real (every real sign) presents itself as an event that calls our freedom to account by provoking (i.e., calling forth, arousing) it to adhere.(...) In this sense, education, which seeks to introduce the student into an*

<sup>1</sup> Einstein, Albert. "Physics and reality." Journal of the Franklin Institute 221.3 (1936): 349-382.

*integral experience of reality,  
leads him progressively to grasp  
its proper nature, that of being a  
sign of the mystery, whose paternal  
countenance has been revealed to  
us by Jesus.*

*Excerpted from "Education and  
Integral Experience" by Angelo  
Scola<sup>2</sup>*



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<sup>2</sup> Scola, Angelo. "Education and Integral Experience." p.103

# THE HEART

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## of the student

What do I have in common with my students?  
Where do I start? How can I reach them?

In reading Fr. Giussani I experience the peculiarity of what he says in that he is talking not about a technique but about something "alive". His proposal is alive, much more than other methods that can risk to becoming simply a technique. I'll give you an example: last year I noticed that the children really loved the director of the school in deep way. They flocked around her like bees to honey. So one day I asked her if she knew why they loved her so much and she said: "I think it is because I take them seriously. When I was a student I never liked it when teachers pretended to be interested in my life, but deep down it was not a real interest. I discover myself sincerely always being very interested in the children and their stories and what they discover even if they are children. I am sure that this is the reason."

- Rossella Carone, teacher at Ave Maria Montessori school, Florida



*Henri Matisse, "Icarus"*

*The problem of education is whether we have an answer to this urge inherent in living, such that we can communicate it, in our living. Therefore, it's not the kids' problem; it's the adults' problem. Only if we adults have this engagement with the real in its totality can we communicate a meaning.*

*- Julian Carron<sup>1</sup>*



*Photograph by Elio Ciol*

*Therefore, in order to educate in truth, it is necessary first and foremost to know who the human person is, to know human nature. Contemplating the world around him, the*

*Psalmist reflects: "When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?" (Ps8:4-5). This is the fundamental question that must be asked: who is man? Man is a being who bears within his heart a thirst for the infinite, a thirst for truth – a truth which is not partial but capable of explaining life's meaning – since he was created in the image and likeness of God...*

*- Benedict XVI<sup>2</sup>*

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1 Carron, Julian. "Educating: a Communication of Yourself, That Is, of Your Own Way of Relating to Reality." Traces Booklets, 2007 p.10

2 Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: Educating Young People in Justice and Peace." January 12, 2012.

# EDUCATION INVOLVES A RISK

What is the role of the student's freedom in the educational event?

Is a student's freedom to challenge my proposal an obstacle to the educational event?



*Robert Doisneau, " Les tabliers de la rue de Rivoli, Paris," 1978*

*The young person must be guided gradually as he matures toward a personal and independent encounter with the reality that surrounds him. It is here that the educator's stability becomes important, for increasing autonomy of the student is a "risk" for the teacher's intelligence and heart, and even for her pride. It is precisely the risk of confrontation that helps create the pupil's personality in his relationship to all things; it is here that he develops his freedom.*

*- Luigi Giussani, Risk of Education<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Giussani, Luigi. The Risk of Education, p.81

In order to prevent the desires of the heart from escaping from our deepest regions our wills must be educated and trained. We need an education system in which these desires are systematically reduced.



*Philip Koch, "Edward Hopper's Room by the Sea, II,"*

We need an education system where the possible link with infinity is not even mentioned, an education in which our only recognized link with the stars is that cosmology shows we are made of the same material stuff: all this is necessary to prevent these desires from bursting out of the hearts of our young people, leading them to question every compromise we have made and to demand what our current views of sexuality, our economic system, and our politics cannot provide.

- Lorenzo Albacete, *God at the Ritz*<sup>2</sup>

My deepest desire as a teacher is to enter the classroom with an open heart - ready to have a meaningful experience with my students, sharing with them the beauty of the content that we are learning, and being in relationship with them. Taking this desire seriously implies a risk; one can't have an "open heart" without allowing himself to be vulnerable. This means I must be willing to expose my emptiness and inadequacies, knowing that only Another who is more powerful than myself can make these beautiful experiences and relationships possible. But the golden standard of being the perfect teacher who never shows his weaknesses is not nearly as beautiful as being a human teacher whose relationship with his students is predicated upon the power of love. And the simple fact is that I'm more free when I live this way because it is more authentic to my humanity and to the desires of my heart.

- Stephen Aduabato- taken from the blog, *Cracks in Postmodernity*

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<sup>2</sup> Albacete, Lorenzo. *God at the Ritz: Attraction to Infinity*. New York: Crossroad Pub., 2002. Print.

# A UNIFYING HYPOTHESIS

## of meaning

What do I wake up for in the morning?

Why do I go to work?

What do I look for in the faces of my students?

Whether I know it or not, the answers to these questions become a proposal or hypothesis of meaning to my students. Whether I teach religion, philosophy, calculus, or chemistry, my convictions about the meaning of life are communicated implicitly through the way I present the content to my students.



*Stephen Aduabato's theology class*

In a math class, I can discover the ordered beauty of a formula or geometrical proof. In a history class, I can face the mystery of evil and violence head on. But what does all of this mean for my life? How does it all “come together”?



*“The marvelous eruption of discoveries, steps forward, and chains of connections which define the educational development of a human being—that is, his introduction to all of reality—cannot come about without an idea of meaning that presents itself to the individual in formation with solidity, intensity, and sureness.” -Fr. Giussani<sup>1</sup>*

V. Kandinsky, “Free Curve to the Point  
- Accompanying Sound of Geometric  
Curves,” 1925

1 Giussani, Luigi. The Risk of Education. p.53.

# AUTHORITY

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Why should I do what you tell me?  
What do you have to offer me?



*Luigi Giussani with students*

In many inner-city schools, children express the same resistance and disillusionment toward authority figures as many adults do. This tension often becomes a gift to me as it challenges me to take my own position of authority more seriously and to ask daily what it means to be a teacher to my students. My authority, and that of any other authority figure, is strengthened by my awareness of the origin and finality of the task that transcends me. Many of my students look at me as if my authority somehow limits their freedom and their capacity to express themselves. I constantly have to remind them that I'm on their side and that, rather than seeking to control or restrict their freedom and sense of identity, I desire for their freedom to flourish and for them to live their identity more fully. After a number of unpleasant confrontations, I have learned to value the moments in



which my kids challenge my authority. I run the same risk of letting my authority become a license to incite violence when I am tempted to affirm myself and assert my own power, rather than to direct them to something that transcends all of us.

-Stephen Aduato, Religion teacher at St. Benedict's Prep, Newark, NJ

*We experience authority when we meet someone who possesses a full awareness of reality, who imposes on us a recognition and arouses surprise, novelty, and respect. There is an inevitable attraction within authority and an inexorable suggestion within us, since the experience of authority reminds one more or less clearly of one's poverty and limitations.*

*-Fr. Luigi Giussani<sup>1</sup>*



*Luigi Giussani with students*

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<sup>1</sup> Giussani, Luigi. *The Risk of Education*, p.64

# PRESENCE

when the educator becomes a sign of that which he seeks with his students

What is the ultimate value of the relationship between the teacher and student?

Is the presence of the teacher necessary for the educational event to be authentic?

"For this reason, educating means being a presence in front of the other person. There is no education without presence, a presence able to fascinate the other, to move the other deep down. This is very different from covering over everything the other does, at one extreme, and from taking no interest at all in the other. If we think we can educate without



*Ms. Christina Zaccagnino with her science students at St. Bernadette Catholic Academy in Brooklyn, NY.*

presence, without being there with our whole selves, with a method that does not involve us, we are off the track! Only when we involve ourselves in the first person with the other can we become a presence that captivates, that evokes the free involvement of the other. You just need to avoid losing yourself in theories and ask yourself what helps us, and verify whether the way you behave with your children is the one that helps you, who are adults. The hypothesis, the ideal, is incarnated in the witness (in the educator), because education is a communication of self, that is, of the way I live the relationship with reality."

-Fr. Julian Carron<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carron, Julian. "I have Loved You With An Everlasting Love. I Have Had Pity On Your Nothingness." Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Rimini, Italy 2016. p.83

*In class, we discussed the meaning of life. Mr. Adubato explained how people in the world live with no real purpose. People just move along with life with no end goal in mind. Mr. Adubato asked us something along the lines of – do you know the purpose of your life. It took me sometime to think about it, and I realized that I did not know. My reflection on the question did not end in the classroom, it has changed my view on the meaning of life. At first I was down on myself for not knowing what my meaning in life is. Then I remembered a lyric from a song from Childish Gambino in the song 3005, "I used to care what people thought. I mean, nobody out here's got it figured out" I came to the conclusion that nobody knows what the meaning of life is. I feel as if God created us to go on this search for what our purpose in life is. Right now as a senior, myself and my brothers are going through a lot of stress. As much as I try, I can't figure out what the point of going through this stress is. What I did realize is that I am not going through this alone. I have my senior class who is going through it with me and many members of the community to help me through this road to college. I am not going on this search for my purpose in life alone, I have God, family, and community. Another thing that stuck with me from class is that Mr. Adubato always ask us how we're doing and if we have anything we have to let out. This impacted me because many people get a chance to let it all out, all the stress they are going through. After doing so, I felt great. Knowing that there was someone that cared about how my day or week was going was heart warming. This has inspired me to try and ask someone everyday how their life is going because we never know what they are going through on this search for the meaning of their life.*

*- Brian Benedict, student at St. Benedict's Prep, Newark, NJ*

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# IN THE WORDS OF STUDENTS

Thank you for helping to make everything more clear to me. Thank you for taking the time to get to know me and to listen to what I think. No other teacher treats me like you do.

I learned from you that school isn't just for getting through to live life. School is about learning the material for our own good. I also learned that to learn something you need to hunger and desire it.

I appreciate the great care you have for my thinking and writing . . . I must say that you had a great part in influencing me with it. I want you to know that I have started praying again.

I would like to start off by saying thank you. For a long time I didn't believe in anything, but while being in your class I was able to put into perspective how much I have to be grateful for. Thank you for making me believe again.

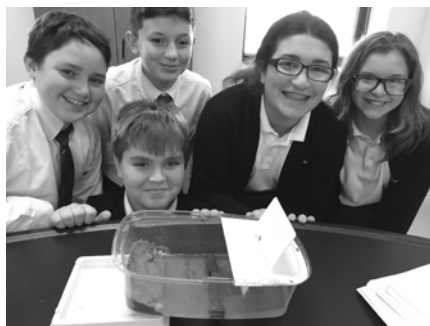
You teach me more than just science. Every day you teach with the same thing: love for science and love for us. You mean more

to me than just a science teacher. You made me love science. You made me want to be kinder to others (continuously). You helped me realize that I shouldn't be defined by a grade, but as the person I am and am trying to be. Your kind words and your love for everyone in the classroom rock climbed into my heart.

I think that the reason why God didn't give you children is because you have all of us in the classroom. Maybe we can pray that you could have children but not now, when you are older like Elizabeth of the Bible

You are an extraordinary teacher. Sadly, up to that point in my life, my education was overwhelmingly just regurgitating what the textbook or what the teacher had said. You were the first teacher that taught me to think on my own.

I've had a wonderful four years with you in science. You've instilled a love for science in me that will never go away.



*Students at St. Bernadette Catholic Academy in Brooklyn, NY.*

# ADVICE TO EDUCATORS

## of the 21st century

Be seriously involved with your lives. The one who seeks daily the answer to his own human need, with truth and passion, verifying the value or lack of value of his conception of life, cannot but communicate to others, and almost naturally he is an authority for them. This involvement is also translated into an involvement with one's tradition, with the richness that each one has been launched into reality with, and that is communicated with newness. Nothing of the past can interest us again if not lived in the present, in some way and by someone. This is the great temporal category of education.

In addition, one must always be educated. Everything that I have said and written has been born completely of an experience, born out of dialogue with others.

Finally, one must be certain, that is, be honest with themselves and truthful with others. It is not possible to build anything if not on something that is certain; it is not possible to educate if not communicating the depth of truth that has already become experience in our own lives.



- Luigi Giussani<sup>1</sup>

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1 Peterson, Holly M. "Relationship of the Educational Pedagogy of Luigi Giussani to the American High School of the 21st Century." Dissertation. University of San Francisco, 2000. Print. p.145



I love school because it is synonymous with openness to reality. At least it should be! Yet it does not always manage to be so, and so that means that the structure needs to be adapted a little. Going to school means opening one's mind and heart to reality, in the wealth of its aspects, of its dimensions. And we do not have the right to be afraid of reality! School teaches us to understand reality. Going to school means opening one's mind and heart to reality, in the wealth of its aspects, of its dimensions. And this is so very beautiful!

In the first years we learn a wide range of subjects, then little by little one delves more deeply into one subject and then ultimately specializes in it. But if one has learned how to learn — this is the secret, to learn how to learn! — one retains this always, a person remains open to reality!

Teachers are the first ones who must remain open to reality. For if a teacher is not open to learning, he or she is not a good teacher and isn't even interesting; young people understand that, they have a "nose" for it, and they are attracted by professors whose thoughts are open, "unfinished", who are seeking something "more", and thus they infect students with this attitude.

- Pope Francis<sup>2</sup>

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2 Pope Francis. "Address to Students and Teachers From Schools Across Italy." St. Peter's Square, Vatican City. 10 May 2014. The Holy See. Web. 28 Dec. 2016.

# FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

- Pope Francis, "A Big Heart Open to God"



Winslow Homer, "Boys on a Hillside," 1879

*A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides.*

- Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arendt, Hannah. "The crisis in education." Between past and future (1961).

Is there any concept more ambiguous in our postmodern world than education? To approach it is to grapple with the intersection of the vastness of human history and the fleeting moment of an individual's existence. Yet, as a society, we seem to agree that the educational endeavor is in crisis; it falls short of what we would hope for our children and casts gloom on our vision of the future.

Positing that there exists an educational crisis begs the question of what we mean by education. Focusing on the search for solutions puts the cart before the horse, provoking cries of woe when the cart doesn't budge, despite all of our data driven theories and scientific techniques.

In developing this exhibit we have explored the question of education starting from where we recognize it occurring in ourselves, and in our students. In doing so, we find evidence of the educational event happening in all of our lives, notwithstanding the diversity of environments in which we work. The more we reflect on what education is, the more we find it intertwined with the questions, "what does it mean to be human" or "what is the meaning of life?"

In examining the educational crisis we have become more aware of a fact in our lives that gives rise to hope. Each one of us teachers, young and old, from different backgrounds and regions of the US, has been the recipient of an ingenious pedagogy, one that reached us through the presence of an unlooked for "teacher." Through the witness of these people we too have become sure of a loving Presence at the heart of reality that desires our good. More than a static fact, our own education is a continuing journey that expands our capacity to reason and opens our hearts to the possibility of a ceaseless fascination with the world around us.

Facing the educational crisis through work on this exhibit has been the opportunity to ask fundamental questions about education together and to critically reflect on our experiences as teachers. Through this common task we have rediscovered a promise within reality that became tangible in the form of a friendship born among us, generating an energy capable of launching us back into our work as educators with a renewed hope for our students and joy in our labor.



# THE RISK OF EDUCATION

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conference given by Msgr. Luigi Giussani

Church of Santa Maria della Passione, Milan, June 6th, 1985

transcript not reviewed by author

I would like to begin to take a brief look at what I believe to be the fundamental factors of the problem of education. We cannot forget, especially since the Pope continuously refers to it in his addresses, that the problem of education is the primary one in a society that has a minimally evolved civil awareness. I remember that in the first years I was teaching religion, often in the disputes and dialectics in class, I would say, "Please, send us—us, the clergy—naked into the streets, take everything from us, but don't take from us the freedom to educate." I was distressed to see, in the years that followed—because thirty years have passed since I said that—that we have strived for everything, but have sacrificed freedom of education.

I would like to begin to hint at what I believe to be the fundamental traits of the phenomenon of education by quoting T. S. Eliot, because, along with Giacomo Leopardi, he is my favourite poet, so I read him almost every day:

*Of all that was done in the past, [past: this is the first word in the problem of education], you eat the fruit, either rotten or ripe.*

*And the Church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored.*

*For every ill deed in the past we suffer the consequence:  
For sloth, for avarice, gluttony, neglect of the Word of God,*

*For pride, for lechery, treachery, for every act of sin.*

*And of all that was done that was good, you have the inheritance.*

*For good and ill deeds belong to a man alone, when he stands alone on the other side of death,*

*But here upon the earth you have the reward of the good*

*and ill that was done by those who have gone before you.  
And all that is ill you may repair if you walk together in  
humble repentance, expiating the sins of your fathers;  
And all that was good you must fight to keep with hearts  
as devoted as those of our fathers who fought to gain it.  
The Church must be forever building, for it is forever  
decaying within and attacked from without;  
For this is the law of life; and you must remember that  
while there is time of prosperity  
The people will neglect the Temple, and in time of  
adversity they will decry it.<sup>1</sup>*

I wanted to quote this passage again firstly, as I was already impatient to mention before, to present the first fundamental factor of the phenomenon of education. The phenomenon of education is clearly a present; if it is a vestige of the past, then it is in the present that it can become education. It is a relationship in the present, but for educating.

A great Austrian theologian gave me what I hold to be the best definition of education I have found up to now. He said that education is introduction to reality as a whole. Now why does man need to be introduced to reality as a whole? Because, as the Pope keeps on repeating when he speaks of education or of culture, which is the same thing— because education is the main instrument of culture and in the end the two words have similar roots --, man has to be educated in order to become more himself, to be realized, for man does not realize himself unless by means of an encounter with something else.

Perhaps some of you recall Gide's *Symphonie Pastorale*—it's years since I went to see a film myself—in which Gide tells of a Protestant Pastor who is visiting his flock at Christmas and goes into a poor miserable hovel with its roof sagging, almost touching the ground. In that poor home, while he was speaking with its oldest inhabitants, he realized that what he had thought was a bundle of rags under the roof, was moving. His curiosity was aroused; he got up and went over, and there under a heap of rags, was an apparently 17-year-old girl. The girl was deaf and blind, and therefore mute. She had been born deaf and

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from 'The Rock'*, *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1963), 153-154.

blind and had remained mute. The two inhabitants of the hovel were her grandparents. Her mother—their daughter—had given birth to that child and died in the process. At first, the grandparents had tried all sorts of ways to provoke a reaction from the child, but she was deaf and blind and did not perceive anything. Ignorant as they were, and tired, since they were very old, they had just left her there, in the same place, just keeping her fed. She had grown up like an animal. So the Protestant Pastor takes up the task of rehabilitating the girl.

Now the main point of the story is that man develops through relationships, through contact with something else; just as an "other" is necessary for man to exist from the start, it is equally as necessary for man to become true, more and more himself. Thus man is destined for the fulfilment of himself at the ultimate horizon. So, at least potentially, education must aim at introducing man to reality as a whole. But with what eyes, that is to say, with what criteria, that is to say, with what hypothesis of meaning will he approach this total reality, or this reality that he impacts? If there were no hypothesis of a meaning, or a previous point of view, how much less value would it all have! Simply upon coming into this building, how differently each one of us reacts to these masterpieces, according to the evolution of our awareness.

So, take the case of a parent; if we identify the parent, quite rightly, as the educator par excellence, by nature, on the basis of what terms will he introduce his child into relationship with reality? Without a proposal, the relationship with reality is purely reactive, it is like starting from zero, pure reactivity, instinctive or a matter of opinion; it will never be knowledge in the full sense of the word.

With young people, I insist on using the scientific formula "working hypothesis," because man comes to know things only on the basis of a working hypothesis. Man's genius lies in finding the most adequate working hypothesis. Now, the working hypothesis on the basis of which a parent introduces his child into reality is called the past. It is the past. I said that the phenomenon of education is in action in the instant, in the present. But what is the present? Just an instant. The present instant is nothing. Its density, its richness, is the legacy of the past, including the previous instant. In the present instant the only thing that comes into play is that mysterious thing called freedom which manipulates in some way what comes from what was before, from the past.

I want to say that the first condition or the first fundamental factor of an education is the richness of tradition. Without this, education is either impossible or impoverished, flattened out. It is like an encephalogram that comes out as a flat line. The first factor is the wealth of tradition. This is the great, rich or poor, hypothesis, or point of view with which nature helps the new being in his impact with reality. The adventure into which existence launches the new being is like a dowry; it is not bare, naked or neutral; this dowry is called the past, and I insist on observing—Solzhenitsyn has a fine page in which he describes this, but it is a persistent idea he has—that a regime, in the negative sense of the word, a power that wants to dominate a people, must first of all sever the people's relationship with the past, because a people that is not severed from the past, whose memory is not taken away, has the potential to judge and therefore to criticize and therefore a great potential for rebellion. On the contrary, the greater the richness of a proposed tradition, the more the person being educated has a conciliatory relationship with his elders, with his father and mother. The preservation of tradition, this means that the actor, the mediator of the offer, the father or mother, must be as aware as possible of what he or she is handing on. This awareness is not absolutely identifiable with the richness of tradition, because the greater part of this richness can be communicated without a critical awareness, but the more one is critically aware, the more explosive is the fascination that the tradition evokes. I believe that the confidence, the stability or the psychological balance of a person is strongly linked to the positivity of a proposal that re-engages the past, the tradition, for his new life that is vibrating.

A meaning in life, a meaning for life cannot but be first of all identified with a past or offered by a past. For the word tradition does not mean simply a store of information, of data, or of behavioural habits, but above all a meaning. So an education, first and foremost—I am ready to discuss this, I am willing to hear if I am perhaps exaggerating—an education is dependent and proportional to the devotion, to the fidelity to the past that the educator has and his awareness of it.

So this stresses what leads us to outline the second factor in the educative process: Tradition as a proposal is actuated by the figure of the educator. I believe there is no affirmation more absurd than that which maintains that a parent should not give his child ideas, feelings and values, that the child, as he grows, will have to choose for himself. There is nothing more nonsensical, nothing more unnatural, because a father and mother are such, not only because they give the child firstly

milk and then more adult food as he grows, but also because they give themselves; otherwise the ideal would be to have a fool for a father and an idiot for a mother. It is clear that, as years pass, my esteem and devotion for my father and mother grow; the emotion in my memory, and my gratitude to them increases. This is because the more time passes, the more I realize what my father was for me, and what my mother was for me, and I discover a richness in them, in their words and attitudes, that I had never noticed, not for a long time. It often comes to mind how my mother would come to kiss me good night and tuck me in, and every night, before I left for the seminary, for at least 10 years, she would say, "Think of the children who have no father, think of the children who have no mother, who have no roof over their heads or a roof that leaks, and who get wet when it rains, those who have not eaten like you have today." How those short phrases said casually, without my understanding their value, just moving me sometimes, developed my sense of relationships. I understood it ten years later, and I am indebted to my father for a certain sensitivity I learned from his behaviour. Now, how much richer in awareness and content is the educator, his words, his attitude! In this regard, I would like to make an observation that I have seen provokes a public reaction. I believe that the main problem in the attitude of the educator is not that of coherence from the ethical point of view, because even a youngster, as he grows, once he has passed a certain point in adolescence, understands that his father is a man like the others, and the same goes for his mother. Incoherence in concrete, practical life arouses various feelings, like anger, if it serves, or almost contentment if it justifies, our own evasions. But there is something a youngster needs to see, and that is coherence of ideal in the educator. When parents insist on certain values and then, in the evaluation of things in life, in their attention, in their suggestions for the future, they never keep in mind the values they insist on, this generates a scandal, a wound that rarely can be healed, if not after a long time, I would say it's incurable. This is because the young person has first and foremost an enormous logical, rational need. If you insist on this ideal with me, and then in all your judgments this ideal has no effect, this destroys the esteem I have for you. Perhaps I am stressing personal reflections and experiences, but I am convinced of what I am saying. The educative subject must be as aware as possible and maintain an attitude towards his proposal that is above all an attitude of intellectual coherence, coherence in judgment and therefore adequate as regards the advising and evaluating of what he insists on. But it is destructive if the subject making the proposal is contradictory in the choice of his child's

associates - that is to say, if parents propose certain ultimate values regarding meaning and the teacher in school or the companions they allow the child to spend time with, constantly have a different proposal to make. It would not be harmful or destructive if everything were tackled consciously and critically, for then it would be an aspect of the adolescent's introduction to reality as a whole. But the reasons must be clearly brought out. Everything that is censured provokes either unease and an unconscious but very active ferment deep in the heart, or else passes on contradictory things, leaving the heart at a loss before moral and ethical problems. So, as well as being aware of tradition, the educator must make a great effort in making sure that the people his children spend time with are in line with the concern that has been and will be fundamental in his relationship with his children. On this point I believe that every sacrifice must be made, because there is no greater threat than incoherence in the line of a proposal made to young people.

I remember at Berchet High School, I was coming out and, in the entrance hall, I met a very distressed mother who was coming in. As soon as she saw me she came at me saying, "When my son was in his first year of studies in this school, he would come to church with me and say his prayers with me; now he is in his final year and he doesn't want to go to church any more, and it's your fault as his religion teacher." I answered her, "In five years, how many times did you come to find out how your son was behaving with me, what judgments he had? How is it that you were never concerned about the group your son was frequenting? Above all, how is it that you were never concerned about what the philosophy teacher and the Italian teacher—[and I gave her their names]—were saying?" Coherence of a proposal is a grave matter for the growth and the achievement of a personality. Paradoxically, only if a young person is helped to try out and verify deeply a coherent hypothesis for facing life, will he also be capable, out of honesty, in virtue of the real values acquired, to leave one road and follow another. But to face life or to allow one to face life without first of all being honest with what one was born with, that is to say, with tradition attentively and critically tackled—but I will explain this in a moment-- , means once more making one's own reactivity the criterion for living: "I like, I don't like, I want, I don't want, I think or I don't think..."

I always tell young people that it's quite right that a person is born with one of Aesop's two knapsacks on his back—the reference to Aesop is purely external by the way-- , and in this knapsack his parents or others in their place, since they love the child, put everything they

believe useful into the bag; it's quite right; it's quite natural, as we said before. But there comes a time when nature itself, this same nature which makes a parent give a child what he feels to be right, pushes the child, or the adolescent by now, to take hold of the knapsack on his back and throw it out in front of him to look inside it. In English we use the word "problem" which means exactly "to throw before"; it comes from the Greek *pro ballo*. He rummages inside to see if what is there is worthwhile, and for this we use another word of Greek origin, *crisis* or *critique* (*krisis*). It means to grasp the reasons, become aware of the reasons, and therefore the limitations or the lack of limitations of a proposal. If a person is not trained in this work, without having made the effort of training in this work, he will grow up to be reactive, with his reactivity being the ultimate criterion—physical or mental reactivity. But if the adult has not gone through this process in some way, or does not learn it when it comes to educating his child, then how will he be able to help the child? In this sense, freedom comes into play, first of all in the figure of the educator. In fact, freedom has first of all to come into play in the attitude the educator takes up regarding the past. How sad is a society in which no one sets out to defend the possibility of communicating one's heritage to the new beings who emerge, because the newspapers, the television, the school, can all create a screen and an insulation that prevents a living contact with the values of the past.

The publishers, Jaca Book, have produced a history of the Church and I have noted that all the adults who have bought the books for their children have read them and learned things they had never heard before. They are, in fact, a summary written for children, with illustrations for children. How can a Christian, a child of the Church who does not know the history of his own home, perceive the depth of the values that are proposed to him? It is impossible. Moreover, the nobility of one's blood, of his heart or his soul, can be seen first of all precisely in the sensitivity he has for the history of his own family.

Now I want to speak of the third factor that comes into play in the educative process and it is above all because of this third factor that we normally call the fact of education a risk. It is the most dramatic aspect. I believe that many times, if not as a rule, there are few sources of delusion and pain that parents can have from their children like that suggested by this point of our discourse. I have already expressed it in other terms. What is proposed cannot simply be proposed. Simply

to propose it is not education. One must in some way train, as far as you can, your own child to compare what he has been given with the problems life sets before him as it develops.

The experience that the growing child has, that is to say, the impact of reality with a subject is like a provocative presence which has the same root as the Christian word "vocation"; for one's vocation passes through the provocations coming from this impact. These provocations put questions before the young person which he must answer, and before which he must become aware of his responsibility, his capacity to respond.

Education must imply help in exemplifying these answers. After all, this is what we said earlier when we spoke of critique. We must always give the reasons for what we propose to them, and giving reasons is never an abstract phenomenon; it means showing how what I give you is able to make you face up to the more or less dramatic, more or less impassioned questions, in an intelligent and cordial way, as a man, more than what you are told by a companion or what you were told by your teacher or what you see in a film or an article by Severino in *Corriere della Sera*.

Education is above all within this phenomenon which is called in technical and scientific terms "verification"-- the verification of a hypothesis. Now, in this verification, the adult's effort is intensified, because he is the first to be tested; it is above all the adult who is tested because it is not automatic that he will be able to convince others with his own verifying action. This is because both the proposal and even the adult's action that verifies the proposal stop on the threshold of the mystery of the freedom of the child or of the one being educated. Therefore, hoping against hope, hoping whatever the situation, continually grasping the opportunity for showing that what is maintained and given is reasonable, even when the reactivity of the child seems to be opposed to it, even when it seems that the child or the pupil is impermeable, even when he is obviously following other paths, you must persist in this fatherly and motherly, parental duty, with this contrition, with this tremendous disappointment, and overcome your distress. It is at this point that the risk of education is played out, because our task is to love, in other words, to propose and to accompany the young person in putting things to the test, so that the person on the receiving end of the proposal can grasp the reasons that we have grasped. This is love. Love cannot be demanding obedience



on the basis of a persuasion, a conviction not yet formed.

Man, and therefore your child, is a free relationship with destiny, with the Infinite, with God, with truth and goodness. He is a free relationship, and so the way the search for destiny will ensue in him is mysterious. This can never suspend our untiring attention, our untiring proposal and assistance. You can do what you will, but someone with no will power cannot be educated beyond a certain limit. To conclude, I will quote another page by Eliot:

*It is hard for those who have  
never known persecution,  
And who have never known a  
Christian,  
To believe these tales of  
Christian persecution.  
It is hard for those who live  
near a Bank  
To doubt the security of their money.  
It is hard for those who live near a Police Station  
To believe in the triumph of violence.  
Do you think that the Faith has conquered the World  
And that lions no longer need keepers?  
Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can still  
be?  
Do you need to be told that even such modest  
attainments  
As you can boast in the way of polite society  
Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their  
significance?  
Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;  
Women! polish your fingernails:  
You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon of the cat.  
Why should men love the Church? Why should they love  
her laws?  
She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they*

*would forget.*

*She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they like to be soft.<sup>2</sup>*

This is the triumphalism of the authentic Christian. But I read this passage in order to affirm that every personal history is as if it were begun over again. Despite our heritage, the true point of drama, the point of understanding and therefore of decision—because in order to understand you have to decide to understand—always presents itself as if it were the first time (that of Adam and Eve), and the great tenacity or, rather, the strength of character of the educator is this indefatigable, continuous reproposal. Just as the finest expression in the Bible says—as far as I'm concerned, also because I need it—"In spem contra spem," hoping against all the evidence.

I wanted simply to say what I think are the fundamental factors of the whole educative process. First, the value of tradition, which is the first factor targeted and censured where a power dominates in society, in the family, in civil society, and, paradoxically, in religious society. At times, it can happen that ecclesiastical society, if it is lived as a will for power, censures its own history. Second, the figure of the educator, which is the place where tradition becomes conscious and becomes a proposal, but it is a proposal that must offer companionship in its impact, and therefore in the comparison, and in the comparison show the reasons for the proposal itself. But this, the third factor, that is to say, the proof, the verification, is not mathematical; it is not a matter of logic; it stops short, as I said, on the threshold of the person's freedom. Here lies the drama of the risk of education. But whatever be the immediate outcome of your own loving passion (because, as the Pope says, there is no demonstration of love for mankind like the educative commitment), the living proposal, in other words the "I" of the educator, must be untiring, an "I" that is not halted by any circumstances of space or of time, nor therefore of age, nor by any exterior situation, nor any kind of response.

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<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot 160-161.



True experience  
throws us into the  
rhythms of the real,  
drawing us irresistibly toward  
our union with the ultimate  
aspect of things and their  
true, definitive meaning.  
*Luigi Giussani, The Risk  
of Education*

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