



Education from a change in paradigms: to the post-religious or cross-confessional. Educate to exist

Educación desde un cambio de paradigmas:
de lo religioso hacia lo post-religional o transconfesional. Educar para ser

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Introduction

We live in a confessed post-religious environment which invites us to carry out a profound review of teaching. If we want to provide the right response to this reality, we have to listen and take into account what the new generations are demanding of us.

This reflection and pedagogical proposal springs from an interest in and investigation into, the keys which steer spiritual education methods nowadays. Perhaps the biggest risk we are running is that we repeat and reproduce what worked for us before, without taking into account that we live in a new age.

The teaching experience we present here has already begun in many schools in a combined effort. Its common denominator is the demand from teachers to confront the new languages used in pastoral teaching which put an end to the sterile processes undertaken up to now. The idea is, therefore, not to 'remake' but to transform customs from a post-religious perspective.

Paper-Communication received on October 09, 2014 and approved on March 18, 2015.

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The first step in this educational innovation was to stop and consider the codes at work in 21st century society. The characteristics of this generational transformation are dealt with in detail in the first section of this article. The second step was to clarify the terms and concepts which had begun to appear in pedagogical and pastoral areas and in the post-religious society itself. In the second section we present definitions, delimitations and both common and differing characteristics which have emerged around education in belief, religion and spirituality. In the third section we explain the recently published teaching proposal 'Education in interiority Within Yourself' which is already being put into practice within many frameworks for spirituality of different congregations and schools. Its subject matter, methodology and key aspects are the kingpin to education as a first step to spiritual experience.

And here we come to an end, giving witness to this historical era of openness which society is calling for. This new '*teaching of spirituality*' is an answer to the social demand to open wider areas of interiorization which must transform our Christian experience and that of any other traditional creed.

1 A generational transformation

1.1 Characteristics

To fully understand the transformation which is in progress in this century, we must first comprehend what our children and youth of today are like. These new generations have certain traits which we can sort into groups under the following headings:

a) Autonomous generations

Never before in children's' development have we seen such a precocious ability to discover things individually. Proactivity (not hyperactivity) is the ability to perceive oneself as master of one's own life, knowing what steps to take in order

to achieve what satisfies us. It is as if each child has a microchip or inbuilt skill which guides them to the desired place. This ability for thought has also been called 'self-constructing thought'. Thinking is built on one's own personal perception, without the need of absolute external references.

b) Extra-fast generations

Nowadays speed is the most recognizable element in any human activity. We have never moved so quickly. Our collective stress is to a large extent caused by factors related to the speed at which we live. Emails, whatsapp, SMS, social networks etc. form a constant soft rainfall which keeps us continuously soaked with 'water'. But speed has a deeper dimension which grows from the seed of a new idea: nowadays everything is provisional and volatile. In other words, static, immobile and immanent states fade into oblivion in the minds of our youth. Speed is synonymous with 'transitory worth': the value of the present moment.

c) Experiential generations

In truth, life experience is, for everyone, the most important knowledge attained. But the difference lies in one's genetic pre-disposition to reject that which is not a consequence of experience. For previous generations, those of us who grew up with 'spare the rod and spoil the child' or 'you have to', an accepted stereotype exists which is in no way experiential. We do things (rituals, customs...) and believe in things (dogmas, faith...etc.) which do not have to be based on our personal experience. They are valid because we assume them rationally and they have been handed down to us just so. This is the widest gap between us and younger generations. We have gone from a society based on effort to one based on discovery.

d) Interconnected and universal generations.

This aspect is undeniably new in the world of the 21st century. Never before could we even imagine a world where by simply moving a finger we can connect

with someone on the other side of the world without leaving our own room. This new reality is moved by the current idea that everything is connected, united, related. Everything is a part and nothing is a whole. In other words, no thought or belief is valid unless it is united or connected to all other thoughts and beliefs. This is the reason why some forms of belief have fallen into oblivion in young people's minds. Besides, nothing in this new way of understanding or thinking can have meaning if 'to assert myself, I have to deny others'.

e) Visual generations

Words have become a relative means of communication. This is not the moment for speech making. We live in a historic moment where images are everywhere. Flat screen televisions, full HD, 3D, mobile phones, 4G, videos, Skype, YouTube... An infinite visual world in which words are cropped, badly written and expressed synthetically in terse messages. The whole world is contained in suggestive images which invade our vision of life. One of the significant differences found in this visual age is the value of image as a suggestion, a question. Every image evokes a wide range of answers which, in addition, immerse us in the world or the place we see.

f) Broadminded generations

The term coined is 'flow and free'. Apart from being broadminded generations (which is not the same as free) they are 'fluid' generations. 'Liberated thought' is that which is not confined to a static frame, nor is it defined forever: frontiers have disappeared (including religious ones). A 'fluid generation' is one which cannot allow its thinking to stagnate or to be retained (neither in places nor in dogmas nor in the cobwebs of time); nowadays 'if it doesn't flow, it doesn't exist'. Flowing means following its path without obstacles or impediments.

1.2 Challenges

a) Self-building learning

A new concept cannot be opened up if it is not discovered by a person who ‘traps’ an idea. We must develop ‘perception’ as an instrument of knowledge and discovery. Our inner door will never open if we do not start by considering the individual as a human being who can already harbor within himself that which is his essence. It is not an exaltation of individualism and egoisms but an inner recognition which springs from the very fact of being human.

b) Dynamic learning

New pedagogy can only be sustained in movement, in the acceptance that everything changes and nothing is immutable. Static learning based on eternal formulas cannot be sustained nowadays. Dynamism does not mean triviality and the absence of universal or global values, but the ability to adapt to different experiences, perceptions or interpretations.

c) Experiential learning

Emotions determine educational and relational processes. Cognitive functions cannot be sustained without the approval and acceptance of experience. Reason will happily accept its own limitations and sentiment, emotion and experiment will govern knowledge. Schools are already taking this reality seriously and numerous pedagogical initiatives exist which are based on the plurality of intelligence.

d) Universal learning

Any knowledge which is not useful for anyone living on this planet will be discarded. We must create educative processes which are useful worldwide; which

can be followed by a child in the southernmost point of America or in the Horn of Africa, in Central Europe or in Australia. Limits will become exhibits in the museum of human evolution; as examples of states which were indispensable but now overcome.

e) Suggested or induced learning

The word which commands, the image which says it all or the pulpit of those who 'know', will no longer have an echo or reverberation. All knowledge will be built on questioning, openness and surprise. Nothing will be definitively stated or commanded. Everything will be wonderfully open and will be suggested, motivated, proposed.

f) Open learning

Often we will have to rip open the chrysalis to discover that a new butterfly has been born. These processes will not be lineal but fractal. In the world of education it will be indispensable to incorporate different ways to solve the same problem. There will no longer be closed doors which limit knowledge, at very least, we will gaze at the wealth of the crack through which light will sneak in and which will allow us to glimpse new knowledge.

2 Hazy semantics

Faced with this tsunami, a great debate has opened which forces educators, pedagogues, teachers and psychologists to coin new terms which explain and clarify these new educational processes. In some aspects they coincide, although each of them in itself underlines an important point. The idea is to refine and clarify but at the same time not to look for only one terminology as this would be radically contrary to this new age and reality. Moreover, what today emerges as terminological definition must be prepared to reach its expiration date knowing from the onset that it will only be valid for a time.

2.1 Multiple intelligences and existential intelligences

It is well known that since Gardner coined the term 'multiple intelligences' in 1983, the educator's task underwent a profound transformation. An intelligent person was no longer one who was highly knowledgeable (at a cognitive level) but someone capable of developing different areas; linguistic, spatial, mathematical; inter personal.....and so on up to eight different aspects. By 1999, he had already published a book in which he explained how he had reformulated his theory on intelligences because they had evolved. In this new theory he included the possibility that a ninth intelligence exists which he called 'existential intelligence' which is the intelligence that provides the answers to the big questions and the meaning of life.

2.2 Spiritual or transcendent intelligence

Authors such as Marshall or Zohar coined the term 'spiritual intelligence' to refer to deepest significance of life and of human beings. Between 2001 and 2008 authors such as Buzan, K. Noble, Vaughan, Wigglesworth or D.B. King claim that 'spiritual intelligence' is a human potential which need to be cultivated, overcoming ego, understanding our place in the world, acting with compassion and developing abilities such as existential reflection, sense of oneself, recognition of what is transcendental and control of different states of consciousness such as contemplation or meditation. In 2010 the Spanish philosopher F. Torralba published his book 'Spiritual intelligence' in which he explains in detail how to cultivate this intelligence, the benefits it brings and the risks entailed when it becomes stunted. In 2012 the same author, in his book 'Spiritual intelligence in children', proposes some guidelines and experiences which are being carried out in some schools.

2.3 Spiritual competence and education in interiority

Although the term ‘spiritual’ has a marked religious connotation, in several educational areas this term is used accompanied by the word ‘competence’ from a post-religious or trans-confessional approach so that there is no specific confessional intention in its development but the cultivation of an ‘inner educational process towards the centre of Being’ (this is the aim of the Educational Project ‘Within you’ Edelvives 2014). In these terms, ‘Education in Interiority’ and ‘Spiritual Competence’ find a common source for spiritual education by initiating the design of ‘Interiority pedagogy’ in schools.

2.4 Spirituality, religiousness, confessionality

An established consensus already exists in the establishment of the boundaries between these three terms and authors such as Benner, Helminiak, Torralba speak of the differences between spiritual intelligence and religious denomination. Farran himself distinguishes between ‘spirituality’ as the most universal human potential, ‘religiousness’ as an act of faith and ‘confessionality’ as adhering to a particular religion. Other authors speak of spirituality as the ‘wine’ and religion as the ‘glass’ or the map (religion) and the territory (spirituality).

3 ‘Within yourself’, an educational project for the 21st century, a learning process leading to the centre of oneself

Education in this new century forces us to gather and integrate each and every one of the aspects previously mentioned. Education today from the new *post-religious* paradigm implies entering into the inner self from different pathways and with different educational tools. When we speak of the deepest dimension of human beings, we speak about that which gives sense to life and which lives inside everyone, regardless of their beliefs, religious ties, race, culture or personal or social position.

It is the discovery of this profound reality which is translated in different ways in a person and must be educated and worked on as an essential dimension in every individual. To do this, spiritual growth no longer needs to be exclusively associated with a particular religious thinking, although naturally it takes them into account and gets to the essence from which each and every one of them originates.

When we talk about teaching spirituality nowadays, we mean that we are embarking on a process of accompaniment towards that deepest dimension of a person in order to reach and perceive that which transcends. This road to be travelled must be started out on from a very early age and continued throughout life, and it should be introduced into schools with objectives and content defined by the keys to the new generations.

Teaching spirituality is teaching our children and youth that what they experience and what they are, is always regulated by the inner experience that each individual has and this can be taught as we have already done in numerous schools with the Educational Project 'Within yourself' (reviewed in the final section).

3.1 A threefold methodology

The methodology which supports this new learning process is anchored in a process which consists of three parts.

Firstly: experimentation. Educationally, it is the beginning of the inner process. Transforming our schools in 'creative experiences areas' from which we can later ask ourselves '*What have I experienced? What has happened in my inner self?*'

Secondly: discovery. This is the part of the learning process which recalls what we have experienced and where we can look over events; it is the cognitive and emotional anchoring of the experiences lived. Here the question is '*What have I learnt?*' (*Not as a mental process but from real experience*)

The process culminates with the third area; interiorization. Here an introspective path is followed where what has been deposited in each our inner selves is analyzed. It is the answer to the question: *‘What have I interiorized?’* Using descriptors and evaluation methods, a self evaluation of the process and analysis of competences is carried out.

3.2 Four keys for a new learning process: listening, attention, the present moment and silence

The keys or fundamental pillars of spiritual education in the new century are:

- help to discover ways to listen to oneself and others
- encourage the ability to attend to the present moment
- discover silence as a form of introspection
- experience the wonder of fullness

These four elements are worked on from the attentive discovery of everything that happens, using personal search as the driving force for learning, imagination/visualization as the source of inner recourses, conscious attention to recover the sacredness of our surroundings and self-affirmation as a regulator of emotions/sentiments. The whole process is accompanied by profound silence which guides the process of teaching from a position of serenity and calm.

3.3 Five educational areas

This journey of spiritual growth is structured in five educational areas:

a) *Creative or divergent thought’*; through the fostering of creativity we can enter into the inner dimension of a person in an extraordinary way because it is through creativity that a human being can express his inner experience.

b) *'Symbolic expression'*; because from the symbolic, humans can express that which surpasses them. Through symbolism we can always leave an interrogative open when faced by the unknown. Symbols are the door which allows us to enter an inner world which is sometimes difficult to explain in words.

c) *'Corporal consciousness'*, because our body is the thermometer of our inner state. Working and educating corporal conscience gives us access to the first layer of a person's inner experience. Recognizing the messages we receive from our body allow us to indentify that which is open in the most intimate corner of our being.

d) *'Emotional harmony'* which allows us to indentify our emotions, express sentiments and be capable of distancing ourselves from them to enrich our inner experience. Emotional experience is what often determines a person's inner experience. So, harmonizing it so that we live a balanced life is essential and fundamental to find a deeper space.

e) *'Spiritual growth'* is the path to the threshold of mystery. It is in spiritual development where we allow ourselves different forms of inner silence in order to discover the profound sense of what we are and what we are experiencing. Spiritual development also allows us to distinguish the richness of the wisdom locked inside each of the religious traditions and the newest spiritual pathways.

3.4 Twenty objectives and competence education

Each area has its own specifications expressed by various objectives or competencies

- a) In the area of Creative thinking:
- Create through imagination
 - Admire things from their depths
 - Respect for all creation
 - Develop personal creative abilities

b) In the area of Symbolic expression:

- Perceive through the senses
- Experiment amazement and surprise
- Express oneself symbolically
- Express diversity

c) In the area of Corporal consciousness:

- Recognize our bodies' messages
- Learn to relax
- Interpret corporal perceptions
- Carry out movement consciously

d) In the area of Emotional harmony:

- Identify different emotions
- Distance oneself from emotions
- Feel compassion
- Learn to breathe, concentrate and listen

e) In the area of Spiritual growth:

- Learn to contemplate
- Explore the deeper meaning of life
- Learn to find inner silence
- Discover the diversity of means and sources

4 The means as an end: discover new horizons Everything is open

We can establish new means to help children and young people to listen to what is going on inside, in their inner world. Only thus will they be able to discover the meaning of existence and assume the responsibility of answering their question. *‘What about me? Why was I born?’*

We have to listen to, and accompany children and young people in their journey. Teach them to make contact with, and express, their deepest sentiments, to discover in themselves that deep knowledge which exists in each and every human being. From their earliest school years, we can see in children a huge capacity to listen to their own inner experience. They know, and can learn, how to enter into their personal inner zone. When one connects with one’s inner experience a process of liberation begins, a vital change of direction which modifies behavior.

What do we feel inside? What do we perceive in our inner selves? If we want to find out what is happening under our surface, we need to develop abilities which permit us to discover what we are like deep inside. We can’t just listen; we must also learn to relate to ourselves, to our personal inner process, initiate a dialogue with it. Facing up to our inner knowledge requires courage; it is an adventure to be willing to be within ourselves, to go further than the wrappings and the words. And we all have physical and mental wrappings, we have to learn, and teach, how to reveal them.

In this new *‘pedagogy of spirituality’* we are ‘explorers’, not ‘farmers’. We have to investigate the deepest meaning of our experience, gently embracing all that we are: the good and the least desirable. Children can learn, if we teach them, to leave an ‘empty space’ inside themselves and thus reach a much deeper and real understanding of what they really are. At the same time, they learn not only to listen and understand themselves, but to discover a spiritual dimension and live with a boundless empathy from which a rare and special solidarity springs.

“Inside all of us lives a flame which can become
a huge fire.
We can find that which strengthens our inner self,
And we will be truly strong
To face up to anything
So that nothing can destroy us.
When a flame is fed,
It becomes a fire”

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