

CHANGES: LASALLIAN EDUCATION

Br Bernard Westcott

Awareness is an engagement with changes in us and about us. Everywhere there is flux; there are changes, emergings and newness. We can trace this manner of perception back to the hunter-gathers. And while Heraclitus remarks that we are unable to enter an identical river again, it is only in Europe, from the early part of the twentieth century, that a confidence that nothing is static begins to return and to emerge in our sciences and our arts in a very global and different manner.

If we are to embrace our changing lives we have to **observe, exercise our memory, and be in conversation with others**. Consequently to be aware of life as flux, in every moment, we need to be educated; which means we need the help of others.

Education, and Lasallian Education, is a training which aims to make everyone available to an always changing present. Lasallian Education is about helping each other to be educated in a changing world. It is about the educators and the educated having relationships which continually change. It is about flux. But what does this mean?

We have to look at education through the dynamics of change. We need to learn about change which is still not universally realised in our Western culture today. Consequently, for us Lasallians, engaging with this is to enter uncharted territory. We need to acquire familiarity with changes in our perceptions, feelings, thoughts and practices. This way of life, and the attendant changes in educational practices are experiences of endless discoveries and new possibilities. Growing in this view of living we find we are relinquishing past beliefs, theories, models, morals and pedagogical practices and we are embraced with new ways of living. This is difficult and often we are afraid. We are led in this process, little by little, to a discovery that we do not know what will happen next. We do not know who we are, or who we are becoming. We leave behind certainties and become accustomed to the surprises of uncertainty.

Living in a world of endless unpredictable changes humbles and pushes us towards being less certain, and into a paradoxical chasm of not knowing and knowing we are unlikely to ever be able to predict and to control. We are confronted by not knowing what changes will occur but knowing at the same time that changes will occur and not knowing what or when. We find our selves challenged, sometimes despondent, occasionally on the point of giving up, or besaulted by tiredness we may sense that madness is entering us. We find ourselves living in

paradoxes of thinking and behaving. We know something and at the same time are surprised and shocked by our ignorance. Will the changes in the future be good or evil? We do not know! Who will be safe and secure? Some of us will not be safe. Some of us are not safe now. How will we help each other live in this emerging and different world from the one we knew before?

Perhaps because we know our ideas, theories, observations and calculations of evolution and change are at the moment inadequate we seek energetically further information, which when acquired, will bring the security of order and predictability. Despite all such efforts, our intellectual arguments, observations and measurements, we find ourselves repeatedly confronted with paradox and uncertainty. We find this in politics, history, theology, literature, philosophy, every branch of science and medicine, and every form of art. This surprises us.

This unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of life has to be faced because it is why Lasallian Education exists. Our form of education had its birth in extreme times and changes. Educating in a changing world has enormous spiritual, social, political and material implications, personally and inter-culturally. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle disturbed the scientific world in the 1930s, the emergence of quantum theories in nuclear sciences and the recent investigations of the cosmos have deepened our surprises. The studies of hermeneutics, literature, languages, communication, and conflict resolution also confront us with our limitations and uncertainty and disturb us in similar ways. The same challenges also occur in the studies of materials, plants and every form of living organisms. Further more many people are caught up in the unpredictability of global conflicts and their resolutions and climate changes. Others at personal levels are living lives overwhelmed by uncontrollable expulsions, migrations, addictions, broken relationships, sufferings and deaths. If we are open we are continually surprised.

In view of this, how do we as Lasallians understand – think and feel about – the Risen Christ? How are we together to make sense and live more truthfully without illusions of control and predictability? What are our changing thoughts that we find emerging in our conversations as Lasallian Educators?

We know that the Brothers have over the last three centuries consecrated and committed themselves to be educators. Until relatively recently this might

be seen as a formal or structured and predictable way of life and practices of education. Today the number of Brothers is diminishing; at the same time the numbers of educational enterprises both formal and informal are rapidly growing and with this there are rapidly increasing numbers of men and women (hundreds of thousands) directing and delivering services in what we call Lasallian Education. Inadequate as this description certainly is we can see without any doubt that we are confronted with unexpected and uncontrollable changes.

This growth of the Lasallian global movement is an unpredicted surprise. We can find some insight into this if we draw on studies of changes in macro-systems, perhaps looking at fractiles, string theories, quantum mechanics, the way stable systems always cyclically collapse into unstable states and new forms of stability emerge, but we cannot predict when.

For example the issues and concerns emerging in a small freely conversing group (the office staff, pupils, the RE department, the senior teachers, families etc.) is similar to other small groups conversing in the larger organisation – school. This is also true for small clusters in living organisms and material systems. It is through these observations that we can be certain that the changes occurring in one part of the macro-organism also take place in every part. However awareness that what occurs in one place is taking place elsewhere is usually absent. Consequently we have to help each other (Lasallian Education) discover this exciting communal existence; we are all members of a global living organism called humanity that is always changing.

Managers often think they have different issues from those they manage. Many people think that knowing something and understanding is located or belongs to certain people and not others. This however is not true. When people in large organisations converse and relate in small groups, and they have to make time and learn to converse, the changes discovered are seen to embrace everyone. What in the past was accepted as 'successful' and continues to be valued and practiced may be discovered to be inadequate or even destructive. The greatest challenge of living with change is to identify what it is that the whole living organism (in our case we are looking at the school or educational project or family) needs to stop doing and what new different ways at this moment may be available.

We may like many people think we are in control, and decide to make changes. In fact we are not in control of the changes occurring. We do not cause changes. What we are able to do is to support and embrace or disengage from the changes that are going on. Often we are unaware of this and our reactions are often illusory and sometimes vile.

Our upbringing and conviction of linear ideas of cause and effect are an illusion. Changes occur and we have to live with them as best we can. If we choose to ignore the changing states in our lives and the organisations we are part of we may do so at our peril – the maintenance of the status quo is frequently destructive to others, ourselves and the world as a whole. If we decide to make things happen that are not related to the changes occurring we may find we are broken apart or without knowing it at the time promote something vile. For example, if in our educational services we believe in promoting, praising and encouraging individual skills, achievement, creativity, acquisition, competition and ownership, we may be engaging with changes which develop discrimination and domination. Without realising it we promote greed, capitalism, and imperialism etc.

Where ever we are educating – schools, universities, projects, and families – the important focus has to be the quality of the conversations in the small clusters of people relating in groups. Usually these groups are six to twelve people. Each of us belongs to many such groups. The skill of living and corresponding to change is whether or not this group meets to observe, to remember and to share what they think and feel. These open non-competitive conversations generate new understandings and insights. Each member has something to give and something to receive which brings about something new for the small group. It is also makes visible something about changes occurring at the time which embrace the whole larger educational organism – the managers, the educators, the students, the parents, and those beyond all of these.

No single person is a leader. Every person has moments of leading. Leadership is itself always changing, for it depends on personality, history, culture etc., Each one of us is necessary if the small group and also the larger group are to learn to embrace change and find ways to continuously change and consequently live a good and meaningful life for each other and for others everywhere.

This leads us to ask some important questions. Are there only certain types of conversations in small groups within the larger group that brings awareness of changes and new possibilities? Are there types of exchanges in groups that do not embrace the real world of unpredictable changes? Indeed there are, for we know that most groups that meet are not aware or expecting something new to emerge. Is it therefore possible for us to observe and know what kinds of conversations in a group are open to changes that are taking place? Yes, we do know a little about this, and there are many ways of describing changing conversations that enable participants to change freely and openly, and conversely we know something about conversations that are constrained and closed. We are able to do

this in several ways, for example by observing the group from the outside and also observing what may be occurring in the conversation in the group.

Think of the boundary that comes into being because the group converses. Is the boundary non-existent? Is the boundary semi-permeable and how much and what flows into the group or out of the group? Or is the boundary sealed and nothing flows out or into the group?

A permeable boundary means there is no sense of belonging, location, and relationships of trust, and there is no embracing together a changing world. If this state is present in one cluster it is probably present everywhere in the whole enterprise. The only possible change, for change always occurs, is isolation, loss of individual and collective identity and closure to life. This leads to extinction and fossilisation. What if the conversing clusters you experience have semi-permeable membranes?

What comes into the group and flows out of it? Is there avoidance, silence, dismissal of certain incoming changes? Does the group you are in (not just you) influence and claim its right to influence others around it? Does the flow in and out need to be examined? What if the small group you are in is sealed, self-selecting, converses only on unexamined regulated subjects, has no contact with any other groups? Is it only interested in itself, unable to engage with changes, knows all the answers? This type of group exists and converses but, being unavailable to changes that life offers, is split off from life. It is un-generative and, as ageing and death descend, the group (and probably the larger organism) will disappear. The only place for all of us is hopefully in the small groups that are in ever changing states that are semi-permeable.

Carefully observe the conversations that are taking place in the groups you are part of. Is this free flowing? Are feelings and thoughts emerging and being explored in a co-operative, patient, expectant manner? Is what you and others in the group are

offering in the style of each person's personality: words or silence, or body language, increasingly understood by everyone as having content that embraces the whole group? Are members experiencing each other's contributions as if they are parts of a sentence which the group is shaping and editing and changing and discovering together? Is the changing activity of the group a 'work in progress'? Are individuals changing in their ideas and feelings? Are they aware of these changes? How do the members support each other when confusing, anxious, fearful, terrorising, angry states overwhelm one or all of them? Does the group as a whole recognise its creative achievements of living and moving with change? Is the group stuck in a repetitive status quo? Is the group language developing in such a way that these and many various states are able to be recognised, shared and explored? Is the style and content of the group conversation changing?

An educational way forward into the unexplored life of a changing world is for small clusters of people (as well as pupils and parents) in the larger group to spend time together in a free flowing conversation. It is through this that confidence and interest in the changing differences of ideas and perceptions emerging in the group occurs. These kinds of group conversations enable collective and consequently supported individual decisions and actions to emerge all of which matures the group's ability to be embraced by the changes occurring.

IT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR LASALLIAN EDUCATION IN THE UK TO HAVE PLACES OR A NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SMALL GROUPS TO DISCOVER HOW TO EMBRACE CHANGE BY CONVERSING AND PLANNING.

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bernardwestcott@yahoo.co.uk