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La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences

A scientific-educational model in
support of the “preferential option for
the poor”

Brothers of the Christian Schools
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Presentation

Reading the bulletin attentively will arouse enormous astonishment in some, a healthy envy in others, and in everyone pride in feeling Lasallian and being in solidarity with the mission - enormously proud because the magnitude of this exploit exceeds the limits of our struggling imagination. Could all that is presented be true, or better, could all that is proposed be achieved? In our brief or long existence we plunge ahead with stoicism and resignation taking on board a multitude of changes which become concrete in projects yet so many times never come to anything. We are perplexed witnesses of an endemic infirmity: we are experts in analysing reality, in critical judgement, in drawing up plans, yet so many stupendous plans remain scrap paper. It could be said that what is lacking is determination and strength to achieve what functions so brilliantly in our ideas. Here, in La Salle Foundation we encounter precise objectives, historic vision, analysis of reality, appropriate response, ongoing evaluation, checking bearings and philosophy, etc. and all this during a period of more than 50 years, without hitches or imbalance that would impede the functioning of an organisation. It could be said to be perfect. What is the secret?

La Salle Foundation (FLASA - Fundación La Salle) is the dynamic work of 38 Brothers who believed in a project and of hundreds of Lasallians who have given life to this miracle which is little known in the Lasallian world. As frequently happens, Lasallian simplicity has a habit of mistrusting marketing techniques.

The presentation of the contents is a model of order and clarity. After an initial exposition of the objectives, origins and social context we come to an explanation of the contents and field of action of the Foundation in its origins. The creative fidelity of this institution has been secured from its origins and, without beating about the bush, has been able to proclaim its human and Christian ideals, its Church task, its deep roots in the original Lasallian charism, its communion with the Institute, and very, very particularly its predilection for the poor. Not in vain does it set out in enormous detail the concepts of poor and poverty because it is here that "La Salle Foundation centres its attention

and its strengths". Quite consciously this section is one of the longest of the exposition because without these premises the work would lose its prophetic and salvific dimension.

With these bases set in place the bulletin goes on to describe the various campuses, centres and places of research and development. Once again we are impressed by the magnitude of the developed work. You get the feeling that the institution controls a good part of the educational and formational centres of the nation.

Faced with the phenomenon of cultural erosion and of the galloping homogenisation which is a product of uncontrolled globalisation, La Salle Foundation established as one of its most solid pillars and made it a goal "to become part of the people in their region, culture and traditions..." From that beginning it was logical to conceive of an educational scheme which sets up dialogue with the local community as irreplaceable. Even more, the four modes of operating - research, education, production and outreach - constitute interacting and interdependent elements so as to offer an adequate response to the needs of the situation. Education and the school discover in this way an exemplary social importance. The creation of a control mechanism (SOI) guaranteed that all efforts and outputs responded to the institutional philosophy.

Having finished the reading we are surely left posing the question as to how it has been possible to bring such an enterprise into being. It's true that words alone are capable of revealing to us in hazy fashion the greatest dreams and the simplest accomplishments. We surely feel more Lasallian, more united to the mission and even somewhat Venezuelan, at least in our hearts.

Introduction

La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences (FLASA), an organisation of civil society in Venezuela, has made its own the responsibility of providing for the most pressing needs which inequality and new forms of poverty continue to create among the most disadvantaged sectors of the Venezuelan people. It assists in revealing the natural and human potentialities of this country and collaborates in the elaboration of inter-institutional strategies for obtaining the pro-human environmental appraisal of its development and of its application, in combination with science and technology.

Historical overview

Birth of La Salle Foundation.

La Salle Foundation came into being as an instrument of social action in conjunction with a continuing work of investigation which, joined with technical and integral education, was contributing by a movement of practical and committed Christianity to the emergence of the total person and especially of the excluded based on a concept of socio-environmental integration which helped to preserve the abundant natural resources which constitute the natural endowment of Venezuela.

The various players who took part in the genesis of La Salle Foundation by uniting vision, efforts and perseverance produced this institution which across five decades of uninterrupted existence has been a benchmark - by its successes and its achievements - in the institutional life of the Venezuelan nation.

On 5th December 1957 La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences became legally registered. The Statute and the Act of Constitution which accompany and testify to the registration received the signatures of the following persons: Rev. Bro. Fabriciano Luis, General Councillor of the Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; Rev. Bro. Generoso, Provincial of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Venezuela; Rev. Bro. Gerardo, Director of La Salle College, Tienda Honda; Rev. Bro Gaston, President of Stella Pty Ltd (the company which administers the properties of the Institute). Additionally there were Messrs: Julio de Armas, public health Doctor, former Rector of Central University of Venezuela; Alfredo Planchart, businessman and naturalist; Oscar Augusto Machado, industrialist and President of Electricidad de Caracas (the company which supplies electricity to Caracas and neighbouring zones); Alfredo Boulton, President of Avenza (the national air line) and President of the Boulton Foundation (dedicated to artistic activities); Oscar Rodriguez Gragirena, former Minister of Public Works, chief engineer of the system of national dams; Enrique Tejera, Doctor, Minister and Founder of the Ministry for Health, Minister for Education; Rev. Bro. Gines, Director-Founder of the La Salle Society for Natural

Sciences; Juan Guevara Benzo, agronomist, President of the La Salle Society for Natural Sciences, former Dean of the Faculty of Agronomy of the Central University of Venezuela; Luis Rivas Larrazabal, industrial engineer, in charge of public relations for the La Salle Society for Natural Sciences.

A team constituted of members of the La Salle Society for Natural Sciences, headed by lawyer Angel Viso Rodriguez, gave form to the project of statute under whose norms there would come to be established La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences. The Statute and Constitutive Act of Foundation was finally drawn up on 21st August 1957.

Given that Brother Gines, as Religious, was not able to bring about the creation of this work without the express authorisation of the Institute, and these events coinciding with the visit to Venezuela of Brother Fabriciano Luis, General Councillor of the Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, this was the precise moment to inform him about the contents of the Statute and Constitutive Act of Foundation, and to thus submit the respective texts for his consideration and approval.

After minute analysis and numerous discussions of these documents with the whole group of the La Salle Society for Natural Sciences, Brother Fabriciano Luis proceeded to affix his signature of authorisation of the creation of the La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences. In this way there came into being concretely a scientific foundation which would self-sufficiently generate the economic means for giving continuity to the research that the La Salle Society for Natural Sciences had begun in 1943.

As concrete support at the beginning of these activities of the new Foundation, the Congregation of the De La Salle Brothers ceded a 20,000 square metre piece of land, located within the property of La Salle College La Colina, with the purpose of erecting a building as base for Foundation La Salle in Caracas.

The Venezuelan context of the birth of La Salle Foundation.

It is necessary to summarise events in the life of Venezuela in a quick overview from the forties onwards and within this context to outline the birth, development and consolidation of the work of La Salle Foundation. Without this framework as reference, it is dif-

difficult to be able to understand and extract certain elements of this experiment which could be replicated in other parts of the world. What economic, social and political climate existed in the country in these times? What factors allowed for and made possible an alliance which brought about the rise of an organisation of this type and above all for it to grow and maintain itself?

With the intention of giving some replies to these questions we have taken some concepts and interpretations in particular from the dictionary of the history of Venezuela "Historia de Venezuela" (F. Polar 2000). Therein it is mentioned:

The Venezuela called "postgomecista" (the dictator Juan Vicente Gomez died in 1936) appeared as a communal horizontal manifesto of various social forces, the achievement of the modernisation of the country. The liberalism and positivism of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th had prepared the ground for the achievement of overcoming backwardness - as expressed in a distinctly rural society - and of promoting civilisation and progress. The consolidation of petroleum extraction (even though in the hands of transnational companies) meant a qualitative leap in real possibilities for promoting a process of modernisation. Examining the programmes of the principal forces and political and social organisations of that time, one appreciates clearly the convergence which was going on all over in the process of modernising Venezuela.

This modernisation moreover brought with it what is understood by "overcoming backwardness" that rural societies represent in the scientific and technological domains by means of development of productive forces progressing towards industrialisation, envisaging this as a means of more efficient production to provide society with its material foundations. It brought with it moreover the use of new forms of technology in all areas of social life, development of communications, expansion of public services, and radical changes in the forms of employment and work within society.

In association with this introduction of reason and rational behaviour as the highest instance of what is human there came the application and expansion of education to all levels of society and the rise of multiple and varied forms of massive social association. This was the time of the consolidation of positivism as cultural

paradigm. In the process of arriving at this model some new “modern” forms of social relationship came to take the place of the “old” and this was perceived as a rupture with what had gone before, not continuity. In the economic sphere the process was marked by the effort to industrialise, which required the accumulation of capital, the broadening of the exchange of goods and services and a much more complex employment structure.

In the political sphere this meant the rise of the national state and its growth, together with the birth of civil institutions and associations representative of the new social interests. Moreover there arose a process of political centralisation for which rational modes of legitimisation were imposed. In the ideological-cultural domain, urbanisation and territorial concentration of the population favoured profound changes in personal and social behaviour. Likewise there arose an homogenisation of social expectations by means of the interiorisation of the model of modern society represented by the way of life of some societies which symbolically incarnated modernity (United States and Western Europe).

In this process special significance was afforded to formal and non-formal education and the role of the means of social communication. It was an a-synchronic process that is to say it did not all occur at the same time and with the same intensity in the various spheres and levels of society. Diverse social forms coexisted at the same time. This process was driven in general terms by upper sectors of the national middle classes together with petty bourgeois classes which were economically and politically more active and the ones leading social mobility in pursuit of the aims of modernisation.

With regard to this historic period, the historian Ramon J. Velasquez says: “...the year 1936 merits special study because the Venezuelans, instead of setting themselves to get back from the Gomecistas the 27 years of dictatorship, strove in both government and opposition, among all people and regions, to try and consolidate what they had succeeded in obtaining, to make democracy a reality as a new reason for confidence. This was likewise a time of admirable cultural renaissance in all spheres. Poets, writers, artists, sculptors and playwrights shared with politicians the task of reform and figured at the head of the manifestos. Many of these belong to the generation of 1928 such as Arturo

Uslar Pietri, Miguel Otero Silva, Francisco Narvaez, Guillermo Meneses, Pablo Rojas Guardia, Carlos Eduardo de Frias, and Joaquin Gabaldon Marquez. The activity of artists, sculptors and musicians formed an essential part of this renaissance united to the poets, writers and artists of generations prior to those of 1928 such as Andres Eloy Blanco, Romulo Gallegos, Jacinto Fombona Pachano, Fernando Paz Castillo, Luis Lopez Mendez, Manuel Cabre, Monsanto and Reveron, to mention some of the more important. They affirmed the value of their presence as intellectuals and artists and took part in the great civic days of the epoch."

"In this chronicle the historic transcendence of the year 1936 was like the entry door to the world of liberty, and two things should be noted as being ever present in Venezuelan society: the intention of assuring how much in each period it succeeds in its determination of achieving liberty and of marking a new stage with the rhythm of world-wide changes."

The French Brothers expelled from France stand within this framework bringing with them a component of scientific and educational character, based in a transcendent Lasallian charism which seeks a rapprochement with the reality of the poverty that Saint John Baptist de La Salle perceived in his surroundings. They bring with them to the countries of America, among them Venezuela, the richness of the Lasallian charism.

In the light of this charism is constituted the alliance of the most dynamic sectors of Venezuelan society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools or De La Salle Brothers. It will be within this historical context when the La Salle Foundation for the Natural Sciences is created that there will be established a landmark in the process of modernisation of contemporary Venezuela.

Insertion of La Salle Foundation in the regions of Venezuela

Regarding the form in which La Salle Foundation becomes inserted in the various regions, Brother Gines writes: "From the moment that La Salle Foundation became inserted in the regions, it provided them with a philosophy of action and sought as soon as possible to understand the different aspects of regional culture, asserting itself little by little by means of its most outstanding manifestations and by deepening its programmes."

The same author abounds in detail and comments: "In complementary manner, Foundation studied the various habitats which enrich the natural endowment of the place and give to the community its particular character. Once integrated within a determined group or region, there began the particular form of Foundation work. They began with research into the natural resources upon which the region depended and the most appropriate methods for rationally utilising them for the benefit of the inhabitants."

La Salle Foundation did not neglect whatever had to do with social conflicts which could arise, at the same time as seeking to discover the most appropriate formula for dealing with them. In this way La Salle Foundation continued deepening its sense of belonging to the region. Feeling part in this way of the regional community it dedicated itself intensely to the total education of the young people with the aim of succeeding in making arise in their midst individuals who would be creative, solidly rooted in their territory and culture - the patrimonial legacy of their ancestors - reinforcing and clarifying spiritual values that were often vague.

The cultural tradition of the locality is that which gives a solid base to the personality of young people and shapes their identity to a large degree. It is likewise the patrimony which they are called to enrich. As regards what refers to life, there has to be consideration of a formation process which proportions economic autonomy and social wellbeing for both the student and his/her family and community surroundings.

Concerning the quality of the members of La Salle Foundation Brother Gines comments “with a programme so heavily charged with responsibilities it is not difficult to deduce that it presumes and demands of the members of La Salle Foundation, in particular the directors, teachers and scientists a deepening of one’s being as member of La Salle Foundation, taking for granted the living out of its spiritual principles.” “These are principles which should characterise their institutional personality and reveal the sense of belonging and ultimately their authenticity within occasional conflicts. Hence the importance that La Salle Foundation places upon systems of continuing formation for its members.”

Creation of regional physical spaces for the development of La Salle Foundation (Campuses).

From what has gone before one can deduce how there came into being throughout the length of the national territory the Campuses of La Salle Foundation dedicated to working in the coastal areas and the island of Margarita, in the Orinoco River and the forests of Guyana, in the plains and in the Andes. On each Campus the research stations and the technical education centres of middle and higher levels complemented each other’s activities.

It can be asserted without false modesty that it is a motive for pride in contemplating the important activity of the researchers who daily battled all over the national territory, having as “base camp” the Margarita Marine Research Station, the “Brother Gines” oceanographic vessel, the Guyana Hydro-biological Station, the Cojedes Livestock Research Station and the Bocono Station yielding discovery of nature - close by and far off.

The productive and creative scientific work increased the support from personalities from the scientific sphere, from the Venezuelan state and from the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Over five decades, thirty-eight De La Salle Brothers fulfilled important missions within La Salle Foundation. This unconditional support from these institutions and persons was to be maintained over the years, thus guaranteeing its development and the philosophical orientation of the work.

Current situation of La Salle Foundation in the 21st century.

In the current situation, La Salle Foundation has made its own the demand to meet the needs that poverty presents. Following the institutional spirit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in their basic principles as is the case also with the fundamentals of Catholic education, it has strengthened the ideal of what constitutes the “option for the poor”.

Ideology of Catholic education.

La Salle Foundation bases itself on the human-Christian ideals that constitute the fundamental elements of a Catholic education. These ideals lead to the determination of what education ought to be:

1. Inspired by principles of relevance, meeting needs and development of values such as work, identity and environment, united with a vision of Christian redemption, of communitarian worth and of the professional dimension, centred on the appreciation of work with a humanising vision, technological formation with a polytechnic vision and academic formation with a philosophic-scientific vision.
2. Conceived as an education for the future which synthesises the guiding principles of religious identity, directed to the poorest and identified with principles of quality which discerns a time of change, contradiction and coexistence of different visions of values and anti-values.
3. Shaped from the setting free of the subject who promotes his own development, who demands and needs justice, fraternity and life to the full in accord with the preaching of the Gospel which is the task of the Church, by means of the People of God, and with adaptation to an education as service of the poor, historical persons, for whom the process of liberation in an educational framework should stress their communitarian, geopolitical and hope-filled nature.
4. Renewed, given that education as a life option is rooted in the spiritual aspect of the process, which makes the person the heir to the resurrection and to life in Christ, and in the human aspect valuing and defending life and existence, promoting identity and the witness experience of virtues in our life, in human dignity and in historical and cultural roots.

Remaining within these elements, Christian education adapts itself to new realities of attending to those most in need: teaching, adult education, teacher formation, basic literacy, non-formal education, pastoral care and youth groups. Attention to the poor constitutes an opportunity for forming them as agents of change with a Christian vision from the Gospel viewpoint. This perspective does not limit itself to the utilitarian but transcends it to project fundamental values.

This Christian education is characterised by emphasis placed on the person, seeking his/her participation, commitment, social awareness, vocational-professional expertise and environmental conscience. It constitutes a response to the social requirement to renew institutions in accord with the aim of our service of establishing knowledge and experience as means of meeting the needs of the most unprotected. It is defined as a situation of redemption in the emphasis on attention to meeting the needs the poor who are without economic and educational possibilities.

In centring on the most needy socio-economically and theologically, one encounters true poverty which is not desired by God and represents a “social sin”. It is a synonym for injustice. The poor are socially innocent and victims. They deserve a preferential attention from the Church seeking their complete liberation. In synthesis, Lasallian education emphasises that the option for the poor proclaims Christ with his salvation, enlightenment and freedom, and constitutes a return to the authenticity of the Gospel and recognition of the person, with the idea that the poor are endowed with attitudes and aptitudes for learning and saving themselves by their own selves.

Even considering what has gone before as defining point of the policies of La Salle Foundation, there is no way that the multi-factored magnitude of the problem can be ignored. In this sense it needs to be emphasised that:

- Poverty, from the criterion of human development, refers to the incapacity of a person to solve problems, to cope with the lack of real opportunities, social limitations and personal circumstances, to live a life that is of value and is valued.
- Human poverty manifests itself in a variety of limitations regarding, among others, a healthy life, knowledge, a decent standard of living, participation and access.

- The concept of poverty is also linked to environmental poverty: among other things, pollution of water, air and soil, degradation of ecosystems and natural resources, species extinction, and inadequate disposal of solid residues especially those which more immediately threaten people's health.
- In the same way, the concept of spiritual poverty is connected because of preoccupation with oneself and with those in worse conditions, and because of a spirit of greediness, seeking personal wealth without caring about the consequences for others.

Within this group of ideals La Salle Foundation centres its attention and its efforts on the most needy - the poor.

Option for the poor.

Inspired by foundational principles, Lasallian activity aims at relevance, meeting needs and the development of values such as work, identity and milieu. It aims in addition at a vision of Christian redemption, worth as a community and the professional dimension under a triple aspect of formation centred on: the valuing of labour with a humanistic vision, technological formation with a polytechnic vision and academic formation with a philosophic-scientific vision. This description does not abandon the approaches of the Lasallian international plan which within the concepts of education for the future synthesises the guiding principles of: religious identity, identification with the poorest and raising educational quality (Lasallian Latin American Region 2001).

Education for the future leads to a search for alternatives with a vision of a new period (Peresson 1992). The world of today is characterised by change and contradiction. For Christianity, this is equivalent to speaking of a world in which there coexist different visions of values and anti-values. From this perspective the mission of Christian action finds its inspiration in a liberating education which sees the person as promoter of his/her own development. For Catholic education this means: evangelisation as task of the Church which is the essential task of the People of God which claims and requires justice, fraternity and life to the full (Faure 1972; Freire 1991).

In a conception of education as service of the poor, actual persons, the process of liberation in an educational framework should emphasise its supportive, geopolitical and hope-filled nature. It sees education as option for life which bases itself on the spiritual aspect of the process of bringing it about that the person be heir to the resurrection and to life in Christ, in the human aspect, valuing and defending life and existence. It fosters an identity which is founded on the witnessing experience of the virtues in our life, in human decency and in historical and cultural roots.

Within the limits of the elements described, it is Christian philosophy which inspires the education which La Salle Foundation imparts within the framework of a pluralist and ecumenical conception, making it accessible to the poorest without any type of discrimination. In this sense, the history of Lasallian education within a framework of diversity has adapted itself to new realities so as to attend to those most in need: secondary education, adult education, teacher formation, basic literacy, non-formal education, pastoral care and youth assistance (Anile 1963).

For La Salle Foundation, the provision of education for a poor child in his/her own place and cultural milieu entails the task of knowing the characteristics which surround the state of poverty of the person and its causes, and the possible approaches for succeeding in diminishing the pernicious effect that the state of poverty produces in the quality of life of the person.

Well then, what leads to such action? Such a question makes us reflect on the conceptual elements used in the 39th and 43rd General Chapters of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, those which placed emphasis on the foundational proposition of centring on the poor giving them the opportunity to form themselves as agents of change but with a social and Christian vision, or rather with the viewpoint of the Gospel (ULSAC 2002).

The work of the institution is thus of divine inspiration seeking a quality education which does not limit itself to what is merely useful but goes further to a manifesting of substantive values. In this perspective Lasallian education is characterised as being based on Christian values, participation, commitment, social awareness, vocational-professional expertise and concern for the environment.

The emphasis placed on the development of the most efficient procedures in the struggle against poverty in its different expressions leads to re-planning of the ways of looking at the high proportions of critical and extreme poverty which are to be found in the current world situation. As part of the responses given to this social demand, a renewal of structures has been necessary, inspired by the evaluation of our service. Thus the structures should place our knowledge and experience at the service of society so as to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

In virtue of the above La Salle Foundation defined a situation needing to be redeemed within the framework of attention to the poor, those without the economic and educational possibility of meeting their primary needs. At the same time those are poor who are socially excluded owing to factors such as: race, gender, age, and physical, educational and social incapacity. Or as the common saying has it: those are poor who die before their time.

The Latin-American Episcopal Conference at their meeting in Medellin (1968) and in Puebla (1979) came out in favour of a clearly prophetic preferential option in solidarity with the poor. They considered that “We emphasise the necessity of conversion of the whole Church towards an option preferentially in favour of the poor, seeking their complete liberation” (Puebla Document 1134).

With that there is no wish to ignore the existence of other claims of moral, spiritual and/or existential poverty that derive from family, social or personal complexities. We are clear that these are poverties that require attention but La Salle Foundation made a prior option for physical poverty that is to say derived from the lack of resources indispensable for survival of a person with dignity.

In conformity with what has been previously presented, the total education that FLASA imparts emphasises that:

- The option for the poor announces Christ with his salvation, enlightenment and liberation (Sobrino, 2004).
- Promotes a return to the authenticity of the Gospel (Vatican Council II).
- It is a starting point that the poor are endowed with attitudes and aptitudes for learning (2nd Lasallian Congress, 1994).

Demands called for by the option for the poor.

The demands that this option calls for are varied and of different kinds, the following being among those that should be emphasised:

- The condemnation of extreme poverty as contrary to the Gospel.
- The call to ongoing conversion in all Christians for achieving each day an ever fuller identification with the poor Christ and in the poor.
- The change in personal and collective mentality with regard to the ideal of a human life that is decent and happy - this presupposes a readiness for conversion.
- Solidarity with the poor who are in the majority on the (Latin American) continent which sets them free within themselves and serves as witness for evangelising those in power.
- Knowing and denouncing the mechanisms that generate such poverty.

Poverty in the world.

Poverty in the world is a cause for concern (Romero, 2000) seeing that in any case there are already around 1,200 million persons existing on less than one dollar a day while inequality between countries and within them goes on increasing. More than 100 million people live in poverty in the most prosperous countries of North America, Asia and Europe where there are more than 35 million unemployed.

Poverty in Latin America.

In the year 2002 the number of Latin-Americans living in poverty rose to 220 million people of whom 95 million are destitute, which represents 43.4% and 18.8% of the population respectively. These are the estimates presented by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) in a preview of the Social Panorama of Latin America 2002-2003.

In individual countries the change in these indicators between 1999 and 2002 was also marked by far smaller variations. Amongst the exceptions are to be found Argentina and to a lesser

degree Uruguay which experienced serious deteriorations in living conditions. In Argentinean urban areas the degree of poverty almost doubled passing from 23.7% to 45.4%, while destitution had a three-fold increase, rising from 6.7% to 20.9%.

Elsewhere Mexico and Ecuador (urban areas) are the only countries studied which show perceptible diminutions in levels of poverty and destitution in this period.

Living conditions remain almost unchanged in the majority of countries except Venezuela where poverty could increase significantly and in Argentina where the reactivation of economic growth should reduce the proportion of poor people.

Poverty in Venezuela.

Magnitude of hunger in the region:

On the other hand almost 55 million Latin Americans and people of the Caribbean suffered some degree of malnutrition in the final years of the last decade. In a special chapter dedicated to the topic of hunger presented by CEPAL in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) CEPAL estimates that 11% of the population is under-nourished. Almost 9% of the under-5 child population suffers severe malnourishment (underweight) and 19.4% chronic malnourishment (undersized for their age). This last has special seriousness because of its irreversible effects.

Such poverty is linked with other social factors such as health, education, unemployment and other indices of delinquency. We can thus underline certain aspects.

Health:

- More than 4 million children suffer malnutrition.
- Around half a million boys and girls have an annual average of two episodes of gastro-enteritis.
- The mortality rate through malnutrition went from 3 to 4.6 per 100,000 inhabitants between 1989 and 1994.

Education and employment:

- 32% of the child population gets no education.
- Only 71% of those who begin first grade complete sixth grade, 41% ninth grade and 38% the full programme.

- The index of class repeaters is 10.3% of those enrolled.
- 34.9% of educational establishments close by reason of deterioration of the physical plant.
- More than 480,000 youngsters of the work-force remain unemployed.

Delinquency:

- According to INAM, child-juvenile delinquency has increased 30% in the last three years.
- Of the 2,100,000 boys and girls who are experiencing a situation of critical poverty, some 26,000 are law-breakers.
- Homicides have gone from fifth to second place with significant child participation.

How did we come to this?

In Venezuela it is clear that material poverty is a problem of production and distribution of economic resources. In this sense:

- We have a stagnant economy which does not create sufficient goods and services and which therefore does not provide satisfaction for the needs of the inhabitants of the country.
- We have politicians who establish priorities in the distribution of income and maintain badly administered social programmes.
- The State should alter its role of intervener in economic life and strengthen its role as promoter of development and protector of the rights of citizens.

La Salle Foundation sets up a presence in the country in those zones where the greatest economic depression exists as response to the reason for its existence as being a not-for-profit institution to attend to the needs of those with less. Throughout the length and breadth of the country it organises itself through CAMPUSES as pointed out earlier with the support of its Production Units and Outreach Programmes.

Institutional Organisation

La Salle Foundation carries out its activities through its Campuses, centres and research and development stations. There are today five Campuses:

Caracas Campus.

This is the headquarters where one finds the Presidency, Executive Vice-presidency and the Technical and Administrative Directors and Co-ordinators, the Library and the Research and Development bodies such as: the Caribbean Institute of Anthropology and Sociology (ICAS), the La Salle Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Humanity. On this Campus we find the Co-ordination of the La Salle University of the Caribbean (ULSAC). These bodies have developed works in:

- La Salle Museum of Natural History (MHNLS) whose objectives are: to diffuse everything concerned with knowledge, sustainable use and conservation of the Natural Patrimony of Venezuela.
- Support for scientific works concerning the environment.
- To study, maintain and extend the collection that it presently holds - one of the most representative of the flora and fauna of the country. To be part of the biological memory of Venezuela.

The Caribbean Institute of Anthropology and Sociology (ICAS) whose principal objectives are:

- To deepen the study of the cultural diversity of the different human groups which make up the country as also to promote their incorporation into the benefits which it should provide to its inhabitants.
- To study the impact of relationships of the social groups with the environment so as to set up relevant strategies leading to a lessening of risks.
- To seek to know the societal structures and mechanisms of marginalised groups so as to offer them an accompaniment according to their needs.

The Museum of the Venezuelan Person and his Environment:

- The Museologic and Museographic Project.
- Has as mission to be an interactive and pluridisciplinary museum of scientific and cultural dissemination which integrates contemporary languages of arts and communication in the critical transmission of knowledge concerning the relation between the people and the cultures of Venezuela and its environment, from a humanistic perspective coordinated with geographical, biological, historical and anthropological knowledge.

Management of Library, Archives and Documentation with:

- 12 units: more than three hundred and fifty thousand consultations in the year 2005.

In Outreach Services there stand out:

- Scientific and Documentary Publications: "MEMORIA", "ANTHROPOLOGICA" and "NATURA".
- Programmes destined for the attention of the Warao peoples.
- Institutional campaigns via the means of communication.
- And others.

ULSAC (La Salle University of the Caribbean).

This began its activities in the Tuy valleys in Miranda state and will be in a very near future a Campus with its own autonomy and which will have the capacity for receiving 645 students at the beginning and 10,000 in the long term. The following courses have been approved at the professional level:

- Agronomic Engineering, Certificate of Rural Agro Industry.
- Education, Certificate of Management of Educational Procedures.
- Maintenance Engineering, Certificate in Industrial Maintenance.

As a linking development of ULSAC the Centre of Formation of Human Resources (CFRH) is already up and running in Ocumare del Tuy a zone situated 60 Km. from Caracas and constituting one of its main dormitory cities. In it is taught work training for youths between 15 and 25 years of age excluded from the Educational

System in different technical branches such as: Computing, Administrative Assistant and automotive mechanics.

Nueva Esparta Campus (Margarita Island).

The University Institute of Technology of Mar (IUTEMAR) and the Nautical Fishing School and the Research Station of Marinas de Margarita (EDIMAR) are established. These units are involved in teaching, research, extension work and production.

The University Institute of Technology of Mar (IUTEMAR) graduated 125 students in 2005 and presently has an enrolment of 1467 students. It offers the following careers at the level of Higher Technical University (TSU) equivalent to an Associated Degree:

- Aquaculture and Oceanography.
- Naval Mechanics.
- Navigation and Fishing.
- Food Technology.
- Business Administration.
- Accounting and Finance.

The Nautical Fishing School has approximately 1062 students, graduating an average of 100 to 120 students each semester in specialisations linked to marine activities such as:

- Naval Maintenance Mechanics.
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning.
- Fishing Technology.
- Marine Zootechnics.
- Food Technology.
- Accounting.

The Research Station of Marinas de Margarita (EDIMAR) has begun work on:

- Investigation of marine resources and their responsible management.
- Support of all branches of marine and fishing research with special reference to physical, chemical, geological and biological environments.

In Outreach work, there stand out:

- Environmental services for the national parks.
- Research carried out with the oceanographic ship “Br. Gines”.
- Fishing activities of instruction and production in designated vessels.

The Amazonas Sub-Campus: (South Venezuela).

This is the seat of the Amazonas University of Technology which has multiethnic characteristics. For 2005 it has a student enrolment of more than 600 who do studies in courses of Advanced Technical University level in:

- Ecotourism.
- Agro-alimentation.
- Civil Construction.
- Business Administration.
- (projected) Curriculum Design for Health Assistant in Tropical Diseases (CAICET).

Punta Fishing Programme (Orinoco Delta).

In this state there is the Warao Punta Fishing Programme which carries out a set of activities such as:

- In education: offering bilingual education (Spanish-Warao) in 3 schools, 120 students, 6 Warao teachers. It also presents an adult literacy programme.
- By extension: training for community promoters; health service with 2 centres of complete service and 1 mobile health unit; promotion of income generation, loans, introduction to notions of credit systems and formation of the Makiri Civil Association at Kojo, as a model of a self-management activity for indigenous communities.

Guyana Campus (South Venezuela).

In this state the work of La Salle Foundation is carried out in two cities: San Felix and Tumeremo.

In San Felix there are:

A University Institute of Technology, which graduates annually an average of 300 students by semester and has an approximate enrolment of 2,400 students in the following specialisations at TSU level:

- Electricity.
- Mechanics.
- Metallurgy.
- Industrial Safety.
- Business Management.
- Accounting and Finance.

It also has an Industrial Technical School which in 2005 is graduating 150 students and in the same year expects an enrolment of 1,015. Its specialisations are:

- Electricity.
- Mechanics.
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning.
- Instrumentation.

The Hydro-biological Research Station of Guyana whose main projects are:

- Advice and participation in research programmes in continental aquatic resources.
- Hydro-biological studies of the great rivers of Venezuela, their natural exploitation and effective protection.
- Investigation and production of types of cultivation and reproduction of freshwater species as source of low-cost protein.

This Campus administers a programme of care for “unemployed youth” - outside of the school system - which services an average of 332 students in intensive courses of almost a year in requested specialisations, via agreements, for employers. (Maintenance mechanics, operation of machine tools, electrical maintenance, welding, blacksmithing...).

Tumeremo Sub-Campus (southeast of the country).

This is a Technological Institute of Minerals and Forests with an enrolment of 400 students, with specialisations in:

- Mining Technology.
- Industrial Safety.
- Accounting and Finance.
- Electricity.

La Salle Foundation conducts an outreach programme in the area by means of:

- Radio programmes.
- Non-formal education in:
 - Electricity for apprentices (HECLA and MINERVEN Agreement).
 - Computing (AVEC Agreement).
 - Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (AVEC).
 - Electricity (AVEC).
 - Welding (AVEC).
 - Secretarial (AVEC).

Cojedes Campus (central region).

In this state, activities are carried on in two cities: San Carlos and Baul. In San Carlos, a city located in the centre of the country, there exists a Technological Institute of Agricultural and Livestock Activities. For 2005 there were 154 TSU graduates and an approximate enrolment of 1,029 students. In it there are courses in:

- Animal Husbandry.
- Plant Technology.
- Business Administration.

In San Carlos there is also the “Luis Tovar” Agricultural and Livestock Technical School which graduates an average of 64 students per year from an approximate enrolment of 650. Its areas are:

- Animal Husbandry.
- Plant Technology.

The Agricultural and Livestock Research Station (EDIAGRO) whose main aims are:

- To acquire the most exact knowledge possible of the ecology of the region of the central plains of Venezuela, their productive capacity and environmental restrictions.
- To offer assistance to the Plains inhabitants so as to confront their most urgent needs from a basis of the sustainable use of available resources.

La Salle Foundation in San Carlos carries out its extension activities by means of:

- The study and inventory of the archaeological and paleontological areas of Cojedes State.
- The formation and equipping of producers and their families in the rural communities of the San Carlos river basin.
- Fingerling production for the promotion of fish-farming of the fresh-water “cachama” species in the west of the country.

Baul Sub-Campus.

The Baul Sub-Campus (south of Cojedes State) has a Basic Farming School “Fray Pedro José de Villanueva” which provides Basic Education in its levels 2 and 3 Stage, graduating an average of 45 students per year. It has an approximate enrolment of 272 students of whom 120 are boarders, children of agricultural workers of the poorest district of the state. In this area outreach activities are conducted for training local communities in raising cachama for which there is a Fishing Research Centre.

Bocono Campus: (Andes area).

In this state the activity is carried on in Bocono where there is a Technological Institute for the needs of the inhabitants of the region which is mainly agricultural. This institution graduates an average of 140 students per year and has an approximate enrolment of 327 students in the specialisations of:

- Animal Husbandry.
- Plant Technology.

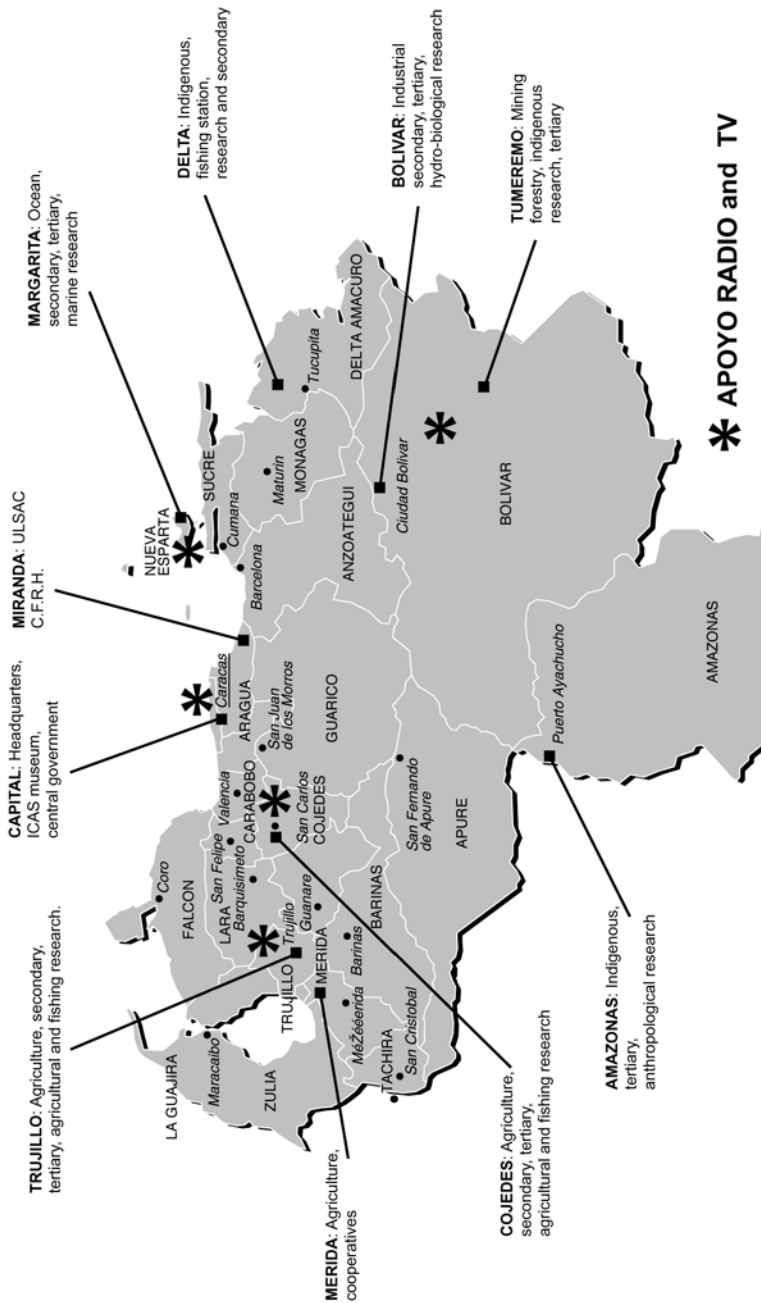
- Business Management.
- Accounting and Finance.

It also runs the “Boys Village” Agricultural and Livestock Technical School. This institution reported 61 graduations in 2005 and an enrolment of 467 in the same year, of whom 60 are boarders, children of agricultural workers of the Andes. It has the following areas of training:

- Animal Husbandry.
- Plant Technology.

It also has an Andean Ecological Research Station whose strategic aim is:

- Knowledge of the ecosystems of the middle Andes which assists in making decisions about the management of rational agricultural exploitation of this region. Too often in the past this region has been submitted to intensive exploitation based on rudimentary systems of cultivation and massive use of agro-chemicals.



The institutional strategic approach

Faced with the foundational arguments and the diagnostics of poverty La Salle Foundation opted to fight it. To this effect, what is our mode of being, of doing and of knowing? Such questions shaped for us an institutional strategic approach which enabled us to formulate and take on the mission, vision, objectives, goals and activities.

Institutional mission.

La Salle Foundation plans to give increased attention to communities most in need, modifying itself according to the needs and realities of each through education, research and outreach, based on the culture of work, brotherhood and solidarity so as to have people take root within their region and to provide them with instruments for facilitating their personal and community development, while maintaining as aim to make the Reign of God become reality on earth.

Institutional vision.

La Salle Foundation has come to see itself as a scientific and educational institution with outreach and production activities, synergically integrated with excellence and solidity. It is founded on a philosophic concept of encouraging the promotion of cultural and environmental values in each group of people.

Objective.

To attain levels of general wellbeing, quality of life, happiness and human dignity in consonance with the Christian understanding of and full exercise of freedom.

Goal: Have people take root within their region with their culture and traditions and provide them with the instruments to facilitate their personal and communitarian development, diminishing the exodus of country folk and small villages towards the cities.

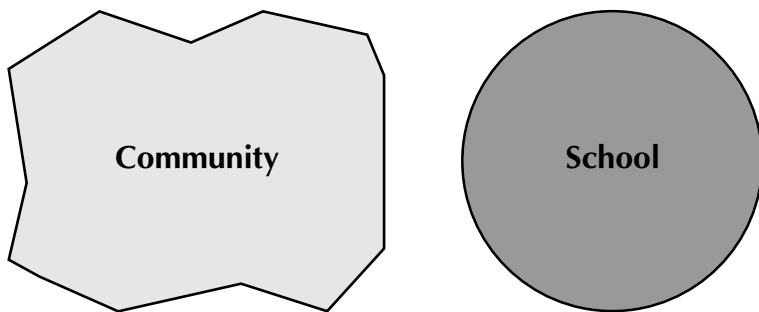
Activities.

Ways of acting and specific operations for the attainment of the objective and the goal.

La Salle Foundation and its community approach

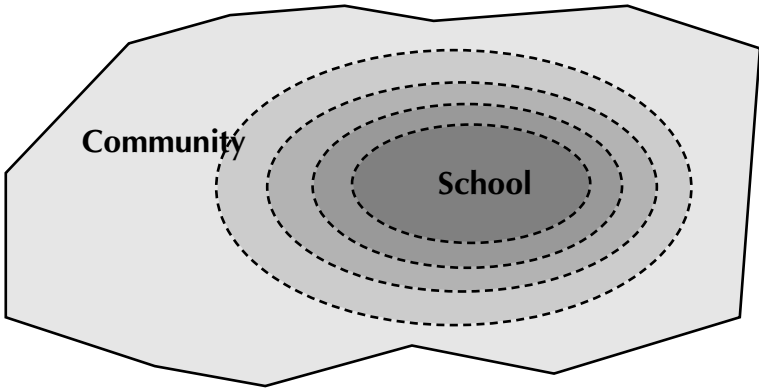
La Salle Foundation begins from the principle that the school institution should insert itself in the local and regional community, shifting from the concept of a self-sufficient and isolated educational centre of the community to an educational centre which is born of the needs of the community which is the object of its attention. The socio-cultural reality of the regions in which the institution finds itself is taken into account as base for the feasibility study which guarantees the relevance of its programmes and study plans.

The traditional schema which has operated in the Venezuelan education system does not allow for an authentic school-community interaction. Both entities remain isolated with the only interaction occurring via the simple development of the programmes of each study plan.



It can happen that the community is open to collaboration with the school but the school remains within its environs without taking great interest in the situation of the community from which its students come.

The model of La Salle Foundation can be perceived in this schema as establishing its proper place and validating its presence in the communities where it is situated.

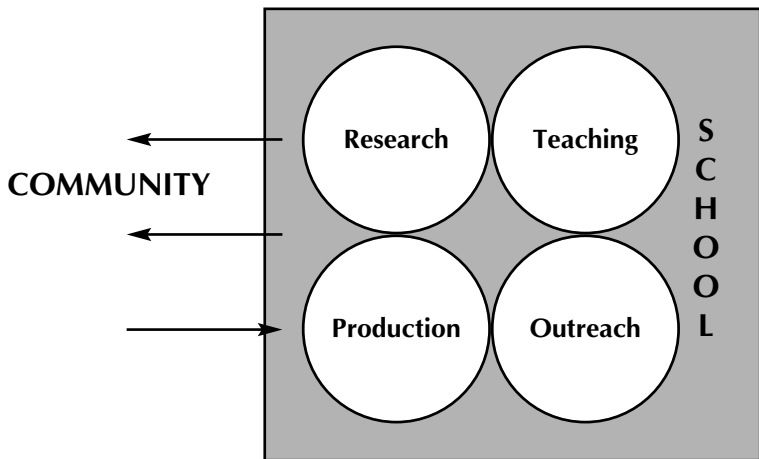


The school should continue to be the promotional centre of culture and formation for the community which is the object of its attention. It should respond to the needs of the targeted local and regional community. For this the school in La Salle Foundation strives to get to know the culture and traditions of the area as also its human and Christian values. It pays attention to the cultural riches that the pupil brings to the school, works with them and strives to have the student give back to his community the results of what he learns so that the influence of the school is experienced in the surrounding community. This outreach method is described further on, clarifying this sort of school-community interaction in more detail.

La Salle Foundation's ways of operating

La Salle Foundation's ways of operating are: teaching, research, outreach and production. The existence of these ways of operating constitutes a model of response in the light of its "prioritised action for the poor".

These manners of acting constitute interactive and interdependent elements in the design and execution of institutional operations. Naming them separately is for the purpose of explanation only, since they function in a synchronised and coherent manner. They thus form a set of actions which respond to the social demands of the milieu within the institutional philosophical framework where the person is the centre of the action and is in movement towards the community.



Curriculum development is understood therefore as a spiral movement in interactive fashion between the ways of operating. Each of the functions has its own area. No one holds supremacy over the others, none is exclusive. They are at all times complementary and mutually enriching, geared to planning and coordination with plenty of capacity for harmony, negotiation and interchange.

It needs to be stressed that two of the factors of major cohesion are the management of knowledge and of technology which are understandably conceived as being interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. The whole thing leads to experiments which allow for integral formation of individuals, forming them for life.

Teaching.

All education imparted in La Salle Foundation is qualified as technical. In the formation of its students, La Salle Foundation's educational institutions envisage aspects such as:

Components which produce an integral education, with the result that the activities of teaching, research, outreach and production are carried on as part of Curriculum Design throughout the length of studies.

Operations which relate theory and practice, facilitating a locus for integration between teachers, students and community as scenario for verifying knowledge, reality and society.

Formation experiences which whether individual or collective foster participation in the development of one's fellows and in the transformation of the context.

This function underlines the teaching nature of La Salle Foundation and it occurs:

- In centres of occurrence of major indices of poverty and more especially in regions that are on borders and indigenous.
- With specialisations for youth and adults who do not have chances of succeeding in life.
- By imparting technical and professional formation for immediate insertion into work and society.
- With courses and programmes that are of great relevance for fostering development in local and regional economies.
- Developing programmes for technical specialisation for young people who have abandoned the school system or are without a trade or job. This type of specialisation is imparted through teachers contracted for this purpose and in workshops of formal education.

- Giving priority entrance to our establishments to students with few economic resources.
- With preferential enrolment for persons with heightened socioeconomic vulnerability.

Moreover, this way of acting is characterised by being directed towards:

- Raising of awareness and sensitivity about situations of human and contextual poverty.
- Study of the causes which produce poverty.
- Responses which diagnosis demands.
- Strategies which produce solutions.

For the sociological study of the populations it serves, La Salle Foundation counts on the Caribbean Institute of Anthropology and Sociology (ICAS). For this it maintains a team of anthropologists and sociologists who constantly assess the process.

The university pedagogical model of La Salle Foundation does not envisage activities known as part-time which permit the student to apply his knowledge for a set time in enterprises or cooperatives. The student who enters the University must become involved from the beginning of his course in course-related activities.

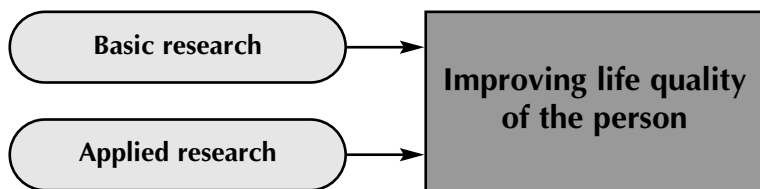
His/her active and continuing presence in the world of industry or the community organisation provides the materials that he/she needs to process in the educational institution so as to analyse the problems or advantages that arise from them. In this way he/she begins the exercise of his/her profession and makes a direct contribution to the communities of his/her environment. All this brings with it systematic research processes which guided by specialist tutors yield as final outcome what has been misnamed up till now "degree work".

As we can see we are witnessing an education that is open to the community where the student participates in its life while at the same time the community benefits from the input of the students and of the institution in general. It is only when the student perceives the problems that are the cause of its poverty and envisages the way to combat them that there is awakened in him the interest to train him/herself as a professional with the aim of bettering the quality of life of his fellows.

Research.

In relation to the research way of operating it needs to be stressed that it fosters the creation and application of knowledge. In this sense it should be pointed out that in La Salle Foundation, research appears as making a contribution to the solution of problems of health and poverty.

In it there is carried out basic research which permits generating knowledge, and applied research which tests and validates such knowledge and achieves socio-educational and productive changes in communities in the search for alternatives for bettering the quality of life, all of this without taking for granted that all research is applied in as much as it benefits, in a form more or less evident, the community or society in general.



In virtue of the preceding, research unfolds through:

- Test centres in geographical places that are rich in natural and socio-cultural resources with the aim of conserving the environmental milieu, making it sustainable, and studying the rational use of these resources.
- Studies of biodiversity and its impact on cultures experiencing impoverishment. There are cultures that depend exclusively on the natural environment in which they are located. Analysing the environmental conditions on which they depend and finding solutions to the negative effects of mal-management of biodiversity is one of the main jobs of research in La Salle Foundation.
- Studies of environmental impact requested by enterprises or the State. These are a way of controlling development processes which can directly affect environmental conditions and ultimately people's quality of life.

- Transfer of technology relevant to the geographic and socio-cultural characteristics of the region so as to optimise production.
- Directing food production to commodities that are suitable for the milieu and have major protein richness.

For developing research investigations La Salle Foundation has no fewer than forty professional researchers qualified in different areas. These researchers are to be found in the stations conducting investigations in pisciculture, marine studies, agriculture, mining, forestry, as also in those related to hydro-biological studies in the great river basins of the country.

When we speak of basic research we are referring to that effected in response to demands coming from the State or from private enterprise. For this type of research Foundation has high-tech teams (oceanographic research vessel, high resolution spectrophotometers, etc.) which make possible data collection and processing. This is the case with environmental impact studies, marine phenomena, quality control of foodstuffs, behaviours of flora and fauna, etc.

In speaking of applied research we are referring to giving direct support to activities in the areas of agricultural and livestock production, fresh-water pisciculture, mining, and in general whatever has to do with pedagogical models leading to better output in production and a better orientation of sustainable management techniques for the use of small producers.

Students participate directly in both activities which enable them to put into practice what they have learned in the classroom.

Outreach.

These are activities which allow La Salle Foundation to convey knowledge and organisation to communities for fostering sustainable management of the resources of their area and culture. Interaction with the community based on a process which directs attention beyond itself allows La Salle Foundation and its educational institutions to know the problems and to identify and apply solutions. To this end there develop:

- Agreements and contracts for imparting non-formal education to young people who are without schooling or

excluded from it. It is a way of reaching those youngsters who are not envisaged in formal education.

- Self-management units to assist regional community services. The community becomes involved in these processes and comes to constitute a way of life of better quality in sustainable form.
- Sociological studies of the communities that are the object of our service. These determine the characteristics related to the identity of these communities with the aim of applying techniques of production and development consonant with their culture.
- Plans and programmes destined to deepen knowledge of the culture and regional values thus minimising the negative effects of the exploitation of the resources which directly affect their environment and the traditional conditions of living pertaining to their culture.

Outreach activities comply with programmes that are continuing and sustainable. It is these which permit the presence of La Salle Foundation to be felt in the localities and regions in which it is inserted. In general they are programmes directed to the orientation and organisation of the communities. They are part of the social and political life of the communities and they become cultural and social reference plans. Outreach allows La Salle Foundation to direct itself towards communities and to establish agreements and contracts with public and private bodies for coordinating forces that foster local or regional development.

Production.

This way of acting constitutes a preferred bastion in the policies of La Salle Foundation, since it allows for creative precision and material for the hoped-for outcomes. Learning by “doing” is thought of as fundamental in the education of students and is seen as an interdependent foundation in research because it is based on applied knowledge. It needs to be stressed that it facilitates the inclusion of research in productive work.

It develops through self-managed concrete activities that are effected by:

- Valuing work as an essential factor for social insertion.

- Seeing to it that the student participates directly in production activities.
- Setting up bases for organisation in cooperatives or production groups.
- Motivating students' participation in the creation and functioning of pedagogical models of production.
- Favouring the insertion of students as assistants in production teaching units.
- Setting up agreements and contracts for the insertion of the graduate in the labour market.

In La Salle Foundation it is understood that the required training of the student for the management of production techniques is above all concerned with the application of such knowledge to the work place process of production in itself, which includes related aspects of product quality, commercial rentability and marketing techniques. For this the institution counts on production enterprises under the responsibility of third parties in which the students by means of established contracts participate directly in the enterprise's organisation and in the techniques of production and marketing. There are production experiments among indigenous communities, rural areas and development of pisciculture in maritime and river zones.

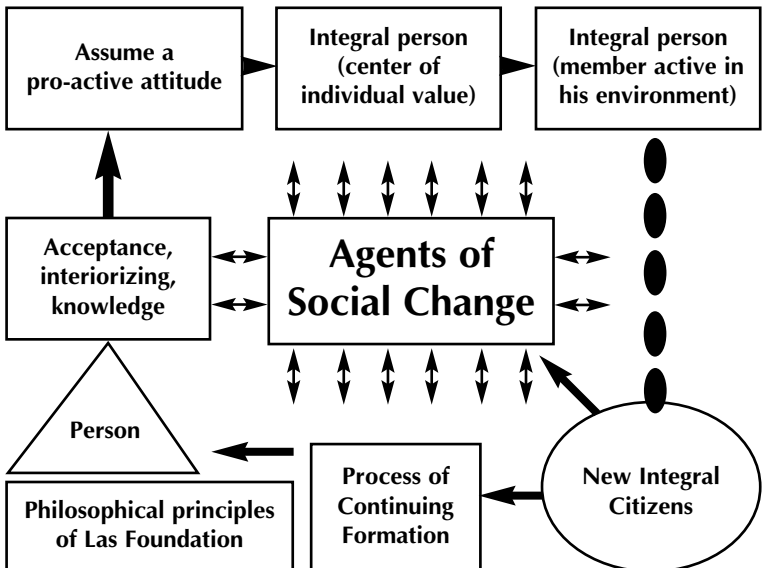
As already pointed out these ways of acting of La Salle Foundation constitute interdependent elements in the design and execution of institutional activities and offer a response to the social demands of the milieu within the institutional philosophical framework.

Comprehensive Orientation Service (S.O.I.)

For the success of much of the linked activities of education and outreach there is reliance on a Comprehensive Orientation Service (SOI) which is a Directorate dependent on the Presidency of La Salle Foundation that assures the presence and practice of the institutional philosophy, a philosophy having its basis in Christian principles inspired by the Gospel.

This Directorate has as functions:

- The development of appropriate staff induction programmes.
- The implementation of concrete Christian and human formation programmes for students at all levels (EREC: School Religious Education in primary and middle school; and CORE: Programme of academic study of Christian and human formation in the Technological Institutes).



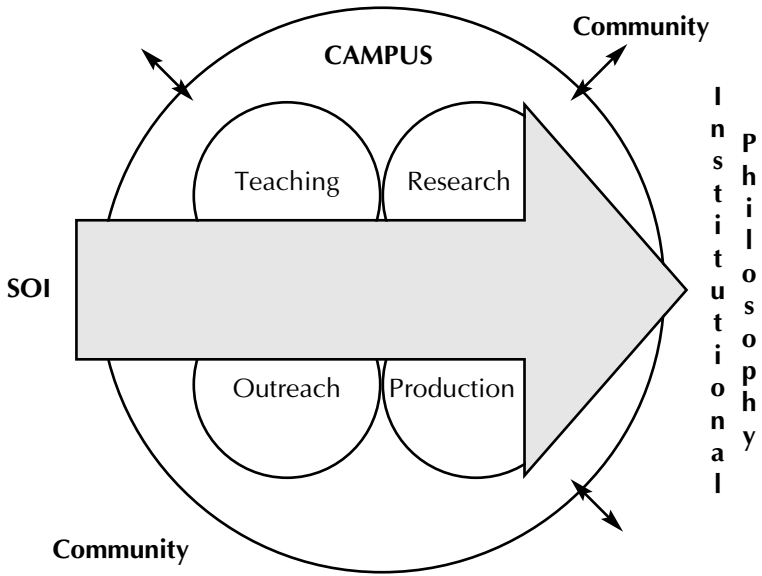
- Arousing community concern about the practice of universal human values.
- Development of programmes of continuing formation for the educators.

Each person entering the institution as also each person working or being educated in the institution is being cared for in a process of continuing formation. Such a process gives them an understanding of the content of the institutional philosophy while reflection is centred on three processes: knowledge of the philosophy based on principles and values; interiorisation of these principles and values so as to be understood completely; a time of reflection for achieving an acceptance of the values and principles on the part of the one being formed. Once the person knows, understands and makes his/her own the institutional philosophy he/she becomes a proactive member of La Salle Foundation. That is to say, he/she is capable of passing on to others the values and principles that have been the aim of formation.

We are faced then with an integral person as an individual who can then become an integral person as an active member in his/her milieu. Formation of people who are active in their institutional milieu is going to constitute a group of new citizens capable of becoming agents of social change who operate within and outside of the institution. They will always have the opportunity to renew their entry into the system of formation so as to acquire an improved grade of commitment.

With this there is contribution to:

- Recovery of cultural values of the regions where it operates.
- Promotion of good interpersonal relationships within the institution.
- Importance of fundamental synergic work for overcoming difficulties arising.
- Strengthening of the organisational climate that fosters all processes that involve people in effecting the mission of La Salle Foundation.



SOI is present in all the ways of operating because none of them can operate outside of the philosophical orientation that inspires the institution. The planned synergy among the four ways of operating should remain founded on the basic principles on which the very existence of the Foundation is based.

We desire to contribute to society in this way, achieving the formation of a person who interiorises knowledge, assumes a proactive attitude, is aware of his/her individuality and milieu, is capable of developing into an excellent professional with constant ongoing formation. In sum, that he/she is an agent of social change.

Resources on which La Salle Foundation counts

For the development of its model, La Salle Foundation counts on a system of financing which combines resources coming from various institutions. The mechanisms most used are:

- Agreements with government bodies: the Ministries of Education, Culture and Sport and of Higher Education, Governments, the Mayoral Office and other public bodies.
- Financial projects with private national and international bodies.
- Services furnished to public and private bodies, self-management projects and international agreements.
- Donations.

La Salle Foundation strives to increase self-management via letters of intent, understandings and agreements, by means of alliances that provide services using our capabilities: research stations, university outreach, workshops, libraries, laboratories and information and computing systems among others.

It is interesting to analyse the process of the signing of the agreements with the two Ministries of Education for the establishment of the major source of income for La Salle Foundation. The first Agreement with AVEC was signed in January 1991. During five years of management they arrived at a signing agreement with the single Ministry of Education for this henceforth. The aspects considered essential for arriving at this signing were: a) Saving of financial resources of the State for the difference of costs per student; b) Possibility of increasing service to people of limited resources; c) Value of the contribution of private Catholic education in buildings and grants, far superior to what the Ministry expected; d) Guarantee of good use of the resources contributed by the State to Catholic Education.

As to the signing of the Agreement between La Salle Foundation and the Ministry of Higher Education it can be added that the prestige of the institution, the quality of services offered and atten-

tion to the most needy areas of the country were some of the major aspects that led to the signing of an Agreement very similar to that signed with AVEC but including Higher Education and the area of investigation and administration of La Salle Foundation.

It is certain that the contribution of the State did not create a high degree of dependence. At the present time there does not exist on the part of the State of Venezuela any sort of interference in the structure of governance of La Salle Foundation nor in the application of the philosophy inherent in the institution.

La Salle Foundation works hard at increasing its self-management operations through agreements with regional bodies, private companies and productive projects with are carried out on its Campuses.

We have autonomy but we are always subject to the law that control foundations in the country.

It is also good to add that the increase in activities that La Salle Foundation is achieving is considerable.

Strategic activities and operations

The activities and operations of La Salle Foundation are directed towards a set of possible options for the development of a social policy that really promotes improvement in less favoured groups.

These strategic operations seek:

- To foster conditions for people to go on increasing their productivity and income by their own means and in a favourable environment and not to be expecting one-way transfers of assistance.
- To concentrate efforts for promoting a better quality of coverage of the services offered in education, health and housing in the communities while at the same time seeking secure food resources, employment and access to land.
- To bring it about that individuals and communities make use of their talents and efforts to attain co-operative self-management so as to increase economic growth and social wellbeing and increased social and democratic stability.
- To offer its services to the community with the sense of equity so as to assist it in its organisation in procuring resources, formation of human capital, technological and scientific advances plus marketing procedures for its products.

Conclusion

La Salle Foundation's decision to adopt the option for attention to the poor was inspired by:

- The fundamental principles of Lasallian education aimed at relevance, meeting demands and needs for the development of values such as work, identity and environment, all based on the Christian concept of the person.
- Adaptation to the guidelines coming from the international structures of government of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which based on a concept of education for the future has synthesised for the world and in a particular way for Latin America the guiding principles of religious identity, identification with the poorest and raising of educational quality.
- In the same way, it is based on elements that derive from social demands and the milieu characterised by extreme poverty and necessities for survival.
- It links teaching, research, outreach and production as ways of operating that in a synchronised and coherent manner offer a response to the social demands of the milieu within the institutional philosophical framework in which the person is at the centre of the action in movement towards the community.
- It adopts a model which allows for educating for management of knowledge, develops a proactive attitude, awareness of individuality and collectivity and capacity for generating social change.

In synthesis.

La Salle Foundation applies a pedagogical model founded on a human-Christian philosophy inspired by the charisma of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. This model is centred on such aspects as:

- The synergic operational capacity of its four ways of operating is a characteristic that guarantees a greater work effi-

ciency that La Salle Foundation achieves in the achievement of its mission.

- The integration of School (Campus)-community allows the Foundation to reach out to local, regional and/or national communities.
- The opportunity of formation offered to anyone lacking resources allows access for children and young people coming from high risk social milieus.
- Promotion of the values which characterise regional and national identity is what allows La Salle Foundation to impart an integral education based on human-Christian formation.

Final Questionnaire

For reflection and sharing

1. What overall impression do you retain after reading the bulletin? Are you familiar with this type of state of affairs? If yes, what have you discovered that is new?
2. Do you find any limitation with the project? Any question? Any challenge for the future?
3. What do you think are the fundamental keys to the success of Foundation La Salle? What elements do you think would be of interest to introduce in your local or District context?
4. How could it come about that your educational work sets up a more fruitful dialogue with the community in which it is inserted? What would be the ideal final phase of a responsible interrelation?

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