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Relations between
families and the school.
An experience

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Presentation

This collection would not be complete without a booklet which dealt with one of the crucial points which affect the day to day work of the Lasallian Education Mission and which emerges as an essential element at present and will be much more so in the future. The assiduous reader of the MEL booklets has been discovering the multitude of different faces of one unique reality - the Lasallian Education Mission - which cannot be thought of as an accumulation of activities, actions and experiences, but rather form part of a kind of precious stone in which the thousand and one facets shine brilliantly on condition that a ray of light reaches them. Without any doubt, one of the most exceptional facets of this jewel corresponds to a relationship: family-school and school-family, to be exact.

With the permission of the author and with regard to his choice of title for the booklet, I would have opted for a different one, more explosive, more provocative, more accusing.

Firstly, because it seems he is going to relate an experience and secondly, because the richness of the contents far exceeds a much too ordinary expository title. Even if it were to speak of an experience - in a very complimentary way certainly - but without narrating it, the booklet could not be less legitimate or necessary. Paraphrasing Martin Luther King Jr., it could have been entitled "Why is it impossible to hope?" or "A divorce which kills slowly", or whatever the reader decides to put after he has finished reading...

In a period accustomed to marriages and alliances in macro-economy, finances, markets etc. it appears that the slogan is "form an alliance or die". The family and the school are two of the social structures which, in spite of their proverbial longevity, have a formidable capacity for adaptation, resistance, creativity when faced with any type of threat. The family, as we see very clearly nowadays, produces new forms of being and the school never stops offering models which were unthinkable in the past. As inseparable sisters they suffer at the same time the same joys and sorrows. If one coughs the other catches a cold. On the other hand it seems obvious that the divorce of convenience between the two is a

common element in almost all cultures and civilizations, even in countries which are the most developed technologically. The text will keep reminding us that the final aim of both institutions is the same. If that is the case, why then are the relations between the two so cold, distant, calculated and even antagonistic? For the author the key questions are results, apart from the most delicate: HOW?

Establishing a position for oneself in the vanguard in the “organizations which learn”, learning to learn, allowing for the possibility of humility from the professorship, are some of the keys which become evident for running a renewed and up-to-date school.

Changing the paradigm of the school is what is claimed by the most authoritative voices and those with more profound dreams. The gods, as always, hate the routine and hackneyed and ally themselves with the intrepid.

The book invites us, in a pleasant synthesis, to take a quick look at the past, to think about the present realities predicted as utopias not many decades ago and to enter into a future full of surprises. Across the screen prophetic figures parade, reminding us of their theories and visions: Skinner, Fukuyama, Senge, Illich, just to mention a few.

And in order not to betray the contents of the title, the origin, the context and the development of the experience are described. For some the experience could be considered as insufficient, but it is step by step that the most audacious enterprises are constructed. To help us Lasallians to take sure steps we are provided with practical attitudes, strategies and experiences which will be useful to us in the context of the traditional school and in other less conventional educational options.

Brother Alfonso Novillo

Introduction

In October 2002, more than 100 guidance counselors from Lasallian centres in the ARLEP region took part in the 7th Regional Meeting on **“Relations with, and attention to, the family”**.

Underlying this was a special sensitivity in all the participants with regard to the necessity for fluid and efficient family-school relations, while at the same time there was a feeling that we have not found a suitable area for carrying it out. We were aware that from the school comprehensive channels are being offered but that the families do not find themselves satisfied. We felt that both the school and the family kept on defending specific areas of activity while excluding the other side, which leads to difficulties, conflicts and misunderstandings. We felt the need to intensify the interaction between the family and the school and to call attention to the necessity for exploiting the existing channels while exploring new paths.

With these expectations in mind the 7th Meeting took place in San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid. The central theme was conveyed by Dr. Raquel Amaya Martínez of the University of Oviedo. In her work she was assisted by three colleagues from the same Department, basically in the work groups. The development of the theme was broken up into the following modules: *1º The Families and the School Centres as agents of education and socialization. 2º Areas and effects of co-operation between the Family and the Education Centre. 3º The process of communication and its educational potential. Factors involved in the process of communication. 4º Social and communication skills for fathers and mothers. 5º Aims, objectives and principles of Family Educational Orientation. 6º Revision and planning of formation programs for fathers and mothers. 7º The guidance counselor as a relational agent. The role of the educational guidance counselor in the development of programs of formation.*

During the Meeting we were becoming aware of the importance of family factors and co-operation between the family, the school and community agencies in the education of the students and in the conditioning of their school and personal comportment. The

data emerging from research showed us that when the parents cooperate with the education centre, the children improve their academic performance and develop positive attitudes and behaviour which, all in all, enrich their persons. We noticed that this could be seen more obviously in pupils following primary education, in those who showed some learning problems, or in those coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

Connecting the distinct environments in which the life experience of persons was developing so as to constitute a space for multiple exchange, open to dialogue and to democratic participation was a particularly exciting concept for the guidance counselors of our Education Centres in the District of Madrid. Observing the advantages of co-operation we want to contribute to the recovery of the sense of an educational community, encouraging meeting, dialogue and the involvement of families in the education of their children.

Here we turned on the light bulb of creativity and we thought of **“The Diptychs of the School-Family relationship”**. In thinking of the diptychs, we understood that education in the family and education in the school could not continue moving along parallel paths. On both sides we would try to set about constructing bridges which would connect both environments. We saw these diptychs as the stones of a bridge built to bring about meeting, dialogue and reflection together about the education of the children of one group and the pupils of the other.

All the guidance counselors of the District of Madrid committed themselves to devoting their time and their good will to the task of drawing up the diptychs, of working on them with the class teachers and, following that, having them presented to the families and studied by them. For this we congratulated and thanked them very sincerely for their professionalism and their Lasallian spirit in the field of school guidance counseling and especially in family relations, formation and orientation. The people behind this work are: *Justino Hernández, Marta Peinado, David Arias, Lucía Pérez, Pepita González, Faina Toledo, Manuel González, Yeya Jorge, Juan Alberto Pérez, Belén Riesco, Adela Vilches, Laura Villacorta, Mariam Zambrana, Coral Revilla, José Antonio Ruiz, Óscar J. Hernando, Inmaculada González-Pola, María Isabel Delgado, Luis García Mediavilla, Joaquín Sánchez-Cabezudo and Fernando Soto.*

We all see in the diptychs a possibility for effective interaction between parents and educators, starting out at all times from the interests of both, but depending on how work can be done in the Education Centres.

From 'Family' to 'Families'

"Family" is the name given to a social organization as old as humanity itself and which has experienced transformations which have allowed it to adapt itself to the exigencies of every society and every epoch. The family has been weighed, measured and quantified by sociologists and economists; it has been broken up and analyzed microscopically by the anthropologist; it has been correctly orientated by the psychologist; it has been idealized and romanticized by religion and, in recent years, medical science itself has taken on the task of studying it from its particular point of view.

In traditional and pre-industrial western society, the predominant type of family was the "**extended or patriarchal family**" - various married brothers who lived together, with their respective spouses and children and with their parents - , integrated into various "nuclear families", or "**the polygamous family**". Economic-industrial development and urbanization disorganized these types of families, favouring the predominance of the "**nuclear family**" - father, mother and children.

In the final decades of the 20th Century, in the information society, a series of dramatic changes have been taking place which have led to the modification, in a substantial way, of the family model and its monopoly. The following factors have led to this latest metamorphosis of the family: birth control, access by women to the labour market, the improvement in education levels and the development of a culture of equality. Someone has synthesized this change in the fact that the family has ceased to be a "*productive unit*" and has turned into a "*consumer unit*", but the most significant thing is that there is no longer a single model of the family, that there is not "family" but "**families**".

The family has changed down through history and not just from the middle of the 20th Century. It has known how to adapt its organization to socio-cultural, economic and even political events. In spite of having taken on so many changes, the family is still with us, as a human community, although with different forms, but still vital for society and for human beings. And why is

it still so important if we no longer dare to say that the family “is the basic cell of society”?

We are in agreement with Ricardo Montoro¹ who, at the Second Congress on “*The Family in 21st Century Society*”, which took place in 2004, said that families, in their various forms, constitute a great social value by being the only social institution which decides simultaneously six questions concerning life in society:

- It regulates sexual conduct
- It decides reproduction
- It decides the most elementary and basic economic behaviour
- It takes on the education of its children
- It regulates and channels the affections and sentiments
- It decides the relations between generations.

No social institution except the family, in its multiple models, is capable of drawing us together and making us function in harmony in the same space. Seen in this way, continues Montoro, the family is an institution which economizes quite a lot of means, which does a lot and at the same time, with few resources. Perhaps that is why the family has always existed and will always exist. Because it is, plainly and simply, irreplaceable.

1° The changes announced.

In the west, if during the 19th Century a family founded on affection was encouraged, in the patriarchal system and the model of the woman as housewife, it was in the course of the entire 20th Century that the family began to be weakened little by little, up to the point of becoming a fragile institution.

Psychologists comment that “prophecies are fulfilled by the fact of being announced”. Already in 1945, B.F. Skinner², the creator of Operant Conditioning and Programmed Teaching, from his radical behaviourist approach to psychology had published his only novel “*Walden Two*”, an entire Utopia built to experiment with a system of life distinct from the normal. In his novel he states that “the most

¹ Montoro, Ricardo, *The family in its evolution towards the 21st Century*, a talk given at the Second Congress on “The Family in the Society of the 21st Century”, Madrid-Valencia and Seville, 2004.

² Skinner, B. F. *Walden Two, towards a scientifically constructed society*. Martínez Roca Barcelona, 1984.

significant fact of our time is the increasing weakening of the family". "Walden Two" abolishes the family, not just as an economic unit, but also up to a certain point as a social and psychological unit. Skinner's new community wants its people to be happy, to produce what they need without working too much and to be able to bring up and educate their children with greater efficiency.

Years later, in 1970, Alvin Toffler published his first work "Future Shock"³, specifying the reasons for the speed of social change. He devoted Chapter 11 to the "Family rotation" and made himself spokesman for different opinions about the family, qualifying some of them as pessimistic: "*The moment of its complete extinction is near.*" (F. Lundberg); "*The family is dead, except for the first few years of bringing up a child. This will be its sole function.*" (W. Wolf). Among the optimists he generalized their thinking with "*if it has existed for so long, it will continue to exist*" and "*its golden age is getting near: they will spend more time together (leisure time)*". He concluded with his own opinion that "*it is possible that the family will neither become extinct nor enter a new golden age, although the most probable is that it will break, will end up in smithereens, but that it will join up again in a new and fantastic way*".

Alvin Toffler claims that the post-industrial man will be obliged to experiment with new family forms and that, at least, the family will experience a big reduction in its components. He devotes the whole chapter to convincing us of the new family forms and practices which are approaching, over which everyone can evaluate as to what it has achieved and which Alvin makes concrete in new forms:

Marriage without children	A drastic reduction of the "nuclear family", consisting simply of a man and a woman. They consider themselves incapable of fulfilling their mission to bring up children ⁴ .
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³ Toffler, Alvin, *Future Shock*.

⁴ In this supposition we could speak of a 'couple' or a 'marriage', as does Alvin, but a never as family, since anthropologically speaking, the family begins with the arrival of a child. Toffler goes on to indicate that procreation will be limited to determined couples, as other will not wish for descendants. In this sense he quotes the anthropologist Margaret Mead: "*Paternity will be limited to a small number of families whose main function will be procreation*".

Professional Paternity	They will not be therapists but true family units, dedicated to the bringing up of children whose “bio-parents” will be others. Multi-generational groups, graduates in bringing up children and in child education. Raising children requires competence. ⁵
Delayed procreation	A compromise solution consisting of delaying procreation rather than of abolishing children.
Community families	The union of various adults and children in a single “family”, where they will bring up the children in common and will have economic-fiscal advantages. (The model of Walden Two).
Single-parent families	Made up of a single or divorced adult, man or woman, and one or more children, adopted or held in custody.
Geriatric Marriages	Formed by elderly persons who are looking for company and help in life in common.
Homosexual parents	Families based on homosexual “marriages”, where they will adopt children. ⁶
Polygamy	It is more frequent than we think. We can see a gradual relaxation of the prohibitions against it.
The Aggregate Family	Founded on the relationship between divorced couples who have contracted new marriages, and in which all the children enter to form part of “a big family”.

⁵ In the 80s the State of Israel created the KIBBUTZ, where the children were educated by the community itself and trained by it.

⁶ Homosexual or gay marriages have been recognised in Holland, Belgium, Spain, Canada and the State of Massachussets in the USA. The adoption of children is not contemplated in all cases. In answer to the polemics raised by this legislation, someone commented: “I know homosexual couples who, I am sure, will care for a child much better than some heterosexual couples. Although, above all, it is a question of rights and equality”. The Spanish Episcopal Conference commented with regard to the legislation of April 2005 that “it introduces a dangerous factor of dissolution of the institution of marriage and, with this, of the just social order”.

2° The changes lived

No useful cause is served by wishing to remain with a blindfold over our eyes, claiming that the only valid model is the model of the “nuclear family” in which most of us were born and grew up. I was born and brought up in this Catholic nuclear model: father, mother and six children, with good relations with grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. My brothers and sisters have set up this same model but with a gradual reduction of the family unit and more disconnected from relatives: one sister had five boys; two brothers had three boys, although they were looking for the famous “balance” of boy-girl; and my two youngest brothers had each one boy. Of my nephews and nieces, all had canonical marriages, except one; one of my nieces got divorced, when she was the mother of two daughters, and lives at present with another man; another nephew lives with another girl, who in her turn is the mother of a child she had with another man with whom she lived for a short period of time with marrying. This being a situation which gathers together several of the changes announced, it constitutes one of the family realities less varied with regard to the traditional model. Many others constitute an emerging mosaic of the models of family.

My family constituted a great experience of love. It was the first school in which I prepared myself for my personal and life development. In it I mumbled my first words, took my first steps, learned what was good and learned what was bad and it was my first faith community since my parents not only transmitted the faith to me but lived it with me and my brothers and sisters.

On Spanish television, a series about a family living in the year 1968 has drawn the biggest audience in recent years. The series “*Cuéntame cómo pasó*” faithfully reconstructs the family life of that period, using a middle-class family, made up of a married couple, four children and the maternal grandmother. The series has succeeded in getting the whole family in front of the television and for the adults, recognising themselves in the characters. The realism of the result gave rise to lots of anecdotes.

Looking at the series people understood how the family faced up to the political, social, religious and economic situations of the period and how they felt themselves called to change, including being pushed towards a new way of existing.

Javier Elzo⁷ claims that “families cannot absent themselves from the social reality they are immersed” and in his opinion “families are living in a period of historic change based on three dimensions: globalization, the technological revolution and the new role of women, giving rise to an evolution of values which gives first place to the search for wellbeing based on the paradigm of individualization.”

From the end of the 60s there has taken place a loss of values - and some say they have found new ones - an authority vacuum - and others say that this was authoritarianism - the new ways of living together nowadays in a family (couples without children, single-parent homes, ipso-facto unions, homosexual marriages...) and some say that these are simply announcing the end of this institution.

Francis Fukuyama⁸, at the end of the 20th Century, commented that over the previous 50 years, the economically advanced countries had been changing into an “information society” or a “post-industrial era” (Alvin Toffler called it a “third wave” transition) and that this change had been drastic, presuming a “Great Rupture” of the social values which had ruled industrial society of the middle of the 20th Century: a deterioration of social conditions, a growth in delinquency and social disorder, a decline in family relations, a decrease in fertility levels, a drop in marriages and births an increase in divorce, births outside marriage...

In his book Fukuyama considers that the main changes to the social norms which constitute the “Great Rupture” are those that refer to reproduction, the family and the relations between the sexes. He claims that the sexual revolution and the growth of feminism affected almost all persons and institutions in the western and developed world, that the “Great Rupture” has led to a prolonged decline even in the nuclear family. He shows how the family has lost importance in almost all modernizing societies, since almost all its functions have been snatched away from it,

⁷ Elzo Imaz, Javier, *La familia, entre la añoranza estéril y las incertidumbres del futuro*, A talk given at the Second Congress of “The Family in 21st Century Society”, 2004.

⁸ Fukuyama, Francis, *The Great Rupture, Human Nature and the rebuilding of the Social Order*.

and he is aware that almost everyone knows the changes which have taken place in western families, collected in statistics about fertility, marriage rates, divorce rates and the education of children outside marriage. In the end, he seems to show that he is in favour of the “nuclear family”, arguing from anthropology that the monogamy link and the nuclear family are not recent inventions which arose after the industrial revolution, as some have suggested, and that although it is not universal, it has predominated down through human history as the most important domestic institution.

Gilles Lipovetsky⁹ devotes some pages to the title “*The wished-for Family*” and the subtitle “*The à la carte Family*”. He begins by recognizing that in the west a change of 180 degrees has taken place in the evaluation of the family, since if at one time it was the object of all kinds of accusations (“*Family - I hate you*”) it is now in the hit-parade of values¹⁰, being the only institution for which a large majority of Europeans would be prepared to sacrifice everything. It is a surprise that young people are continuing to live longer and longer with their parents and that adolescents say they are communicating politely with their parents.

After this statement, he warns us that this “rehabilitation” of the family does not in any way mean a return to the traditional duties prescribed by bourgeois and religious morals. In his opinion the cult of the family has emptied itself of its old obligatory orders in favour of intimate fulfillment and the rights of the free individual. According to him, the traditional concepts of affiliation, fatherhood and motherhood have been disrupted, so that we are not seeing the resurgence of family order but rather its post-moral break-up. Far from being an end in itself, the family has been converted into an individualist prosthesis. Parents recognise some duties towards their children but not to the point of sacrificing their own personal existence. The post-moral family constructs

⁹ Lipovetsky, Gilles, *El crepúsculo de deber. La ética indolora de los nuevos democráticos*. Anagrama, Barcelona, 2002.

¹⁰ The family is the basic value for 98.9% of Spaniards, according to the “*European Survey of values 2000*”. 7 out of 10 French people claimed, at the end of the 20th Century, that the family was the only place where they felt well and at peace. (quoted by Lipovetsky).

and re-constructs itself freely and has metamorphosed into an emotional and flexible institution.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim¹¹ speak of a road, with various stages, leading to a “*post-family family*”. A stage of “*war around the family*” (Berger and Berger, 1983), at the end of the 70s, caused by the student and feminist movements. A new stage would be at the beginning of the 21st Century, where the debate becomes confused: many theoreticians were perceiving the existence of massive changes and perhaps the end of the traditional family, others were criticizing the obsessive talk about crisis at the very time that they were claiming that the future lay in the family, while a third group preferred to speak of a tendency towards pluralism. For the authors what was happening was a move away from a community of necessity to a type of elective relationship and consequently, the family was not splitting up but was acquiring a new historic form: the “*post-family family*”. For them the family is turning more and more into an elective relationship, an association of individual persons, each one of whom brings his or her own interests, experience and plans, and is subject to different controls, risks and conditionings - in short, a family where the links are becoming more fragile and more exposed to breaking.

After so many dilemmas, we find that the family is still here although it is changing, fulfilling its different functions, and that the traditional model of the family has not disappeared because other forms have arisen, given the fact that no developed country has gone below 50% of nuclear families. The family, although it has changed much in recent times, continues to have its logic and its explanation, goes on being counter-cultural and survives the frequent hurricanes which have tried to finish it off. On its behalf we are with Bohannon and with his following assertion: “*The family is the most adaptable of all human institutions: it evolves and moulds itself to each social demand. The family does not break up in a hurricane, as does the oak or the pine, but bends before the wind like the bamboo in oriental tales, in order to straighten up once again*”¹².

¹¹ Beck, Ulrich/Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth, *La individualización. El individuo institucionalizado y sus consecuencias sociales y políticas*, Paidós, Barcelona, 2003.

¹² Bohannon, Paul, *Todas las familias felices*, 1985.

3° Accompanied changes

It is true that the traditional model of the family has displayed in a large percentage of cases its internal problems, its imbalances and tensions, if not the arrogance of men towards women. It is a model which is not called upon to disappear but rather to be profoundly remodelled, something which we believe has been achieved with the new emerging models which have looked for adaptation, whether well-conceived or not, to the new social conditions, to the new roles of men and women within the family and to the growing prominence of the children who demand autonomy to live their own values.

The big changes which have taken place in the family have their logic and their explanation, although for some analysts the result would be that of some families being weaker and with more vulnerable family ties. What we have to be attentive to is that these changes take place in the search for greater liberty, in order to attain happiness within the possible time-span and achieve a greater degree of well-being.

All present-day models of family and those of the immediate future can be defined according to Javier Elzo as *"the search for agreement. Agreement within the couple, agreement between intra-family life and the social advancement of the man and the woman. They are families with tensions, families in search of themselves without having any models as points of reference, families breaking with what already exists, creators of new moulds, families with uncertainties but the ones which come through the test of adaptation to modernity successfully will allow new generations to insert themselves with greater security into the society of the future. They are adaptive families which run the risk of rupture through misunderstandings between parents and children as well as between the couple itself."*

And what is all this saying to us professionals in education and evangelization? What posture can we adopt faced with this new family situation? Can we claim that we are only interested in the children, our pupils, while knowing that to bring solutions to a school problem calls for an integral focus, which among other elements needs to consider the family?

The **first attitude** which we Lasallians have to show is that of knowing, understanding and evaluating the new family forms as well as

the aims they have planned. The family continues to be a social good of our culture and we must protect and preserve it above all.

With regard to this first attitude, we must applaud the initiative taken by the General Chapter of 1993, to hold five colloquia to prepare for the 43rd General Chapter of 2000. The first colloquium held in Rome in 1994 and thus coinciding with the International Year of the Family proclaimed by the United Nations, centred on “*The Families of Today and the Mission of the Institute*”¹³. The Institute, for its Mission, was becoming aware that the family, under multiple forms, continued to be essential in the evolution of individuals and societies and that it concerns us all profoundly. It wanted to know and consider the present-day situation of families and their responsibilities, without leaving it indifferent to anything.

The **second attitude** is a Christian attitude of discreet admiration before the continuing miracle of the birth of a love between two persons, which is always the image and sacrament of God. Our clean, crystalline eyes need to see God in families, since God is love and he is to be found where there is love. Although it is true that the evolution experienced by the family is on the fringe of religion, we need to be able to discover the humus of Catholicism which fed it. Feelings of loyalty, fidelity, fraternal love, the maternal instinct, that attitude of commitment etc. continue to bear the stamp of religion. If a large group of the families of our centres are remote from religion, are not linked to parishes and whose explicit connections with Christianity are few, we have to ask why, without judging them or condemning them. Let us ask ourselves also what are the characteristics of an authentic Christian family.

The leaders of the Catholic Church continue to offer their vision of the family and marriage, aware of the profound changes which have affected them at the social level, and without showing themselves indifferent or mere spectators. Above all they are aware of the loss in the area of family life, of religious differences and of the ethical values which derive from them. They are not looking to interfere but offering a service to humanity in defending what they

¹³ Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools No 245, 1999 pp. 7-26. MEL Booklet No 1, *In view of 2006: The International Lasallian Educational Mission Assembly* pp.30-33.

believe to be the true nature of the family institution and the path for the most complete fulfillment of the human person¹⁴.

The **third attitude** is that of “external support”, that of accompanying. Being close to the guidance counselors of the education centres, I discover that each day consulting and seeking aid for families is on the increase. Statistics tell us that 1 in 10 mothers/fathers see themselves as powerless and that 1 in 3 fathers and twice as many mothers feel themselves alone faced with the difficulties of family relations (Press note, 2002).

More than school guidance, which they are also looking for, their priority request is for family guidance.

María de Codés Martínez and Beatriz Alvarez, aware of the interest that themes on the family have raised in educational circles, teach the subject of Family Guidance in the degree course in Social Education and orientate the “know-how” of this course into different contexts. They offer us the following broad conceptualization of Educational Family Guidance Counseling: *“A systematic process of aid whose ultimate aim is to facilitate a positive family dynamic, the solution of problems and the taking of decisions, as well as empowering their own educational resources. It involves giving help, security and affection; confronting and solving problems; producing and consuming goods, creating services for attention to persons; also transmitting values and exercising influence in reference groups and groups to which they belong... it includes the study of the family as the context for socialization and learning of its members and as the area of educational intervention throughout the life cycle. That is to say, family guidance counseling constitutes an area of multi-discipline and multi-professional intervention”*. It is important that we study how we can implement Family Guidance Counseling¹⁵ in our Education

¹⁴ The vision of “Synod of the Bishops in 1980 on the Family” is important in this sense. So is that of John Paul II in his encyclical *“Familiaris consortio”* and in the successive *“World Family Meetings”* of which four have already taken place: in Rome 1994, Rio de Janeiro 1997, Rome 2000 and Manila 2003 and Valencia 2006 in the presence of Pope Benedict XVI on the theme: *“The Transmission of the Faith in the Family”*.

¹⁵ On common questions about the work of counseling with families and with the school, it is interesting to consult *Orientación educativa en la Familia y en la Escuela. Casos resueltos*, by García Mediavilla, Luis and Martínez González and María Codés. Dykinson, Madrid 2003.

Centres¹⁶, from the involvement of the “Associations of Mothers and Fathers” and from the professional development of the figure of the Social Educator, present in many Lasallian Centres.

If there are many professional people from the areas of psychology, social education, social assistance and law who are helping families with problems of every kind, surely as Christian centres, we can offer dedication, help and family pastoral counseling since the important thing is not the doctrine but the attitude and the personal meeting¹⁷. Our help could be mainly centred on the big problems encountered by families nowadays: crises, breaking-up¹⁸, violence against women¹⁹ and aggression and sexual abuse against children²⁰...

German legislation recently defined the family as “*a relationship in which there are children*”, making legitimate all models of the family except those which are centred exclusively on the couple and which say “*we’re fine the way we are, we don’t need a child*”. We have no doubt that children and their education represent an invaluable good. Could there exist in the family a greater good? The challenge for the future of the family will therefore be in reconciling the education of the children, the social insertion of the woman and the family co-responsibility of the father. For this, we, as educators, need to know how to accompany them and help them.

¹⁶ The 12th Chapter of the District of Madrid, approved in 2001 Proposition No. 20 which said: “*The Direction Team of each Education Centre, in collaboration with the Department of Guidance Counseling, will, over the next three years, organize and carry out in contextualized form, Family Guidance Counseling: meetings, interviews, school for parents, monographic courses, etc.*”

¹⁷ This is taken from the words of John Paul II to the parish priests of Rome, recommending that they devote the greater part of their pastoral activity to families. His talk was published in *Osservatore Romano*.

¹⁸ Psychiatrists and psychologists have diagnosed a childhood disorder directly related to separation conflict: Parental Alienation Syndrome (SAP), which occurs when one of the parents systematically discredits the other in front of the children. (El País, August 22nd 2005).

¹⁹ The UN has given evidence that one in three women is the victim of bad treatment. In Spain in 2004, 72 women died at the hands of their partner or ex-partner. In France it is said that 10% of couples are affected by violence.

²⁰ The statistics on the mistreatment of children are alarming. We must all insist on building a better world for children. The Institute has become aware of this necessity and has considered that an important part of its mission is commitment to and the application of the Rights of the Child (43rd General Chapter) and the drawing up of protocols in regard to cases of mistreatment.

The school faced with the demand for change

In September 2004 I participated in the “4th International Congress on the Management of Education Centres”, organized by the University of Deusto. One of the speakers was Peter M. Senge . In his talk he dared to dramatize some of the organizational features of the schools of his country and to question us as to how similar they were to the components of the schools of our countries. In our minds the homogenization of the model of the school in the western world appeared evident. Of course, Peter emphasized, the world we are heading towards is a very different world from the one in which this western school came into existence, a school of modernity or of the industrial era.

Then, on the affirmative basis that “every teacher has to be a prophet”, since he is educating children for a future which is different and a future of adults, he dared to predict: “The school such as we know it will no longer exist in 50 years’ time”. He ended by claiming that “perhaps of all the social institutions, the school will be the most difficult to change”.

It is certain that we live immersed in one of the most critical transitions in the history of humanity and which some have defined as “the change of the value system of western society” or “the change of mentality”²², but it is difficult to be in agreement with those who dare to claim that “if someone from the 19th Century came back to our world of the beginning of the 21st, the one thing he would recognize as belonging to his epoch would be the school”. Stoll and Fink²³ tell us that in the course of a journey in the Ukraine, their guide and interpreter pointed out an enormous factory and commented: “this factory would look good” and then he paused and laughed... “if this were 1965”. They translate this experience to the school and say: “Many of our schools would be

²² Harman, Willis, *El cambio de mentalidad. La promesa del siglo XXI*, Editorial Centro de estudios Ramón Areces, 2001.

²³ Stoll, L. and Fink D., *Para cambiar nuestras escuelas. Reunir la eficacia y la mejora*. Octaedro, 1999. p. 31.

good 'if this were 1965'. They have remained like this because society tends to predict the future while looking through the rear-view mirror". They do not hesitate to quote the historian Gustavson (1955) who states that "people are scared by drastic innovations, partly because they prefer what they already know and partly because the personal interests of most folk are united to those already existing. To this we have to add the resistance to change of what we could call institutional inertia, a predisposition towards keeping the machinery running in the way it was done in the past, unless strong pressure in favour of change materializes".

Spencer Johnson M.D.²⁴, in "Who has taken my cheese" tells us a beautiful tale which tries to advise us on the difficulty of overcoming our greatest primitive fears of change. With an argument which appears absolutely childish he manages to give shape to a brief story which tries to teach us how to adapt ourselves to the changes on which our existence depends. It is a story riddled with maxims and situations with which the author opens our eyes to struggle against the fate of a world in constant change, in which the sedentary lifestyle has to be removed, in which stability and security are not guaranteed and in which each morning has to be seen as the beginning of a day in search of reasonable success. It is also an intensive little course for teachers, since some have learned how to overcome all fear, while others remain occupied with feeding themselves and others with the same cheese as always.

Focusing on the school in the call for change, I do not claim to be developing a major production in these pages but I am simply taking notice of some aspects which I am interested in picking out in relation to the experience I am presenting. It would be impossible, in this space, to take the **thread** of the pedagogical history of the last 50 years and sum it up in regard to its answers to the challenges which time has been presenting to it. Multiple were the strategies developed in this period in order to pull the school out of its immobility, so that it would be capable of responding to its own challenges and would act like an institution which learns. In those times of change the school has been re-thought in multiple forms as successful exits from the situation in which a large number of western education centres found themselves.

²⁴ Johnson, Spencer, *Who has taken my cheese?*, Editorial Urano.

Those of us who continue to believe in the school and commit ourselves to an education facing up to inequalities²⁵ and the unbalanced expansion of technology and information, have to feel ourselves invited to respond from the school to the challenges which social changes are setting out for us at this period in time. We have to know how to give responses to the paradoxes which are confronting the school, without adopting conservative, nostalgic or immobile positions, but with a capacity for taking on the challenge and re-thinking the school, its objectives and its functions.

1° The school questioned and threatened

In the first years of the 70s, while at university, there fell into my hands two books published in Spain by Barral at the beginning of the decade, both translated from the original English editions. One was written by Ivan Illich and was entitled “*Deschooling society*”; the second was entitled “*School is dead: Alternatives in Education*” and was written by Everett Reimer. Both authors had carried on broad dialogues and had investigated together, in order to share in calling into question the value of making school obligatory for everyone.

Picking up these books now, I can read in the title-page of Reimer’s book, written on an old blackboard on which is hanging the traditional duster, the following text: *“Equally distant from the traditional idolatry and from critical approaches which are partial or based on determined aspects, Everett Reimer’s exposition draws us towards radical conclusions: our expensive and monopolistic systems of education consist of institutions whose final aim is the intellectual and emotional enslavement of the child and the systematic deformation of young people subject to a universal repressive discipline. The book evaluates the education systems not on the basis of present-day situations but on a consideration of their supposed aims, making us conscious of their inevitable failure. Our present-day conception of education ought to be*

²⁵ One of the Millennium Objectives with most consensus is achieving universal primary education by 2015, but the report from PNUD forecasts, that if we keep the present tendencies it will take at least another decade to achieve it. Today there are 110 million children without schooling in poor countries and by 2015 it will not be less than 47 million, 19 of those in sub-Saharan Africa. Schooling is going backwards in 43 countries and some of them will be forced to put back the target date to 2040. (El País, September 2005).

replaced by a plurality of radical alternatives aimed at achieving a truly free society."

In the introduction to Ivan Illich's book, on page 8, one can read his thoughts on schooling: *"Universal education by means of the school is not feasible. It would not be more feasible if we tried it by means of alternative institutions based on the style of present - day schools. Neither new attitudes on the part of the teachers towards their pupils, nor the proliferation of new equipment and new methods physical or mental (in the classroom or the dormitory) nor even by trying to extend the responsibility of the teacher to the point of embracing the entire lives of his pupils, will result in universal education. The present search for new educational 'funnels' ought to be turned into a search for the institutional opposite: educational networks which will increase the opportunities for each one to transform every moment of his life into a moment of learning, of sharing, of taking an interest."*

At that time in the second half of the 20th Century, the ideas of Reimer and Illich were being discussed all over the world. Their ideas were an open challenge to the certainties incorporated in the institutions of modern society. Both **questioned the supposed necessity for compulsory school** given its failure in the modernizing project of bringing education to the great masses. The result of the enormous educational effort carried out by almost all the states, had not been, according to them, a greater education for all nor a greater social equality, but quite the opposite. For them it was evident that the school, for Latin American countries, did not mean emerging from the Third World but rather a new source of injustices and of social control by the true beneficiaries of this development.

In **the 70s** therefore, **an important critical demonstration against the school** took place. My pedagogical library at the time was not composed exclusively of the works of Reimer and Illich. Paul Goodman with his book on *"Compulsory mis-education"*, in English published in 1976, joined the bitter criticisms against the school and the rather eccentric and dogmatic of that period in education. For Goodman, education, just like life, could only be improved by means of a fundamental re-structuring of society itself.

These storms against the school had important antecedents in the work of P.H. Coombs *"The world crisis in education"*, published

in 1968. Another work of particular influence was that organized by Edgar Faure, *“Learning to be”*, and his proposal of the Educating City. Especially important was the influence of the book by Lorenzo Milani, *“Carta a una Maestra” (Letter to a teacher)*, written by the pupils of the school in Barbiana, as a strong criticism of the traditional practice of the official schools. The text was aimed at parents and contains a clear invitation to organize themselves and complain about the education system... a system which marginalizes the majority and condemns the poorest to failure.

Another work of great influence and critical of the conventional school, was the experience of A.S. Neil in *“Summerhill”*. What made Summerhill different from traditional education was that it was supported by psychoanalysis, the theories of self-regulation, anti-authoritarianism and self-rule. Its essence was freedom. For Neil what was essential was confidence in the nature of the child, in its intrinsic goodness.

All in all, during the 60s and 70s a collection of critical theories against the school, which were inherited from Marxism and from philosophical criticism of culture and science, grew stronger. The existentialists, the feminists, the school of Frankfurt, psychoanalysis and structuralism were the schools of thought which caught the interest of youth from the 50s up to the start of the 80s in the 20th Century. This generation was fighting for a new world order and was opposed to the institutions which at that time constituted modernity. They called into question the family, patriarchy, the hospital, psychiatry, prison, the army and of course, the school. In synthesis it was an anti-state position which was demanding autonomy.

Many were the authors who stressed criticism of the selective and segregated school. A fair number of them were able to unite to the critical dimension, an alternative practice, which is more plausible. In many cases you need to be able to read into the criticisms whether they are more or less radical or furious. Since then criticism of the conventional and contemporary school is a permanent phenomenon, founded on psychological and didactic approaches.

The Lasallian Institute, which has as its end human and Christian education, recognizes that its founder, *“Saint John Baptist de La Salle renewed the school in order to make it accessible to the*

poor and to offer it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation"²⁶, but it has come to show itself as timid and reserved by not being very lavish with pedagogical writings and by continually silencing its voice before society in defence of the school and in favour of a better social esteem for teachers.

In that decade from 1960 to 70, yes, we were able to offer a beautiful educational text, within a very valuable and enlightening document which we know as the "Declaration"²⁷. This text **begins by asserting the educational value of the school**, the privileged element of education within the Institute, from the awareness that it is not sufficient to re-assert its value in order to answer the questions about its efficacy, function and meaning. It invites us to convince, by using a whole movement of school renewal in objectives, programs and methods, without fear of entering new paths which make possible a suitable response to the needs of the young people of the period. For this purpose, it makes clear what the said renewal involves: authenticity and bringing culture up to date; concern for the persons and the life of the educational community; in open spirit in relation to life; new requirements in the formation of teachers; revision of the works being undertaken. *"Its renewal demands a tireless effort to pay attention to persons, pupils, using all the resources of psychology and pedagogy in such a way that each one is treated in keeping with his individuality"*. It demands **"taking the trouble to get to know his family background, his temperament, aptitudes and special tastes, far from limiting oneself to considering him merely as a pupil, and respecting his performance"**. *"It implies an effort to take into account the demands of the world and of the Church"* and to *"train teachers in keeping with the needs of modern man"*.

For José María Martínez, "the sense of the Declaration is to find the identity and authenticity both of the Brothers and of Lay Lasallians and, as a result, of our schools. To be a Christian school is to be a school of the Christian education community"²⁸.

²⁶ *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Chapter 1, point 3.

²⁷ *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the world of today*, 39th General Chapter 1966-67, Chapter 8, pp. 65-84.

²⁸ Martínez Beltrán, J.M., *La Declaración, 30 años después*, CSV, Valladolid, p. 185.

2° Schools outside the school

Added to the criticism of the school there have arisen many alternatives, inspired and looked after by persons of deep convictions and generous attitudes. Among these we could cite the "open class" of the United States and Northern Europe, the "integrated day" of England, the "travelling school" of Denmark, the "Walford schools", the French "Modern School" and a great many new forms of educating outside the conventional school which have arisen all over the west and, of course, in Spain.

These experiences constitute a phenomenon which we need to know and analyze in so far as they contain critical references to the conventional school and if we really are interested in the school responding correctly to change and other social demands, overcoming rigidity, overcrowding and routine. We also have to notice that **these experiences are especially attractive to families**, and among these to families which are particularly worried about the education of their children.

Basically I will refer to two experiences: "education in the home" and the "new scenarios of learning".

"Home schooling" is very deeply entrenched in the United States, Australia, Canada and Japan but has practitioners in a fair number of European countries. Although these are all distinct experiences, there exists a relationship between them, including links of association, because they share the same philosophy and they want to obtain a recognition which the system denies them. Numerous are the families which practise this type of education (in the USA it is believed about a million) and who for different reasons have decided not to send their sons and daughters to conventional schools. Questions, shared learning, adaptation to each one's pace, the affectionate surroundings, the individualized follow-up, respect for spontaneity, belief in the capacity of the children, are the principles which support this form of learning, free from institutional courses. This is what one parent of children not attending school, says: *"If you don't go to school there are a lot of things to learn in life. But children who are in school are outside real life and they don't know what is happening during the day. In addition, school kills curiosity"*.

The “*Asociación para la Libre Educación*”²⁹ groups together families and individuals who believe that education in the home is a responsible and suitable option for their children and for this reason they are seeking to achieve, within the Spanish State, the same legal rights that education in the home enjoys in other countries of the European Union, in the United States and Canada, looking for the recognition of basic rights in the matter of liberty. They base their claims on the fact that we are living at a time of profound sociological change where the (social) environment has lost its role in transmitting values, the school has been overtaken by the need to offer a formative curriculum and, in its turn, alleviating the lack of formators in the “hidden curriculum” (education in values, discipline, morals...) These parents or tutors consider that “home schooling” is a valid alternative in a mature, plural and authentically democratic society.

For these families, this educational alternative pre-supposes taking on in an integral form the education of their children, both under the aspects of acquiring knowledge and skills and in the transmission of values and principles, without delegating any of these functions to other institutions. They themselves claim that the results of this educational method have been evaluated in the United States and in the United Kingdom and they believe they have achieved a level of knowledge which is very good when compared with conventional schooling. Not as easily measured are results in self-esteem, creativity, capacity for solving problems, happiness etc.

The reasons which lead these families to opt for “home schooling” are of different kinds, fundamentally religious or ideological, with conservative overtones, and because they believe that it is a way of offering a better education to their children.

This option reinforces the family at the same time that it isolates it. It shows a total rejection of the school system and brings an option which is individualistic and is exclusive to families with the means to use it.

A second experience is that of the “*New scenarios of learning*”. Here basically we meet those who call for “the end of the school”

²⁹ <http://www.educacionlibre.org/somcont.htm>

and its replacement by computer networks, disguising the fact that cyberspace freedom is not so free and less gratuitous, as well as undervaluing the teacher.

Technological advances, the hyper-development of data transmission, are severely threatening to replace the school institution, the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge³⁰ and the meaning of education itself. Novak recognizes this: "...*the place of the teacher as the exclusive source of knowledge is called into question by the explosion of means of communication and access to knowledge by means of non-school mechanisms. Inflexibility and permanence are no longer functional qualities but, on the contrary, difficulties encountered in school practice*"³¹. For a group of our contemporaries, the teacher and the school could easily be replaced by a computer and computer networks, given that they make access to knowledge on the part of the pupil more convenient, freer and richer, apart from enabling the state to make great savings.

Every time that José Luis Montero has given a course to teachers on the development of lateral intelligence, for the implementation of the CREA program, I have heard him say that "*the school has been the tomb of creativity*" and that, given that creativity is the essence of change, we have to develop it in the pupil and preserve it in adults. Certainly the school, because of its exacerbated red-tape, has been accused of ending the creativity of the child. The song-writer, Facundo Cabral says: "*I was intelligent until I went to school*" and the anthropologist, Margaret Mead states: "*Since my grandmother wanted me to get a good education she did not send me to school*". For people in situations like these there is the promise of the freedom of cyberspace and there appear before them new concepts of teaching, such as the "*virtual classroom*" - an environment of teaching-learning based on a system of communication by means of a computer and an attempt, by means of data-transmission applications, to implement the quality of the communication involved in on-the-spot training in distance learning.

³⁰ Already "The Declaration of 1967" was insisting that "the renewal of the school required teachers trained in harmony with the needs of modern man" and that they should not be reduced to being transmitters of knowledge.

³¹ Novak, J. *Aprendiendo a aprender*, E. Martínez Roca Editores, Barcelona, 1972, p. 32.

In the year 2003, according to the Spanish Internet Observatory, more than 300,000 Spaniards were following some course of study on the internet. Of those, 150,000 were university students, a figure which seems to grow by 15% each academic year, on confirming that one in every 10 university students was no longer attending classes. In reference to secondary education, the same study indicated that in Spain a total of 48,000 pupils were doing their secondary and school-leaving certificate studies on the Internet, although this was a case of students with various difficulties in attending school. According to Francesc Canals, President of OEI, *“The Internet and distance-teaching are for the first time threatening all of traditional teaching in Spain and this tendency could turn into a real fracture of the management system of learning if the traditional structures do not make an effort to change the methods of acquiring knowledge”*.

Although the computer and the Internet allow us make use of interactive contents, graphics and sound effects which stimulate the pupil, we have to keep thinking that they are simply tools, although essential, just as the textbook has been, and that the school has to know how to incorporate them.

Behind the interest which the computer and the internet have aroused at all levels, there exists the general conviction that the traditional institutions, of bricks and cement, are not suitable for responding to the challenge in the matter of initial and on-going formation in the information society. From the point of view of teaching resources, the school, in the opinion of some writers, has as much to do with learning for the future as the horse and cart has with modern transport: the school will be replaced by an education centre organized around the new technologies in information and communication.

For this there exists a global movement which is making an effort to develop new educational methods and scenarios, adjusted to the needs and possibilities of a public which cannot or does not want to go to the conventional centres of formation and rejects the conventional school. The education system cannot distance itself from the social and economical system which has already opted for telecommunications. On the contrary, it ought to support and rationalize this option.

The computer has become a necessity in all areas of society but the relationship between education centres and the new technologies of information and communication, after many years, books, congresses and courses cannot be described as a happy one. Its use as a teaching instrument in classrooms is still limited, given the fact that the training of teachers is too basic in the majority of cases.

“Information technologies are changing our work and our lives period the education system ought to adapt itself in order to be able to fulfill its essential mission: to prepare individuals for work and for life. In particular, the education system ought also to prepare for one of the tasks which will be essential in the years to come: the capacity to convert the ‘raw material’ information into the ‘product’ knowledge”³². It is really very necessary not to confuse “information” with “knowledge” or “education”. Educational objectives go way beyond information objectives and many of the uses of information networks in education do not go beyond being “informative”, that is to say, they do not agree on methods of teaching-learning.

The appearance of the new technologies of information and communication in the school not only have an effect on the basic units of space and time (all the pupils in the same place, at the same time, are carrying out the same learning activities), but they demand new objectives in education and the development of new skills or abilities in the student body. Managements, teachers, parents and the entire education community have to involve themselves in taking on this change. The information and communication technologies cannot simply be introduced as one more resource, as one more instrument, without provoking important changes in the form of teaching and in the boosting of a more flexible form of learning. The information and communication technologies demand curricula which are flexible and open to promoting the autonomy of the pupil.

Frequently our schools function like the makers of one-size-fits-all garments and apply the same educational offer to all the student body in an indiscriminate manner. A good number of the students

³² Denis, Jaime, *Tecnologías de la información en la educación*, Anaya, Madrid, 1998. p. 20.

fit into this with success, but another sector of the student body does not adjust itself to the standard measure, although we try to alleviate this by measures of attention to diversity and with special educational measures. The information and communication technologies can play a fundamental part in this aim of giving a more personalized attention to all the pupils, by becoming an instrument which makes a more inclusive school possible.

The school will have to respond progressively to diverse teaching-learning situations which embrace everything from conventional situations up to the teaching of pupils who are not physically present. A possible response to these situations is what is called "open learning" which is centred on the actions chosen by the individual, the heart of learning, but placing emphasis on the help which as "mediators" of learning we give to the pupil in the making of decisions. Open learning introduces a style characterized by promoting "learning to learn" in the pupils and "the application of the learning to the real world", the place where the information and communication technologies fit in.

A fair number of our education centres are already using it in an imaginative and powerful form the tools which are offered by the computer and the Internet, integrating them into their activities of teaching-learning and extracting part of their immense possibilities.

The wide availability of the new interactive information and communication technologies opens up a huge number of possibilities for the school in its relations and communications with families, by means of the web page, the internet, the intranet, education portals etc. The commitment of the teacher can no longer be limited to activities in the presence of the pupils. The school will need to provide times for the teacher to interact with the families and the pupils by means of the new technologies.

3° A school which learns and brings itself up to date

We all understand that the fundamental mission of the school is to contribute to social improvement by means of the formation of citizens, making it clear that the task entrusted to us is that of teaching. What does not appear quite as clearly either to the school or to the teachers is that in order to teach in a way appropriate to the times and the context, the school needs to learn in an institutional and organizational way. Each school therefore, has to

take shape as a unit of formation and innovation. From this arises the conviction that the improvement of the school will only be possible if the school shows a pre-disposition to learn.

The theory of *"the school which learns"* forming part of the theory of *"organizations which learn"* which has arisen in the world of business, establishes a suggestive line of thought for indicating new paths for the development and bringing up to date of education centres. In this same sense it is being expressed by the most famous thinkers on educational change: Michael Fullan, Karen Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, among many others. For all of them, this theory can mark a path which orientates the educational changes necessary in the school at the beginning of the 21st Century, presenting itself as a vanguard theory in educational change. If the school does not show itself insensitive to the reality of the globalization of the economy, to the knowledge society, to information technologies, to social pressures etc., we will be able to find in this theory a suitable direction for confronting the changes.

Understanding the school as an organization which learns is to provide a constant vision of *"a good school"* and to promote processes for succeeding in becoming one. It will come to be what John Baptist de La Salle inculcated into us as a constant pre-occupation: *"that the school may run well"*. To put it another way, it means finding ideas, processes and strategies for education starting out from the new social reality.

It was Peter M. Senge who popularized the term *"organizations which learn"*, in 1992.

Antonio Bolívar³³ is the one who helps us to understand its scope: *"Senge goes back to the Greek term 'metanoia' which another Greek convert (Paul of Tarsus) used to express Christian conversion: a change of mental focus, in so far as it will affect the nucleus of what it is, to a transformation of the 'human condition', as the French say. Later (Kofman and Senge, 1993) say that solving propositions for organizations which learn is 'a new way of thinking, feeling and being: a culture of system', which pre-supposes anew 'Galilean change', where the primacy of the parts is*

³³ Bolivar, Antonio, *Los centros educativos como organizaciones que aprenden. Promesa y realidades*, La Muralla, Madrid, 2000, pp. 222.

replaced by the primacy of the totality. In this context, the organizations are taken as vehicles for a general change". To understand, we need to put ourselves in front of a new school paradigm.

It might help us to be clearer in our minds, if we look at the idea of development or a new vision of the school, offered to us by Dalin and Rolff: *"We see the organization which learns as a vision of the schools, an aim which is never fully achieved, but a future for which it is worth making the effort. The proposition is to create schools which can respond to the needs of the young and of society in a world which is in continuous change. The only way in which schools can survive in the future is by managing to become organizations which learn creatively. The best way in which students will learn to live in the future is by the experience of life in an 'organization which learns'"³⁴.*

Making it clear that a new complementary function of the school is to learn, Gairín³⁵ and other writers are more worried because the education centres are not used to learning and something will have to be done to make this happen. They are convinced that it is not sufficient for each teacher to learn. It will be absolutely necessary that the whole school as an institution, also learns.

From this focal point, Miguel Angel Santos Guerra³⁶ sees it convenient to define the characteristics of the school as an institution, so as to get to know its idiosyncrasies, understand its necessity for learning and understand how to overcome the obstacles which prevent it learning. For the school institution, a collection of paradoxes is appearing, full of critical meaning, some of them loaded with optimism, others pessimistic, which are shaping it structurally in a peculiar way. The characteristics which Santos Guerra defines are the following: **The school is an institution...**

- *...of forced recruitment of the student body which claims to educate in freedom.*
- *...which is hierarchical but claims to educate in and for democracy.*

³⁴ Dalin, P. and Rolff, H-G, *Changing the school culture*. Cassell, London, 1993, p. 19.

³⁵ Gairin, Joaquín, *La organización escolar como contexto y texto para la actuación*, La Muralla, Madrid, 1996, pp. 377-399.

³⁶ Santos Guerra, M.A. *La escuela que aprende*, Morata, Madrid, 2001, pp. 35-49.

- *...which is heteronomous but claims to develop autonomy.*
- *...which claims to educate for democratic values and, at the same time, for life.*
- *...which is epistemologically hierarchical but claims to educate in creativity, the critical spirit and divergent thinking.*
- *...which is sexist but claims to educate for gender equality.*
- *...claiming equality but maintaining structures which promote elitism.*
- *...looks for diversity but trains for common cultural skills.*
- *...full of impositions that claims to educate for participation.*
- *...which is uncritical but claims to educate for democratic demands.*
- *...apparently neutral but which hides a deep ideological argument.*
- *...which is homogenizing but claims to pay attention to diversity.*
- *...weakly articulated but claiming to develop co-operation.*
- *...which imposes a curriculum in spite of basing its activity on the principles of the psychology of learning.*

We De La Salle Brothers, as Religious, know a lot about the meaning of 'cloister'. I do not know how much of this experience of community life we transmit to the school, since we are also educators, but what is certain is that one of the problems presented by every school today is the lack of openness, and there is also narrow-mindedness. These are attitudes which impede taking on change, continual improvement, knowledge of our surroundings and knowing how to rely on contributions from outside.

These attitudes show a way of turning a deaf ear to any opinion and to any invitation to change.

In this way we experience our blinkered attitude in front of society which is making demands or which is passing judgments on our educational practice by persisting with our own objectives, practices and claims. We are quite clear that our function is teaching and not at all clear that we also need to learn, in this case from public opinion. From this position our tendency towards routine is fully justified. If we ask ourselves why we show resistance to

change coming from our social surroundings, we easily answer: because we consider these external agents incompetent in dealing with educational themes. Do they give opinions on medicine, architecture, etc. if they are not in those professions?

This closed mindedness of the school faced with social contributions is not due exclusively to the perception we have of the said agents. We also refuse to take on this change on discovering that the objectives are confused, that we don't see ourselves compensated for taking on some innovation, because of the lack of funds so that not everything has to be based on volunteering, because of the lack of co-ordination and, above all, because of the immediate commitments which get us worked up, as well as showing ourselves available and capable of taking on something new. It is this situation which keeps us year after year in routine and paralysis.

In our internal world, critical opinions usually raise suspicion, distrust and condemnation. It can even happen that we describe as enemies of our profession those who make criticisms, founded or otherwise, of our educational work. The Principal is the first person who needs to call into question the practices of the school and not simply justify, defend and praise everything. The Principal needs to promote innovation and create a good climate for it.

As we have stated in another part of this booklet, in the majority of our centres, the parents have open channels for information and participation but they don't feel satisfied with these channels. We could interpret this as meaning that they do not wish to be involved in the education of their children, that they are delegating authority and are leaving their children fully in our hands. Thus, this does not suggest full confidence.

A fair number react in this way because they consider it is useless to make suggestions to teachers, while at the same time they are aware that we see ourselves as threatened and we position ourselves before them in a defensive and justifying attitude.

Having arrived at this point in our analysis, we should ask ourselves, with Fullan: how can the school learn all that it needs in order to go on each day educating in a more positive and effective way? What are the strategies and methods which need to be set in motion so that what we consider desirable can be made possible? Proposing a series of strategies, many of them already

operating, we will understand the methods the present-day school has for taking on the changes which are asked of it.

- **The selection of teachers:** In our western society teaching continues to be considered as a task which is unimportant, has no prestige, is badly paid and, in recent decades, feminized. As a university professor training teachers, I have been able to observe in recent years that already there are not so many candidates attending who have a vocation for teaching, that the best qualified persons are opting for other trades and jobs, and that the lecture rooms are being occupied by a high percentage of women, when not exclusively by them, because we males prefer other better-paid work.

At the present time, for some European analysts, the least qualified persons seem to be those who have decided to dedicate themselves to teaching, which contrasts enormously with the growing demands which society is putting forward to the schools. Nevertheless, there are still people with vocations and well-qualified, who are turning towards teaching.

In the District of Madrid, as in other Lasallian Districts, we have, for the last 15 years, been selecting teachers on the basis of vocational, professional and institutional criteria. We rely on a process and some facilitating instruments in making this selection.

- **The formation of teachers:** One teacher, knowing his difficulties in the classroom because of the demands of society, asked me if at present we were training new teachers adequately for the changes in school and in teaching methods. I replied that at present the initial formation of those who decide to dedicate themselves to teaching continues to be insufficient, inadequate and scarcely innovative, as well as trying to justify a poor and non-contextualized previous practice such as that he was observing in his centre.

At present it is not enough to provide formation in content, since a mastery of this does not carry with it an up-to-date methodology nor a co-operative attitude in the teaching team. The huge number of courses which have been given in recent years have barely improved the attitudes of teachers and have modified their practices very little. We continue to fail to cut out from the roots the deficient pedagogical formation of

teachers and we fail to facilitate for them critical reflection on their own educational ideas.

- **The organization of the teaching staff:** the organization has to do with the management of the education centres, with mechanisms of participation, with the degree of autonomy, with generosity and adaptation of media resources, with the rational use of spaces...

I read somewhere the following quotation from Popkewits: *“Teachers are usually charming persons. What happens is that they work in horrible places.”* If the organizing context is poor, it is difficult for us to be able to count on good professionals.

- **The Project of the Education Community:** Every project is the result of dialogue, reflection, commitment, permanent adaptation and improvement, but drawn up and made its own by the entire education community. It cannot be something imposed or drawn up by the Management Team. “Communities of learning” are quite a positive contribution in this sense and we have to learn from them.

For the Project to be real and alive, we have to modify the organizational and positional conditions and understand it as a medium and not as an end. The educational aims will always be found together in the school’s ‘mission statement’ itself from which the Project draws its ideas.

- **Experimentation:** If we are capable of converting educational practice into research, we will learn and will improve in an inevitable way. This conversion demands an attitude differing from the one now maintained, a methodological strategy and favourable organizing conditions. Those teachers are right who are worried when they are asked: When will you do it? It should not be a question of us always coming back to the personal time and generosity of the teachers, but that we should be able to create in the centre those conditions which make possible action-research.

What point is there in pupils and families evaluating our educational practice, if we do not fix times and possibilities for getting out of routine and experimenting?

- **External evaluation:** This should never be an imposed and hierarchical evaluation, but one arising from the initiative of

the centre. At present the vast majority of educational centres are involved in processes of quality, which carry with them periodical internal and external evaluations. From these arise the teams and plans for improvement, capable of continuing to modify the institution itself. Being able to count on external evaluators facilitates an interesting service for orienting the learning of the school.

- **Formation in the centre itself and shared reflection:** In recent years, all the centres of the District have been asked to draw up an ongoing Formation Plan starting out from their needs, which facilitates the method of internal formation based on realistic evaluation and being aware that it is the best way of transforming its practice.

Secondly, based on our awareness that each teacher is a being with his or her own thoughts and ways of reflecting, we have been defining times and themes which facilitate reflection on our own way of educating and on the model desired by the institution. We are trying to break with our isolation tendencies and professional individualism in order to enter fully into shared reflection and working in cooperation.

- **Educational innovations and follow-up:** Br. Nicolas Capelle has said on various occasions that *“innovation functions within the La Salle institution like a founding myth allowing each one to reencounter his deepest motivations and to rework the meaning of his educational commitment.”* Certainly there are many innovations which we are daring to implement in the classroom, starting out from a collegial involvement of the teaching staff. We are satisfied that the teachers are taking on as their own each of these innovations and are contributing to their successful implementation.

In recent years a large number of innovation programs have followed one after the other: PEI, Effective Reading, ARPA, ULISES, CREA, Aula Materia, Mediation in conflict situations, etc. All of these benefit from a detailed follow-up in the classroom so that educational practice may be truly modified. The learning which derives from the innovations and their follow-up is considerable.

Finally, with these words we claim that everyone understands that it is necessary to learn in order to know and to know in order to

teach and also to know whom we are teaching and where and how we are doing it.

Family-School relations in a context of change

In the west we have changed into a society of knowledge in a dramatic and rampant way and this change which consists of multiple and varied elements related among themselves, would be difficult for us to synthesize here. In this new society there are demanded and produced, above all, two goods or values: Liberty (of choice) and Equality (the collapse of all hierarchy). In this change we have succeeded in getting many advantages but not everything is positive. Among the latter, **we have transformed our relationships**, which have changed to being less permanent. But once we are installed in the new society, given that as human beings we are by nature social animals, our most basic impulses and instincts are leading us to create moral norms which link us and unite us in communities. I believe we are returning to showing our confidence in institutions, among them the family and the school³⁷.

In this way, families and the school continue to be two fundamental social institutions for the incorporation, development and consolidation of the person in society. Because they are two fundamental social institutions, though not the only ones, the very characteristics of our society is asking them for a **greater rapprochement**. They are asking for a **more active role for families in the education of their children**, avoiding the delegation of responsibilities to the school. Precisely, the most characteristic thing about the present time in education is 'delegation'³⁸, lead-

³⁷ In a study in "*Fundación Hogar del Empleado*" in 2002, the students unanimously consider that the school and the family are the two fundamental elements among those on which their education depends, giving to the first a more relevant role than the second. Friends have less influence and in a considerably lower percentage, the means of communication.

³⁸ In the year 2002, in a study on "*Children and Parents: communication and conflicts*", in answer to the question: "*What things would help you most in resolving the difficulties which you run into in the education of your children?*" 59.6% of parents replied "*that the teachers should educate better*", and following this at 49.2% came "*that the means of communication should be more educational*". This first demand seems to translate into a delegation of responsibilities: as if, feeling overwhelmed by the demands made on them, they are looking for the teachers to take their place.

ing to the professionals in education feeling overwhelmed by the excessive extension of their functions.

The countries of Europe have been becoming aware of the need to incorporate families and in the running of Education Centres, relying for support on the *“Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child”* and picking it up again in the successive laws which define its educational systems. As an example of this we have the call made by LOGSE in 1990: *“That the development of the education process in the centres be carried out in a **joint and participative** form between all the members of the education community”*.

In 1994, the UN, with a view to celebrating *The International Year of the Family* boosted the educational function of the family and put it in relation with school teaching:

*“The **family is the framework of spontaneous education, a base from which its members can receive a school education; this base also has to form a medium suitable for learning”**³⁹.*

Fullan in his analysis of the relations between parents and schools, concludes that the closer the parents are to the education of their children the greater the impact on the development of the child and his or her educational progress.

J.A. Marina, in an interview in a magazine in 2005, declared: *“Parents have the primary responsibility of education, while the school is subsidiary. But the latter will never be effective if it cannot count on the support of the parents. At present there is a very dangerous fracture between the family and the school. Parents do not collaborate with the school, do not give a respectful image of it, have no confidence in the teachers, do not participate in the school, and in case of doubt, take the part of the child”*.

For A. Marchesi⁴⁰ parents are more and more aware of the importance of education for the future of their children but what happens is that increasingly they have less time available for becoming involved or feel overwhelmed by the changes that are taking

³⁹ Quoted by P. Feroso, *Diccionario de Filosofía de la Educación Hoy*. Ed. Dykinson, Madrid, 1997, p.263.

⁴⁰ Marchesi A., *Controversias en la educación española*, Ed. Alianza, Madrid, 2000, pp.149-161.

place in education and this increases distancing, insecurity and ignorance. He believes that parents are interested in the education of their children in their own manner and never in the manner of the teachers.

Bernabé Tierno, in an interview expressed himself in these terms: *“A family is what the education of its members makes it. Frankly, few parents know how to educate a child who is violent, hyperactive, timid or with low self-esteem. They limit themselves to applying some educational norms which they have read about.... Teachers should not be so distrustful of parents participating more in the educational work of the centre. They have to learn, once and for all, that the school does not free them from being, as parents, the first educators. Parents and teachers ought to be aware that the protagonist is the one doing the educating. The teacher needs to be valued by society”.*

All the opinions and analyses highlight and have a bearing on the **necessity for a deep relationship between the school and the family**. In our knowledge society, in which an increment in cultural capital is produced, it is good that families have increased their educational demands for their children and do not simply - on finding themselves lacking time, confused and insecure - hand over the responsibility for this task exclusively to the school or, without thinking, hand over their children to other institutions. Both the family and the school find themselves subject to the pressures of the new social demands which go beyond the traditional functions of both institutions and as a solution, society itself brings along other institutions capable of assuming some of the tasks traditionally carried out by the family or the school.

The two institutions are called upon to inter-relate, understand each other and co-ordinate themselves. Both have to be capable of **drawing up**, between themselves, **a new common education plan**. Collaboration between the family and the school is absolutely necessary, even though it turns out to be extremely difficult to find a suitable meeting point for the real participation of families in the education system. Parents and teachers both need, at the present time, **to carry out an effective interaction in areas which are concrete and clearly defined**. Once we have defined the responsibilities of each institution we need to draw up real proposals for interaction.

1° The educational functions of the family

At the present time, within our Education Centres, we recognize a wide group of families who are preoccupied with and involved in the education of their children. They are co-protagonists and co-responsible with the school in education. It is noted that the complexity and difficulty of being parents goes well beyond the biological fact of having a child. They do not feel prepared but need help and advice but they always show their wish to be counted on and to be involved.

Also to be recognized is an absent group, a group of families who simply “park” their children in the classroom, who do not want to have anything to do with the changes in “parking” for various reasons and therefore it is impossible to contact them; and they are not exclusively families of ethnic minorities or immigrants. For this second situation we, unfortunately, do not need to feel that the words of Saint John Baptist de La Salle are excessive: *“You should look upon the children whom you are charged to teach as poor, abandoned orphans. In fact, though the majority of them do have a father here on earth, they are still as if they had none and are abandoned to themselves for the salvation of their souls...”* (Med.37.3). *“You then.... work according to the grace that has been given to you to instruct by teaching and to exhort by encouraging those who are entrusted to your care, guiding them with attention and vigilance, in order to fulfill towards them the principal duty of fathers and mothers towards their children”.* (Med. 193.2).

Since quite a number of other groups exist, a third group which we usually identify is that which seems to wish to educate its children in parallel with what is being done in the school, and this without doubt has negative repercussions on both the child and the education system itself. Some families, feeling themselves capable of transmitting the values of the parents, consider the family as an isolated “bubble”. Others, not knowing how to exercise authority, create in the children a thirst for egalitarianism, supporting them in taking on social counter-values, over-protecting them or over-stimulating them.

Then there are those for whom, in the words of Freinet: “what is important is not formation, the deep enrichment of the personality of their children, but rather sufficient instruction for taking on

exams, occupying positions envied by others, entering this or that university, etc.”⁴¹

Ch. Z. Cataldo considers four functions of the family, linked with the care and education of children⁴²:

- 1^a Care, support and protection of children.
- 2^a Socializes in relation to the values and roles adopted by the family.
- 3^a Supports and controls the development of the child as a pupil and offers him/her preparation for schooling.
- 4^a Supports his/her growth as an emotionally healthy person.

Traditionally, the principal function or task that has been taken on by the family has been that of integrating the children into society, carrying out the process of **primary socialization**. Nowadays, socialization is carried out in the framework of a global society and in this there are many institutions and diverse agents in action at the time of transmitting, inculcating, teaching elements of culture and guidelines for social behaviour. However, the families and the school continue to be the most important social contexts.

If in the past, families used to bring up and look after children from 0 - 6 years of age on their own, nowadays they do so with the help of kindergartens, grandparents and other persons connected with the family. Children are continually starting their schooling at an ever earlier age⁴³. It seems that early schooling for their children is the only way in which parents who both work outside the home can manage to attend to their work duties. This reality causes some families to wash their hands of the process of the child's socialization and leads others to wish to share it, mainly with the school, which has to manage to take on the request.

Families have also come to start exercising a first **influence on the intellectual and moral development** of the children, although it

⁴¹ Freinet, Célestin, *Por una escuela del Pueblo*, Ed.Laia, Barcelona, 1976, p.21.

⁴² Cataldo, Ch.Z., *Aprendiendo a ser padres. Conceptos y contenidos para el diseño de programas de formación de padres*. Ed. Visor, Madrid, 1991, pp. 49-50.

⁴³ According to the National Institute for evaluating and qualifying the Education System, in the school year 2001-2002 there was an increase in the schooling of children between 0 and 2 years and that 93% of 3 year olds were at school and 100% of 4 and 5 year olds. In France, Belgium and Italy there was a greater percentage for the ages from 0 to 3 years.

has been in an indirect and informal manner. The only credentials which certify one's capacity for being a parent are the fact of having a child, not whether one has had any training for forming them, but in spite of this, family education has normally been providing the child, with the first essential and basic elements which awaken his/her potential abilities as well as his/her first code of conduct. The family has the problem of knowing in which values they need to educate their children since they do not believe that those which served them are valid for the present.

Since society demands an active role from families in the education of their children, urging them more and more to take on psychological functions, families are delegating this to the school, and in many cases feel themselves overtaken and replaced by the means of communication. If the families and the school have the same objective: to bring the child to his greatest development, what they need is to unite their efforts to achieve the objective. For this, the parents need formation and the schools need changes, so that both can co-operate and participate. Families and the school need to know how to clarify and negotiate the scale of values to be educated⁴⁴. J.A. Marina, speaking before the School Council of the Community of Madrid during a "Workshop on the Family and the School", in June 2005 said that *"ethics is the best way of using the intelligence. To educate in values is to educate in feelings. When we educate in feelings we create a deep form of ethics"*.

Traditionally also, during the process of development and rearing, interpersonal relations are based on an **emotional commitment and involvement** between parents and children, which creates and re-creates the affective and emotional climate of the families. According to C. Aguilar⁴⁵, 'The family is an environment of happy or unhappy memories filled with an affective and emotional aura which induces people to repeat old behaviour guidelines which they have received from their own parents'.

⁴⁴ We should bear in mind the UNESCO book, "Guía de Virtudes para la familia", Arca Editorial, Barcelona, 1999. It is part of an initiative called "Proyecto Virtudes", whose mission is to provide multicultural programs and materials which help people to remember who they really are and to live in accord with their values.

⁴⁵ Aguilar, C., Educación familiar: una propuesta disciplinar y curricular, Ediciones Aljibe, Málaga, 2002, p. 60.

The main objective which parents need to set out is to help their children to be able to express their sentiments and emotions, to recognize them and to channel the most negative ones for the purpose of shaping their ego, because in this way they will be supportive of their child's self-concept, self-image, self-esteem and confidence in himself.

*"To deal with a child in such a way that he appreciates and feels at home with himself, is an invaluable legacy for his life, and helping him to value and respect himself is the best thing that a father and mother can give him"*⁴⁶. It is necessary for us to introduce into the school environment socio-affective and emotional formation but always in co-operation with the family environment and not just when we are planning it and drawing it up.

In our model of the Christian school, the family has been the place for the **transmission of the faith**. Believing is adopting a form of living and living is learnt during the first years and in the family, the first believing community. My Director of Novices, Br. Tarsicio de Jesús, used to repeat to us on various occasions that *"the educational and catechetical work of the first years is the most important"*. For some believing parents, the greatest joy of their lives is seeing their children living their faith and their greatest sorrow is seeing them living separated from God. One believing mother expressed herself in this way: *"I confess that I took very great care in passing on the faith to our children, trying very hard to find attractive books, preparing the catechesis with all the adults of the community, arranging liturgical celebrations and lots of other things. The family becomes stronger and forms a common block by sharing the same values and style of life"*⁴⁷.

Christian families and also those of other religions need to find the best way to pass on the faith to their children, and for them to succeed, our schools must come to their aid. We need to offer them information and updating on the contents of their faith, we need to provide them with resources and we need to help them to live and share a personalized and living faith.

⁴⁶ Marulanda, M., *Los padres ante el proceso de formación de sus hijos. II Congreso "La familia en la Sociedad del siglo XXI"*.

⁴⁷ Ayerra, Mari Patxi, *La familia, lugar de transmisión de la fe*, Sal Terrae, May 2003.

2° The school as facilitator of inter-action and participation

On various occasions I have seen quoted the African saying *“to educate the child you need the whole tribe”*. Perhaps in this Western “society of individuals” it is very difficult for citizens to be responsible for the education of children and young people, when we live isolated in our residences, shut away with our own affairs and never invited to become involved in the lives of others. But the school must break with its culture of isolation and open its doors and windows so that social life and institutions may enter. We do not need to claim to educate for life but rather from life.

Conscious of the complexity of present-day society, the education system needs to do some wide reflection on the objectives and agents of education. More and more we hear more voices demanding a global perspective on education, so that it is not understood exclusively as *“school education”*, but that it takes into account all the educational practices in which children and young people participate. It makes more sense, therefore, to think of and situate education from a community perspective, in such a way that what is known as *“the educational community”* is not wrongly reduced to the team of teachers and the participation of families and other social institutions.

Precisely the **“communities of learning”** constitute a project from which we need to learn. This project has begun to realize that the information society and the present multicultural framework create a series of challenges for the education system to face up to. They stimulate a transformation of schools in order to provide a response to these challenges and needs, a social and cultural transformation which is produced by means of the participation of families and other educational and social agents in the Education Centre. The *“communities of learning”* have been taking shape in the course of the last decade as an alternative in the manner of understanding education.

Let us defend, without doubting it, **the idea that families and teachers share the education** of the children who attend the school centres and that if they co-ordinate themselves, it will have a bearing on the better personal development of the children and the educators. For this it will be indispensable to create channels of relationship, participation and co-ordination as permanent sources of feed-back between the family and the school. In actu-

al fact this idea is present in practice itself and in educational legislation. In spite of this, the existing channels do not always function suitably and never cease to create unnecessary tensions and misunderstandings. Most of the time the channels only function in one direction, either from the school to the family or in the opposite direction, so that a mutual knowledge is never produced, nor a positive evaluation of the work of the “other”.

“Apart from the institutional relations which they can have among themselves, the entities school-family-association have among themselves a continual vital communication”⁴⁸. Generally, in our schools, there exist two **ways of being in relationship with families**:

INFORMAL	On “fiestas” and the contact which arises on schooldays in the “coming and going”, especially in lower Primary school.
FORMAL	At all levels this takes two forms: 1. “Classroom meetings”, which vary from one to three a year depending on the centres; 2. “Interviews” with the class teacher. Some centres are developing a 3. Form: the “educational portal”, interaction adapted to the new technological media.

“The participation of parents in the school centre has, in various countries, shown itself as an important element of approach and understanding between parents and teachers and as a way of enriching and facilitating the learning process of the children by causing these two bodies to unite their efforts in achieving a common aim: the integral formation of the pupil”⁴⁹. In almost all of our education centres the **participation of families** in the Centre takes three forms:

THE SCHOOL COUNCIL	The official organ of participation of families in the educational running of the Centres subsidized by the State.
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⁴⁸ García Hoz, Victor, quoted by Aguilar, Carmen, in *Educación Familiar*, p. 116.

⁴⁹ Martínez González, R.A. *Participación de los padres en el centro escolar: una forma de intervención comunitaria sobre las dificultades escolares*, Bordón, Nº 44, p. 172, 1992.

PARENTS ASSOCIATION	A form organized by the parents in order to intervene in school life.
DELEGATED PARENTS	Fathers or mothers elected to maintain communication and collaboration with the class teacher.

Parents have had their right to take part in decisions about the organization and running of the Centre recognized by law and they should take part in them. For this reason we must facilitate their participation and responsibility.

Within the area of infant education (0-6 years) relations are close. On the one hand, informal contacts are widespread and formal ones are more frequent than in Primary School (6-12 years), since, as the children become older the families attend fewer of the activities organized by the Centre and we teachers show ourselves less available. We can highlight the following forms of participation and collaboration, typical of the Infant school:

OPEN DOORS	Days on which parents have the possibility to participate in classroom activities.
WORKSHOPS	In which families participate and collaborate along with the teachers in the production of materials, toys, etc.
TELLING STORIES	Allows for the visit each day of the grandfather of a child to tell a story in class.
THE TRAVELLING BOOK	Goes from the house to the school. In it parents and teachers note down habitual incidents, interests, qualities, tastes and other particularities of the children.

The same thing does not happen in Secondary Education, especially at the compulsory level (12-16 years), since the autonomy of the children predominates. Someone, based on his experience, described the teaching team and the families as two football teams in competition, who while sharing the same game have different, if not incompatible, objectives. What makes it difficult at these ages for both sides to work in a coordinated and complementary manner, is bad communication, a series of prejudices, distrust, fears and suspicions. All this generates a relationship

which is not very sincere and is formal. During this educational stage it is important that families receive complete and frequent information and not just when there are unusual events or conflicts. Carrying out a follow-up of the student, as is done, and sharing it with the family will allow us to detect processes of deterioration from the outset.

We must make a special mention of the **“Parents’ schools”**⁵⁰, which were started in the 70s in a remarkable variety of forms. The majority, based on formal talks or chats, tried “to teach families how to educate their children”. They created spaces for formation and reflection on concrete themes which could facilitate a better involvement of the families. The age sections which were most successful were the very young and adolescents. The best methods were those which involved the guidance counselors’ department and the class teachers and created groups based on the age or educational level of the pupils.

Ignasi Vila⁵¹ is of the opinion that sufficient ways exist for establishing a fluid communication between the family and the school. Of course, he recognizes that the level of satisfaction both of the teachers and the families is not always good and complaints come from both institutions and the reasons have very different overtones. We need *“to look for and build a climate of confidence in order to arrive at a collaboration between teachers and parents. For the relationship to grow will be gratifying and positive for both, allowing for the building of an authentic education community”*⁵².

It is not right for us teachers to think and act as if the school is our “domain” or that we, professionals in education, are the ones with exclusive possession of “educational wisdom” and that families neither understand nor educate. Aware of the fact that it is in the

⁵⁰ In Spain the materials provided by the publication *“Padres y Maestros” (Parents and Teachers)* have been very valuable. A program of great success in the Canary Islands, Galicia, Extremadura and Andalucía has been *“Escuela de Madres y Padres de Radio ECCA”*, based on radio courses, printed material and tutorial activity.

⁵¹ Vila, Ignasi, *Familia, Escuela y Comunidad*, Ed. Horsori, Barcelona, 1998, p. 107.

⁵² Various writers, *Construir la comunicación entre la familia y la escuela como una relación de confianza*, in the collective work *“La participación de los padres y madres en la escuela”*, Ed. Graó, Barcelona, 2003, p. 124.

family that the personality of our pupils begins to take shape, we need to give a new meaning to family-school relations, one which promotes fluid, cordial and constructive relations.

Each school should get rid of excessive bureaucracy, look for resources for connecting with families and think about in which areas, beyond the strictly legal, we will look for or accept the collaboration of the parents. The possibilities are infinite and it is up to each centre to think of how it can adapt it to its concrete situation. A common objective unites us with the families - achieving a better education, a quality education, for their children and our pupils.

An experience: “Diptychs of the School-Family relationship”

The design, production and work with the diptychs was taken on by the Guidance Counselors of the Centres of the District of Madrid - psychologists, pedagogues and psycho-pedagogues; it is to them, therefore, that we owe our recognition and congratulations. At all times they were certainly able to count on the tutors of the different education levels of the centres and involve them in the experience. We are convinced that the vast majority of teachers are very well disposed, totally dedicated and wish to improve the channels of communication and relationship with the family.

The idea arose from the “7th Regional Meeting of the Guidance Counselors of ARLEP”, which took place in October 2002, on the subject of *“Relations with and attention to the Family”*. At this meeting, Professor Raquel Amaya and her team from the University of Oviedo, helped us to analyze the educational and social implications of the family; they made us aware of the need for promoting positive relations between families and the centres, showed us strategies and skills in communication and introduced us to methodological proposals for attention to parents and their formation.

We became aware that the majority of our centres showed themselves to have “open doors” every day of the school year, in no way isolated from the family and social context. Perhaps some were a bit self-centred, but with a capacity for building “draw-bridges” to inform and have relationships even if only on specific occasions. We recognized that the times were not easy for being a good educator, with setbacks, difficulties and obstacles on the part of the administration, the inspectorate and certain families but we also noticed in the centres, creativity and generosity in building bridges of relationships and spaces for co-operation between the centre and the families.

If there were many good things, nothing was perfect. We should not blame factors outside the centre and free ourselves from self-criticism. We wished to correct the possible mistakes in the guide-

lines and strategies being undertaken and build new ones. It was at this point that “a bulb lit up” and we thought of the *“Diptychs of the School-Family relationship”*. One more initiative, a new arch of encounter, which also arises from the school, but with its gaze fixed on the parents.

1. Characteristics of the Diptychs

We wanted them to be of an informative-formative nature, not very extensive, which would make reflection possible, offer concrete guidelines for action and use a language suitable for those at whom it was aimed. We wanted teachers and parents to be “reading the same thing” and “speaking about the same thing”. They were produced, delivered and evaluated during the school year 2004-2005. The experimental edition also covered the year 2005-2006, at the end of which, once it had been revised, the definitive edition would be published.

In the first step it is the guidance counselors and the class teachers, by educational levels, who work with them. Secondly they present them and work on them with the parents of their pupils. The handing over and presentation to the parents is always direct, never by means of the children. Some tutors, not being able to count on the presence of all the parents at the class meeting, decided to hand them over and have discussions on them in individual tutorial sessions.

If the formative factor of the diptychs does not promote a joint formation of parents and tutors, as would be desirable, it does allow them to share some experiences, develop a relationship and reinforce themselves in the joint formation of the child/pupil. At all times there is an attempt to avoid passive attitudes on the part of the parents in front of a formation which uses an incomprehensible psycho-pedagogical “jargon” and instead to promote an open and sincere dialogue.

They are thought out and produced by age-groups or educational levels and are offered to parents with children of that age. By calling the parents together by levels and working and holding dialogue with them on the essential themes of the personal development of their child at his particular age, we solve, to a large extent, the inconveniences of the “Parents’ schools”.

The frequency of the handing out of each diptych is once a term/semester, which we consider sufficient in so far as the organization, convocation, presentation and reflection on the theme are concerned. Up to now the parents of a group of pupils have been called together, in most Centres, once a year so that they can get to know the plan for the school year, the functioning of the Centre and their child's teachers. All the rest, on the initiative of the class teacher, the mother or father, is channeled through the individual interview with the class teacher or with the subject teachers on the learning process of the pupil and how he gets on with the others.

Above all, they are a service promoting the intellectual, affective and social development of the children and young people who come to our Centres.

Finally, they promote meetings between the class teacher and the parents, the exchange of information, dialogue and educational co-operation and complementarity based on coherence and consistency. We are sure that many parents feel grateful that they are trained and involved in this way in the education of their children. This being the case, the school will not exist alien to what is happening in an educational manner in the family. Together, family and school, by means of the diptychs, will be sharing the action of educating.

2. Themes and distribution by age groups

The Guidance Counselors managed to have dialogues on the themes of the diptychs with the groups of teachers of each Educational Stage: Pre-school, Primary, and Secondary (Compulsory Secondary, Baccalaureate or Specific Professional Formation). In a joint meeting we agreed on the themes by age group and we formed teams for carrying them out. The following was the result:

PRE-SCHOOL 3 to 6 years

3 years	<p>No 1. My first days in school;</p> <p>No 2. Psychological characteristics of the 3 year old child;</p> <p>No 3. Fears and nightmares. What do small children fear?</p> <p>No 4. Habits, norms and values.</p>
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4 years	No 1. Psychological characteristics of the 4 year old child; No 2. Child jealousies; No 3. Learning by playing.
5 years	No 1. Psychological characteristics of the 5 year old child; No 2. Psychomotricity: infant movement; No 3. Feelings and emotions.

PRIMARY EDUCATION 6 to 12 years

6 years	No 1. Autonomy and responsibility: "Placing limits"; No 2. Psychosomatic disorders; No 3. Self esteem.
7 years	No 1. The importance of games; No 2. Children's fears; No 3. Encouraging reading.
8 years	No 1. How to help children with their school tasks; No 2. Parents as models of conduct; No 3. Feelings and emotions.
9 years	No 1. Reinforcement, prizes and punishment; No 2. Educating in values, the value of education; No 3. Educating for leisure time; extra-curricular activities.
10 years	No 1. Personal organization; No 2. We take care of ourselves; No 3. Videogames: TV, Internet, DVDs, Gameboy... How difficult it is to choose!
11 years	No 1. Social skills. How to communicate better, be oneself and resolve conflicts; No 2. Aggressiveness and self-control; No 3. Moving on to Compulsory Secondary Education.

COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION 12 to 16 years

12 years	<p>No 1. How to help my child in his studies;</p> <p>No 2. The Internet: a help to our children?; Is it a problem for them?</p> <p>No 3. How to help them to be responsible.</p>
13 years	<p>No 1. An adolescent at home;</p> <p>No 2. Preventing alcohol consumption;</p> <p>No 3. A healthy balanced diet.</p>
14 years	<p>No 1. Our relationship with a child/an adolescent;</p> <p>No 2. I don't like my child's friends;</p> <p>No 3. Free time, for what? Leisure: a human adventure for one's own enrichment...</p>
15 years	<p>No 1. A distinct way of being intelligent: emotional intelligence;</p> <p>No 2. Making decisions. The adolescent facing his future profession;</p> <p>No 3. Volunteer service and adolescence.</p>

BACCALAUREATE 16 to 18 years

16 years	<p>No 1. The Baccalaureate pupil: a new stage, new challenges;</p> <p>No 2. Helping them to decide.</p>
17 years	<p>No 1. Leisure time;</p> <p>No 2. After college, what?</p>

MIDDLE GRADE PROFESSIONAL FORMATION -16 to 18 years-

16 years	<p>No 1. Let's get to know the Middle Grade;</p> <p>No 2. Professional Formation: a sure path towards employment.</p>
17 years	<p>No 1. Leisure time;</p> <p>No 2. After college, what?</p>

SUPERIOR GRADE PROFESSIONAL FORMATION

18 years or more	No 1. Let's get to know the Superior Grade; No 2. Professional Formation: a sure path towards employment. No 3. Help them to decide.
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3. Evaluation of the Diptychs

With a view to obtaining the opinion of the teachers and parents on how the diptychs were received, the degree of use made of them, the attainment of the aims planned and possible improvements to be introduced, the guidance counselors of the Centres evaluated them directly with them or gave them an evaluation questionnaire.

At this time, given that the diptychs have only been in operation during the school year 2004-2005, we have at our disposal only the evaluation of some Centres in the District, but sufficient for what we intend to make known at present.

In the group of Centres which have evaluated them, the majority of the diptychs were facilitated by giving them directly to the parents, making use of the class meetings at which the presence of the parents proved very satisfactory. Some diptychs were given out during the individual interview with the families and some others, in fewer Centres, by means of the pupil. Everyone agreed that the best way was in giving them out collectively to the families, although we are aware that it can be difficult to find times for doing this. In various Centres it is suggested that this should be done at the beginning of the school year and when giving out marks or grades in the 2nd and 3rd terms/semesters.

The task has not been easy for all the class teachers, since in spite of the fact that the guidance counselors have worked on the theme of the diptych with them in advance of its being handed out, a significant number of them admit that there are gaps in their formation on how to dialogue with parents on the theme proposed.

Nevertheless they are seen as interesting documents, of value and facilitating joint formation. The format and printing have been

assessed in a positive manner. The contents are considered suitable and up-to-date. Usually they are of sufficient length, but some turned out to be heavy and removed from concrete reality. These Centres are in favour of continuing the initiative and feel that the families benefit from a plan which covers all schooling, on the basis of three diptychs by age group. Nevertheless they will need to be worked on in greater depth by the teachers.

In the **evaluation carried out by the parents**, we note the following assessments:

- To the majority the diptychs seemed a very relevant idea, which brought them knowledge and facilitated their participation in the formation of their children. They turned out to be a useful guide, although they seemed to them - to some more than to others - difficult to put into practice. They felt that they were helpful to them in understanding their children and in being better educators.
- The format seemed to them simple and practical. The information which they contain is easily accessible and is understandable because the language used is straightforward. Some diptychs are somewhat technical. The different parts of the diptychs are interesting, but what stand out are the elements which help in going deeper into the theme. Apart from some concrete points, the majority did not propose changes or modifications. They encourage the Centres to continue with this initiative. It seems to them ideal that the education in the school and in the family should complement each other and overcome misunderstandings.
- They approve of them being given out during general meetings but would like to see dialogue and an interchange of ideas given more encouragement. Some parents in one Centre are not keen on having to go to the Centre to receive the diptychs. Some recognize that they have been a good means for being more in contact with the homeroom teacher and coming to agreement on the essential themes of education. Others believe that the homeroom teacher did not find them (the diptychs) helpful.
- The richest and most positive assessments were those from parents of children in Pre-school and Primary schools.

In the **evaluation carried out by the Class teachers**, we find the following assessments:

- They found the initiative relevant, given that it orientates the parents in important aspects of the life of their child. Some consider it a good opportunity for building a relationship with the families. Some class teachers would prefer if it were the guidance counselors themselves who gave them out and worked with the families. Others were satisfied with the dialogue carried out between the tutor and the families. They considered that, in general, the themes were well chosen and that the applicability depended on each family, context and theme.
- The majority gave the diptychs out during the term/semester meetings with the families but said there were situations which led them to give them out individually or by means of the children. They found that giving them out during meetings was more positive since it facilitated the exchange of opinions and mutual enrichment.
- For homeroom teachers in the Pre-school they constituted a way of promoting dialogue and discussing worries and pre-occupations regarding education. They facilitated the exchange of opinions. Those in Primary schools felt that giving them out personally to the families had brought them closer to them and they had been able to have a more open dialogue on matters which preoccupied both sides. Those in secondary schools believed that they had followed the guidelines but did not seem particularly enthusiastic, perhaps because they felt that the themes of their pupils should have been worked on by the guidance counselors.
- All see them as up-to-date, realistic and promoting dialogue between families and the school. They constitute an effort that is worth the trouble. They are adapted to reality. They are clear and direct. The presentation is very good.
- In Secondary schools it was seen as better to have the guidance counselors work on them. Those in Pre-schools and Primary schools were satisfied with the method followed. They suggest adding concrete cases on each theme. Some felt that they helped them to define their work as class teachers in relation to the families.

4. The development of the experience

In the course of the school year 2005-2006, the same diptychs will be given out at each educational level. The parents will receive other diptychs different from those of the previous year since their child will have changed his level or stage of education. In the course of the year, based on the evaluations of the tutors and the families, we will carry out a detailed revision and adjustment of each diptych, in order to end up with a definitive edition. This new printed edition will go into a different folder for each age group with detailed information on our Lasallian style of education, educational innovations and other aspects of the culture of our institution.

In addition to the printed edition, various Centres which have Intranet access or an education portal, will put the diptychs on it so that the parents can have access to them. Each diptych will allow for the development of a forum where the parents of the group can add their opinions, as can the teachers. This method will facilitate one more means of communication and inter-relationship between the parents themselves and between them and the class teacher.

We now present, as an example, some of the types of diptychs of the different educational stages:

INFANT EDUCATION 3 to 6 years

3 years	nº 1. My first days at school; nº 3. Fears and nightmares: What are children afraid of?
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PRIMARY EDUCATION 6 to 12 years

6 years	nº 3. Self-esteem.
8 years	nº 3. Feelings and emotions.

COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION 12 to 16 years

13 years	nº 1. An adolescent at home; nº 3. A healthy and balanced diet.
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BACCALAUREATE and MIDDLE GRADE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING 16 to 18 years

16 years	nº 2. Helping them decide.
17 years	nº 1. Leisure and spare time.

DIPTYCHS

1. FEARS AND NIGHTMARES

What are children afraid of?

These appear very frequently in the child from a very early age, when he/she is in a phase of development in which he can already distinguish his self and is aware of his situation in the world and his experiences are very intense. The influence of the environment will cause these nightmares to appear.

It is not easy to pick out the stimuli which can cause the child to have nightmares. They are usually children sensitive to the changes and events experienced during the day. Whenever something happened in their daily lives, these fears will appear at night in the form of monsters or animals which are under the bed or in the wardrobes. It is nothing more than the reflection of their fears when faced with situations which they cannot control. Once they adapt or solve the problem, the nightmares will disappear.

It is, nevertheless, advisable for us to learn to differentiate between the different processes through which our son or daughter passes in the course of the night and that evidently, depending on the typology, they will have one type of characteristic or consequence or another.

Nightmares

Nightmares are terrifying dreams which cause an important alteration in the child. It can happen that your son calls you screaming in the middle of the night because a wolf is chasing him and wants to eat him. When you reach him he will be able to tell you his dream or part of it. He will have experienced it as something real and will then feel genuinely relieved.

If these dreams are very frequent you should try to look for a possible relation with some external factor which is causing them. They are probably related to some event such as starting school, change of house, the arrival of a little brother or sister...

Avoiding excessive excitement in the last part of the evening usually helps in having a more peaceful and relaxing dream. It is also good to take supper at a regular time and have it well organized.

Night-time terrors

Unlike nightmares, nocturnal terrors are not remembered and cannot be linked with any concrete fear. They are episodes of great agitation in which the child can even end up running around the house terrified, without being aware of what he is doing. Although it has not been totally proven, it is believed to be related to an immature stage of dreams in which there is a certain difficulty in getting rid of the dream.

Suggestions for parents

- **Calming them down and giving them a feeling of safety**
Normally, the most the parents can do for a child that suffers from nightmares is to wake him up, calm him down, tell him that everything is fine and that nothing is happening.
- **Avoid excessive excitement**
All children need to have a calm and relaxed period before going to bed and for that reason it is best not to allow them to look at TV programs which are violent or terrifying, not to tell scary stories or allow them to indulge in physically violent activities.
- **Discuss problems, fears and events that might cause tension**
Use conversation and the dreams as information on whatever problem the child is experiencing. Talk to him during the day about his nightmares and try to alleviate his fears and worries.
- **Take measures with regard to repeated nightmares**
If the child has the same dream a number of times, you can be sure that he is feeling anxiety about something.
- **Develop a night-time strategy**
Knowing how to defend oneself against nightmares normally helps older children. One small girl used to “fortify” her bed to protect her from dragons and a young boy got security by leaving the light on during the night.

What was the lion afraid of? Why did he not want to go near the water? Discover in this story the fears of one of the most powerful animals.

The lion and the lake

On one occasion, a lion came to a lake with clear waters in order to quench his thirst and on coming closer to it he saw his face reflected in the waters and thought:

“Oh, this lake must belong to that lion. I will have to be very careful with him.”

In fear he moved away from the waters, but he was so thirsty that he returned after a while. The lion was there once again. What to do? His thirst was suffocating him and there was no other lake nearby.

He withdrew.

Some minutes later he came back to try again and, on seeing the lion, he opened his jaws in a menacing manner but when he saw that the other lion was doing the same, he felt terrified. He ran away but his thirst was very great. He tried again several times but he always fled away frightened.

But since his thirst got worse and worse, he finally decided to drink water from the lake, come what may. He did so and when he put his head in the water the lion had disappeared!

For further information

- <http://www.solohijos.com>
- <http://www.aulainfantil.com>
- <http://www.educaguia.com>
- <http://www.infantilweb.com>

2. AN ADOLESCENT IN THE HOME

“The adolescent is a masterwork, seen from the point of view of his temperament.”

Luis García Mediavilla

In the adolescent the turmoil happens inside: his mind, his emotions, his physical changes are a hotbed of problems, insecurity, doubts and contradictions. He does not know who he is nor what he wants. He is unstable in his intentions and reacts in a surprising way.

Of course, it is a lovely stage but at the same time it is difficult, both for them and for you, the parents.

Many parents, when adolescence arrives, find they are meeting a child who is no longer a child and they don't know how to act when faced with his non-conformity, disobedience, wanting to get his own way, hiding things, paying more attention to his friends, problems with clothes, going out at night,....

To begin, it is useful to start out from what your child is like and how he acts. All the behaviour mentioned above is frequent and normal, provided it is not exaggerated; for example: if he gets angry with you often because you won't let him do something, that is normal, but if his anger includes insults and aggression, that is not so normal.

The adolescent looks for security in his 'gang', although this is still not very stable.

Apparently he needs less affection from you (but he does need support and understanding) and is looking for his independence. On this path your child ought to accept parental authority, but you need to dialogue and negotiate more than before (it is no longer any use saying “because I said so”). You also need to let him know when his reasoning is sensible and when it is not.

At this time you fathers and mothers can be overwhelmed, so that you need a lot of mutual help. For this reason it is important that you come to an agreement on your style of educating (the norms and limits within the home).

Adolescents need wider and more flexible limits than before, but equally they need to be clear. Negotiating is not bad, always provided that they accept the agreements and do not try to ignore them. We should value their sense of responsibility and reward it. If they does not fulfil his commitments, they must learn to accept the consequences of this (but don't deprive their of everything, just a part so that the punishment will be worthwhile).

Loving an adolescent child should not be based just on kisses and hugs but on dialogue and appreciation for what the young person thinks and does.

Suggestions for parents

Basic ingredients for living with an adolescent

- 7 litres of PATIENCE
- 1 kg of UNDERSTANDING
- ¼ of DIALOGUE
- 1 bag of NEGOTIATION
- 1 bunch of CLEAR LIMITS
- 1 small glass of SUITABLE CONSEQUENCES

LOVE, MUCH LOVE... AND A PINCH OF SALT

Preparation

Take all the ingredients and let them soak for a considerable period of time; it is necessary that they mix well.

Once placed on the fire of life stir the stew continuously.

Don't be afraid of boiling and if there is danger of it boiling over, lower the heat slowly so that it won't overflow, add a little bag of negotiation and let it rest.

Cook it slowly over a long period of time; if the ingredients aren't good, don't give up; the result will be delicious.

Enjoy your meal!!!

The adolescent questions the values which were transmitted from the family during his infancy and which consolidated his identity, because they constitute the point of reference from which he sounds out the world in a search for what he should choose as convictions and styles of life.

Your adolescent child is like an astronaut who gets out of his spacecraft to float in space. In order to get into orbit it is necessary to travel for a time protected by the walls of the spacecraft and propelled by its engines. While he is floating in space, the spacecraft appears insignificant in comparison with the universe, the stars and the planets, up to the point of being seen as ugly and fragile. But without this little ship and without the cord which unites him to the ship, the astronaut would not have arrived here alive. The relationship of the adolescent with his parents is just like that. The same person who criticizes and questions, is the one who before admired what he still needs before gaining his autonomy.

For further information

- Tribulaciones de una madre sufridora. A.Vallejo-Nágera. Editorial Temas de Hoy.
- La edad del Pavo. A.Vallejo-Nágera. Editorial de Bolsillo.
- Understanding your child from 15-17. J. Bradley and H. Dubinsky.

3. LEISURE TIME

Increasingly leisure time occupies more time in our lives. Our developed societies are characterized, among other features, by the fact that we have more free time at our disposal.

Adolescence is the last stage in which parents can take an active part in helping their children to find their path in life: giving them advice, organizing family activities and making an effort to maintain smooth communication with them.

One of the facets of the life of our children where their friends play a very important role is in leisure time. For this reason it is advisable for parents to inculcate into their children a series of principles for establishing healthy relationships which are beneficial in helping them to mature:

- To be able to create with their friends their own environment for recreation, at reasonable times, in suitable places, without feeling they have to consume alcoholic drinks, with possibility for conversation...
- Not to stop being themselves and to hold on to their own personality, acting in accordance with their ideas and principles during their leisure time. To rebel against the dictatorship of the ways of behaving of the majority (*"everyone does it"*), group pressure.
- Being responsible for the consequences of going out: eating on time, contributing to family life, being in good humour, studying and doing homework, going to class punctually and not sleeping in class.
- Teaching them that it is possible to have a good time without drinking or taking drugs. You need to be prepared for the possibility that your child may try alcohol. When this happens you must show yourself to be calm and avoid sermons which annoy the young so much. Remind him that other ways of having a good time exist.

- Occupy his time with activities suitable to genuine leisure: outings, sports, trips, manual and artistic activities, hobbies such as music, theatre, photography, cinema, collecting....
- Avoid his replacing his good friends with partying and drinking companions. Remind him that friends for going out with are numerous but “true” friends are very few. He should learn to value those friends who are around him when he has problems or when he simply needs to talk.

There are also a series of instructions so that parents can ENCOURAGE family leisure time.

- Choose holiday locations taking into account the needs of the children and the real recreational possibilities of the place chosen.
- Do not waste the leisure opportunities which arise within the family dynamic.
- Encourage good leisure habits from the earliest age so that they will know how to relax, play, entertain themselves, amuse themselves, take part in a feast, by promoting these experiences in the family environment.
- Find time for personal leisure and for guiding the leisure of your children; let the children see that their parents have interesting habits and know how to enjoy themselves.
- Keep yourselves regularly informed on how your children employ their free time: where they are and with whom, what they are doing, at what time and in what state they return home. It is important that we know what our children are doing, without them feeling that they are being spied on or that we want to control their lives. If you want your son to have confidence in you it is paramount that he does not notice your presence in the place where he goes.
- Make sure that your children do not give themselves over completely to their free time: make sure that they get up and go to bed at a fixed time, that they are occupied, that they know how to have a good time without money or with little money.
- Be consistent and constant so as not to give in to pressure from your children to miss family timetables, receive more money....

- Make your children sensitive to the need to help with some altruistic activity (NGOs, associations...) and also give them the example of your participation in some such activity.

Suggestions for parents

Some activities for free time

We propose some activities as guidelines. You will need to adapt them to the characteristics of the members of your family.

- Sports activities.
- Activities involving nature (orienteering, camping...).
- Reading activities.
- Collecting activities with their multiple possibilities.
- Do-it-yourself and restoration activities.
- Volunteer work activities.

Guidelines about leisure time

- **Leisure time is the time for doing activities different from the normal ones.** Having leisure time does not mean doing nothing and not devoting ourselves to other activities which we like, which help us to have a good time and furthermore help to form us.
- **Find a balance between work time and leisure time.**
- **Parents have to be aware that they are role models and reference points for their children.** Through imitation it often happens that the hobbies of the children are similar to those of the parents.
- **We need to look for ways in which the whole family can enjoy themselves together.** One aim of leisure time is to promote a spirit of unity between the members of the family.
- **Involve the members of the family in preparing activities.** The level of satisfaction obtained from an activity is directly proportional to the degree of involvement which the person has had in the said activity.
- **The proposed activities need to be as varied and rotated as possible.**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- http://www.madrid.org/juventud/actividad_joven
- <http://www.sindrogas.es>
- <http://www.cnice.meck.es/recursos2/estudiantes/jovenes>
- <http://www.munimadrid.es> (In the publications section there is a very interesting youth information bulletin.)

Final questionnaire

For reflection and sharing:

1. In the first part, three attitudes which Lasallians should adopt with regard to families are pointed out. In your concrete situation: Which seems the most necessary? How can you unite the forces around you to provide better guarantees of success? Is there any other attitude which in your context could be especially significant?
2. In the second part the possibilities and the future of information and communication technologies in connection with the school are described. What reflections do you have in your concrete situation? Would it be possible for you to discern a new learning scenario adapted to your environment?
3. Do you think it is possible to improve family-school relations in your surroundings? Would it be worth trying for fuller co-operation in the short, medium or long term?

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