P A I D E I A

H o w d o w e t e a c h ?

Note: *This is a letter from the Paideia Collective that was published in the Debate Forum explaining how they teach at the school.*

It is not the teachers who teach; it is the students who learn.

In the first place, our concept of the curricular project is a 'constructivist' concept of learning. This is a part of integral education.

But we will try to answer the question that has been raised. We believe in the learning of instrumental subjects and not in learning in general, since a person must learn everything, and that accumulation of data builds it in a certain way.

First, we follow Piaget and his collaborators. This approach is fully consistent with that of the former authors who were considered "individualists" of the New School (such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Fröbel) as well as creators from our systems like Dewey and Montessori. The principles of the New School constitute the basis of our curricular project; this includes regarding the laws of development, supporting the spontaneity and initiatives of the child, incorporating knowledge from both action and experience, respecting the child's personality, favouring the goals of cooperation and solidarity, etc.

These principles respond to a need to educate for a participatory, supportive society that needs free and autonomous people, and this presupposes that students have confidence in themselves and are able to have their own ideas, initiatives, and critical and self-critical capacity. In other words, they are subjects of their own action and are not docile or passive people.

According to Piaget, knowledge is built by the "interaction between reasoning and sensory experience," which are inseparable. But he considers that "the most important pedagogical principle is to stimulate the child to use their initiative when acting on objects."

"A constructivist interpretation of school learning is incompatible with teaching that is understood as a mere transmission of knowledge and requires an equally constructivist interpretation of pedagogical intervention." (Coll.)

In other words, a constructivist learning discards the master classes, rote learning, passivity, and competitiveness. However, it does not carry out this learning as a sectorial element of the educational process but is integrated into it, following the same principles.

Our educational job is to adapt our competence as an adult to theirs and not to pass on a competence they do not yet have.

The physical and mental action of the child creates three kinds of knowledge:

- **Physical Knowledge:**
  This refers to knowing the properties of objects and the external reality. This kind of knowledge is built when the child experiments and explores their reality. This creates the foundation for spatial-temporal and logical-mathematical knowledge. The origin is external, since the properties that the child recognises are observable: weight, shape, target, etc. Therefore, the child puts simple abstraction into practice.

- **Logical-Mathematical Knowledge:**
  This kind of knowledge is usually present in all activities. It refers to all the relationships that are established between objects. The intervention of the adult can accelerate it, but following predictable sequences, this knowledge is less likely to be taught since it is through questions and suggestions that the thought processes are stimulated. The origin is internal and found within the student, since they create and introduce relationships between objects. In this case, what the children understand is not found outside; it is not observable but inside them and implies reflective thinking.

- **Social Knowledge:**
  This refers to the types of action, behaviour patterns, emotional manifestations, etc. This kind of knowledge is acquired through contact with other people. The best way of acquiring this kind of knowledge is through language, as both verbal and non-verbal expression. This happens through dramatisations, imitation, plastic expression, spontaneous interaction between physical activities and mental processes, etc.

According to Piaget, we can say that we assume the aim of our project to be: intellectual and socio-affective autonomy.

We specify this as such:

In relation to adults, the intention is to get the child to develop their autonomy through safe relationships in which the adult influence is reduced as much as possible, trying to help the child to be more and more autonomous in relation to adults.

In relation to their peers, we try to ensure that the child respects the feelings and rights of others, putting into practice a relationship of solidarity and mutual assistance, helping them to learn to solve their conflicts in a non-violent and reasoned way.

In relation to learning, we help children to become more and more confident in their abilities to solve problems; to say what they think; to establish relationships between things and to realise the similarities and differences between them; to take initiative and pose problems, ideas, and questions; and to maintain attention, express their needs and interests, awaken their curiosity, and develop criticism.

This means we encourage children to take initiative and have confidence in their ideas, to manifest the replication of social guidelines in the game, as well as being creative and cooperating while trying to find content that interests and excites them.

Regarding playtime, it must be said that this:

- Develops their intellectual capacity;
- Encourages investigation, discovery, and investigation;
- Helps acquire new experiences and teaches problem solving while allowing children to resolve emotional conflicts;
- Helps children to incorporate and assume the culture of the group to which they belong.

It is very important to accept the wrong responses of the child because, as we want to create people who engage in critical thinking, we must not encourage intellectual passivity.

If we want to help cultivate creative people and inventors, we must allow them to practice invention. We must let them formulate their own hypotheses even when we know they are wrong. We must let them prove it to themselves because, otherwise, we are subjecting them to criteria of authority and will prevent them from thinking. We can help them with our experience, but we must not substitute their truth for our own.

Children have the right to make mistakes because errors are necessary in their intellectual development. Errors are attempts at explanation and, without them, you do not know what not to do. Children must learn to overcome their mistakes. If we prevent them from making mistakes, we do not allow them to learn this.

Adults should prevent their students from creating intellectual dependencies.

The art of teaching begins with providing children with stimulating environments and engaging materials that generate creative ideas and attitudes.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, we must begin by attending to the interests of the children. That is why they chose their workshops for a certain time. They are then offered new ones so that they can learn about other fields and choose which individual activities they want to do. Therefore, we have many didactic materials prepared at different levels and interests for them to choose from.

When doing individual work, the adult expects the children to come to them when they have a doubt. When this happens, they give the students the data that will help them to find the solution but avoid giving them the correct answer. Doing so would prevent the students from having the opportunity to reach the proposed objective by themselves since it is through that process that learning happens. Of course, this also happens when something deeply interests you.

We must bear in mind, as we said at the beginning, that we do not teach but facilitate the process so that the children learn by themselves. Once learned, we must communicate it to the others so that their learning has a social and non-competitive utility.

Therefore, we work with internal stimuli and not with external stimuli. That is, we try to achieve the autonomy of intelligence that is stimulated from itself and satisfied from its own effort. On the other hand, we know that language builds thinking and develops intellectual capacity. Therefore, constantly speaking, dialoguing, debating, arguing, and so on are fundamental pillars of learning and mental development. Development that enables personal autonomy, socially and intellectually, while they are building a certain way of thinking that will be the foundation of a certain type of person: the type of person that this society needs to be better and freer.

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