

## **The Latin American School and The Challenge of Developing Fraternity**

José Weinstein

Until recently, discussing fraternity in education could be understood to refer to part of the continuing pedagogical debate taking place among various faiths and churches on how to promote this value among the faithful, together with other values behind their set of beliefs. More recently, however, this discussion has moved beyond this restricted sphere into a broader educational discussion on how to develop what is required for all future citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Far from being a particularist value, fraternity has become something universal.

Political science has underlined fraternity (or its female equivalent, sorority) as a 'forgotten principle' to be recovered in order to strengthen democracy and produce a new relationship between citizens and their society. An exclusive focus on the principles of 'liberty' and 'equality' following the French Revolution led to relative neglect of the understanding that those who make up society need to relate to one another in a positive, rewarding and mutually supportive way (Baggio, 2009). In Latin American countries, the failure to care about the welfare of others would be even more damaging because of socio-economic inequality, social violence and fragile hold of democracy. Education cannot remain indifferent to this development challenge. School systems, established to develop the many treasures we all carry within us, should ask themselves how they could go further to foster fraternal people who, following Jacques Attali's inspiring definition (1991), find pleasure in the welfare of all that has lived, lives or will live.

An initial, classic response comes in the form of school curricular reform. Recent research on Latin American countries' school curricula has shown the restrictions facing the teaching of concepts bound up with fraternity, such as social inclusion, cohesion or democratic citizenship (Cox, 2013). To compound this difficulty, the growing application of school accountability systems exclusively focused on measuring learning in language and mathematics has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, leaving little room for other humanist disciplines and topics. It therefore becomes imperative to renew curriculum content, both within each subject and across subjects, so that values and attitudes conducive to fraternity are encouraged. In order to pass effectively from a curriculum conceived to a curriculum transmitted in the classroom, teachers need to be familiar with and motivated by curriculum contents — not at all easy in Latin America (Bruns & Luque, 2014). Proper educational supporting resources need to be available and assessment tools need to consistently measure students' understanding and command of the content. Yet, more than this is required: we must renew the school experience itself around fraternity. Didactics has much to contribute to such an agenda, particularly since, as shown by the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2009), beyond a constructivist rhetoric, most teachers still maintain a traditional, memory-based and frontal approach to teaching. Pedagogical



innovation is needed which gives students new opportunities to develop interest, comprehension and positive attitudes towards the well-being of others. This should begin in the classroom itself, engaging students in collaborative activities that foster collective problem-solving and team-work. By creating educational activities aimed at students with learning difficulties and other disadvantages such as physical disabilities, the classroom may become the arena in which to develop a genuine interest and supportive approach among students by collectively improving the quality of school life. Educational support experienced among peers, for example, can foster fraternal practices of benefit not only to the student receiving the peer support but to the student giving it.

But this could be taken further. Approaches such as service learning take students beyond the school walls to engage in solving a particular community issue. This increases their awareness of and interest in other residents of their home town and all their social, economic, ecological and health issues and problems. The earlier those fraternal experiences begin, both within and outside school, the greater the chances to exert a lasting influence on the students.

Finally, I want to sound a precautionary note against pedagogical voluntarism. Beyond the essential efforts of schools and teachers to educate children and young people in fraternity, there are powerful determinants to be addressed by educational policies, in tandem with other economic and social policies. The major obstacle here is the segregation and inequality present in Latin American societies, which lead to wide social gulfs and to social groups who never engage with each other or interrelate during their lifetimes. The overall scenario is a familiar one: schools are internally highly homogeneous, but between them are highly heterogeneous. A more inclusive school with greater social mix would begin to erode the linear reproduction of social segmentation and to progress in creating a more cohesive society, so that new generations grow up with a reduced social gap (García-Huidobro, 2013). If this structural dimension is not modified, any education in fraternity will be mainly restricted to the group to which people belong, without impact on other social groups or on society as a whole. Using the social capital terminology of Robert Putman (2007), students will have been provided with learning as 'bonding capital', generating intra-group confidence, but not learning as 'bridging capital', which is necessary to acquire the skills and the willingness to relate to other groups and communities. Hence, the educational challenge is to develop fraternal individuals growing as persons and citizens, whilst also contributing to solving Latin America's ongoing challenge of building more cohesive societies.

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