



## Methodology of Informal Education

By Fr. George Boran, CSSp.

When we hear the word EDUCATION we frequently think almost exclusively of FORMAL EDUCATION: schools, colleges, teachers and classrooms. Although the Spiritan Congregation is involved in schools (Formal Education), it is mainly involved in INFORMAL EDUCATION, in parishes, communities, courses, and different types of social and religious movements. While we spend a lot of time and resources in preparing teachers and administrators for the Formal Education system we often spend almost no time or resources in preparing leaders and pastoral agents to be affective in the informal system of education. Very often there is a failure to take advantage of seminary formation and pastoral work to train a new generation of Spiritans in the skills of informal education. It is the same as preparing surgeons by giving them the necessary theory on the functioning of the human body without training them to develop practical skills for surgery.

See page 5



### Welcome

*In this issue, the two articles from Brazil invite us to think outside the box if at all we consider informal education as an integral part of our mission. They are written by Spiritans who have refused to be imprisoned in the classical classroom mindset. The stories of their journey with the people are an eloquent reminder that there isn't generic education. We are continually challenged to imagine the best and well adapted educational approaches which respond to the needs of the people wherever we are missioned. This could be a daunting task as we might be obliged to reinvent our models and approaches to education. We can profitably take a leaf from the shared experiences in the following pages especially in the area of informal education.*

*The article from Uganda recounts a marvellous story with the conviction that our presence in mission has and must make a difference to those in need. This is exemplified by the Spiritan commitment to a school for deaf children at Mulago in the outskirts of Kampala. Happy reading.*

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### Methodology of Informal Education

P. 1 & 5

### A Theology of the Sewers

P. 2

### Spiritan Mission in Uganda and Special Needs Education

P. 3

# A Theology of the Sewers



DESCOBRIR QUE O CÉU



É VER OS OUTROS FELIZES  
Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida

Bishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida with children in a favela, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Walking the streets of the city of São Paulo, Brazil's largest city, as I often do, is a provocative experience. Emotions and reflections abound, generated by the state of calamity one encounters in this subterranean world, where the men, woman and children who live there, have become the invisible face of exclusion.

There is a sense, though, in which the streets and those who inhabit them, are not just a challenge to politics, economics and religious faith. They are also, an interrogation to any passer-by, regarding the very basic elements of our common humanity.

This truth came home to me yet again, one day recently, as I headed for the train station in the Belenzinho region of the city. On my way there, I saw a man approaching me along the footpath, carrying two plastic bags containing all his possessions, one in each hand. I had almost reached the station when I stopped in my tracks.

'Why had I not acknowledged his existence' I asked myself? I could have greeted him, said good morning, asked how are you.....!!! Instead, I had only reaffirmed what he was surely tired of knowing. That he was a nobody.

With that, I descended the steps of the metro station, and returning to the area I had seen him in, found him sitting on concrete slab, with his two sacks of belongings, on each side of him.

What followed was a conversation of a few minutes in which I asked him how he was and if he had eaten that day. Nothing of significance in the grand scheme of things. Nothing extraordinary. Then, before taking my leave, I searched for a few coins to give him but could only find a

R\$50 note in one pocket and a bar of chocolate in the other. Now what, I asked myself? After some hesitation, I extended both hands.

'I'll take the bar of chocolate if I may', he said. The important thing you have already given me'.

As I walked away, many things ran through my mind. Gratitude for this learning experience. For the unknown teacher on the street. For the lesson in life, in values, in dignity. A lesson too, that reaffirmed one of Paulo Freire's abiding insights; 'Every person who teaches is also a learner. And every learner is also a teacher'.

The street had reaffirmed what Freire had stressed in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. But, not all of the oppressed on the streets or elsewhere, would be able to do so. Many, if not most, would probably internalise the oppressor. Or simply have no critical consciousness at all. Fortunately for our work in the favelas of the Eastern Region of São Paulo, which was getting under way in the late 1970s, Paulo Freire had returned from his 16 years exile, imposed by the military government, in 1964. It was due to his influence, that we began to understand the importance of a structural approach to liberation, based on respect for those who were excluded from the very basics of human necessity, both as individuals and as a community. It was essential in other words, to join justice with charity. Bread with poetry.

For me personally, the first major attempt at this started with a sewage project in one of the city's major favelas. It wasn't a question of just turning up and decreeing that these rat infested sewers were a disaster. A whole pedagogy of how to approach the community itself was fundamental. And it had to begin with learning what were the main stories/themes constantly repeated among the people.

The story/theme that came out on top was of a religious nature. Arch critics might have said that it was just pure alienation. But we were not there to dismiss what the people were saying. Rather to get to know it by participating in their frequent prayer meetings, together with the rats and the stench from the sewers.

This practice went on for a year before it dawned on the people that the Padre was actually a learner too. And that though he 'went to school', he didn't know everything. And that though they 'did not go to school', they knew a lot of things the Padre didn't know. Once that intuition broke through, we were on level ground. And the sewers were perceived as a disaster that had to be fixed.

Five years later, after much digging with spades, hoes and even hands, many struggles, disappointments and moments of grace, during which people grew in confidence, maturity and stature, some of them becoming 'mythical' heroes, the job was completed. It was the beginning of a long story for that particular favela and for the favela movement in general. A story which echoes down to this day. One that began with prayer and continues, despite all obstacles, with praise.

**Fr. Patrick Clarke, CSSp.**



# Spiritan Mission in Uganda and Special Needs Education

All Spiritan Missionaries are called to work for the uplifting and liberation of the marginalized, the oppressed and those whose needs are the greatest in society (Spiritan Rule of Life No. 4). The marginalized of today include people with disabilities e.g. the blind, the lame, the deaf, etc. Many times these people are not fully considered especially when it comes to education. This is particularly because they seem to be fewer compared to the general population. Secondly, there is a feeling that their education is reasonably more expensive than the ordinary / mainstream education. Their form of education is termed as Special Needs Education. It is based on teachers with special training and uses assistive devices (equipments) like Braille machines for the blind, wheelchairs to ease the movements of those with physical impairments, etc. The Spiritan Missionaries in Uganda considered an involvement in the education of people with disabilities and established a primary school for deaf children.



*Administration bloc*

St. Francis de Sales Mulago School for the Deaf humbly began in 1998. The confreres at Mulago parish, particularly Fr. Harry Tullemans CSSp, were touched by a needy deaf girl, Angel. They tried to enroll her at Uganda School for the Deaf Ntinda but they were told it was full. So they took a bold step of starting to educate her under a tree in the parish compound. As they tried to formalize this, their initiative attracted another deaf child, Dorothy and others followed thereafter. The teaching sessions were first conducted under a tree in the parish compound. The first professional teachers of the deaf used to come on a part-time basis from Uganda School of the deaf Ntinda. The school slowly but steadily grew into the current one we see today. During this process, the confreres strived to look for assistance from individuals and NGOs to set up the first school premises at the parish. This school now has a nursery section and a full

primary section. Part of the school is still housed in the parish compound i.e school offices and some classes. Another section of the school (dormitories and other classes) is located across the road. The current enrolment of pupils stands at 186 with 23 teachers.

Special Needs Education is the type of education designed to benefit children with disabilities in accordance with their individual education needs. In addition to ordinary or mainstream type of teaching and learning, this one employs teachers with special training, assistive methods and assistive tools during the teaching process. 'Assistive' refers to a teacher or fellow learner going an extra step to help the person with disabilities to ensure that he or she grasps what is being taught. For instance, a teacher may have to go to that particular learner and repeat once or twice what he has taught the entire class. This may also involve using a modified language, for instance, sign language for the deaf or tactile skills for the blind. The assistive tools may include a stylus or Braille machine for the blind.

This education aims at a full development of those learners' capabilities, their independence and social participation. This education can be provided in an ordinary school (mainstream) or in a special school like a school for the deaf, school for the blind, for the physically impaired and others. The major determinant of whether a particular learner should be in a mainstream school or special school is the severity of the disability.

## **Deafness**

The deaf are generally people who cannot hear or talk. At the same time there are specific categories among them depending on whether the person cannot completely hear or not. Those who have some ability of hearing are categorized as Hard of Hearing (HH). There are other minor types of hearing loss like deafness/primary communication visual, deafness/primary communication auditory, hearing loss/primary communication visual, and hearing loss/primary communication auditory. Some countries have reported that 1 to 3 of every 1000 newborns are deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH). It is estimated that 90% of children who are D/HH are offsprings of parents who are neither deaf nor have knowledge of sign language. The number of D/HH children keeps increasing as they grow up.

Sign language is the medium of instruction during the teaching and learning process. This language is mainly based on hand signals and facial expressions. The writing is also different; they shorten their sentences to rhyme with the signs they make. When other people read their writings they may feel that the sentence construction is faulty, yet it is the way the deaf express themselves in writing.

Mulago school for the deaf follows the general education curriculum of primary schools. They do the same Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) like the rest of the schools. For the year 2018, they have 24 candidates. Ever since the school began, at least three pupils have managed to follow the Ugandan education system up to university. They have already graduated.



## Issues with the school for the deaf

Learners are from all parts of the country. This is surprising since there are such schools in other parts of the country. Is it that those schools are not satisfying or are already full as Ntinda was in 1998? This then is a pointer that this section of the population (the deaf) is growing in numbers and requires real attention.

Needy families. Some pupils are from needy families since disability is not by choice. The school requirements plus travel expenses are a real challenge to them. Some of these even remain around school during holidays! It should be noted that the school is boarding to all pupils. As the school is located in a city suburb it was dangerous to have the pupils commute. Many times motorists hoot at them without recognizing that they do not hear.

Scarcity of post-primary institutions. There are few secondary schools yet even the academic requirements for secondary are many times not attained. The vocational training institutes can serve better to equip them with skills of self-reliance but they are also very few. This has resulted in some pupils returning home after primary school without any self-reliance skill! One school of the deaf established a vocational skills section that runs simultaneously with the primary school programme. This is ideal for all such schools if liberation of these pupils is to be achieved.

Age of admission of pupils. Although the school is at the primary level, the age at which some pupils are brought is way beyond the usual one. This is mainly due to lack of knowledge of these special schools by parents, financial constraints for parents who live a long distance away from such schools, parents living in denial of having a child with disabilities (some first hide them from the public – they feel ashamed of them), etc. Thus it is common to find a ten-year old child in the nursery section. This affects the pupil so that by the end of primary school, s/he does not wish to continue with any more studies.

Some parents have a negative attitude towards their children who have disabilities. They do not have much hope in them and do not feel the parental obligation of taking care of them as compared to the other children. Children from parents with a negative attitude are sometimes brought to school by another family member or neighbour. In such a situation, the educational concern and coordination between school and home is challenging and sometimes children are often left at school during holidays with little or no supplies at all!



*Recreation time*

## Conclusion

Venturing into the unknown is often avoided. Education of the deaf was a strange venture for the confreres at the time. At the same time, we recognize that it was justifiable according to our Spiritan Rule of Life. The number of pupils who came and warranted a fully fledged school is a clear sign that it was a needed project. We must salute those confreres for their boldness and admit that they challenge us to look at the marginalized around us, to swing into action and work to alleviate suffering according to how the good Lord can enable us.

**Fr. Bonaventure Ssebzanzi, CSSp.**

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# Methodology of Informal Education

Continued from P. 1

## Relationship between Theory and Praxis

Very often there is very little awareness of the difference in methodology in both approaches. The methodologies are, in fact, very different. Both methodologies have to do with the different relationship between Theory and Praxis. The starting point of each approach is different. The Formal Educational approach tends to use a DEDUCATIVE METHODOLOGY that starts with theory, giving a class or a talk in which priority is given to communicating theory and principles. This works well in a school situation. The Non-educational approach does the opposite. Its starting point is praxis (reality that is reflected upon). It uses an INDUCTIVE METHODOLOGY by starting with reality, with people's lives and the concrete situation where people find themselves. The SEE JUDGE ACT method is an example of a well-known inductive method in the Church, defined by Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* as the best method for formation in social justice principles. This method has been consecrated by the Latin American Church and is used for the structure of most of its documents. With the informal methodology evangelization is no longer a question of learning the teachings of the Church but of making religion and doctrine relevant to people's lives by starting with the challenges faced in daily life. When one starts with theory, with doctrine, it is more difficult to link faith and life.

The inductive methodology of informal education requires a continuous interaction between Theory and Praxis (reality and practice that are reflected on). Reality corrects the theory and the theory illuminates the reality. The basis of fundamentalism is the belief that the theory is ready-made and only needs to be applied to reality. In this top-down approach, reality has to be made to fit into the theory and not vice-versa. That is why it is very difficult to dialogue with a fundamentalist. The person's mind has already been made up and there is no interest in evolving and adapting to new situations. In its extreme form this dogmatic approach was the basis of Nazism that led to the Second World War and the right-wing populism of Donald Trump and other political leaders that are gaining influence around the globe. The inductive methodology helps people to think for themselves rather than just repeat what they have been taught. The well-known Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire, refers what he calls "banking education" that just lodges information in people's minds and "education for liberation" that develops critical awareness. The former can easily lead to brainwashing by unscrupulous political leaders while the latter, no.

## Jesus and Inductive Methodology

The story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus depicts how Jesus uses this inductive methodology. He doesn't start by

giving a lecture. Rather he walks with the disciples and then uses as his starting point their situation of discouragement and disillusionment. He asks: "What were you talking about on the way?" He then explains the biblical theory that illuminates the situation in which the disciples find themselves. And only at the end of the journey do his listeners recognize him, in the breaking of bread. They immediately become involved in action, rushing out to tell others. Jesus uses a similar approach with the Samaritan woman at the well. Thus, we find Jesus using the sequence of the See Judge method before it was codified by Cardijn<sup>1</sup>, the founder of the famous group *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (JOC).

Non-formal education is not limited to parishes, pastoral ministries, NGOs and others. Non-formal education can also co-exist with formal education and be effective in certain situations within the school environment. In fact, if some non-formal approach is not also used, graduation from a Catholic school frequently means also graduation from the Catholic Church. As a young person growing up in Ireland in the fifties and sixties I was catechized by the Formal Educational approach within the Catholic school system. It worked then, however it doesn't work now. The cultural context has changed from a rural, premodern culture to a modern and a postmodern culture that demands that the Church be relevant. A transparency and an accountability are demanded today that was not present previously. As a result, the family which was previously successful in transmitting the faith to their children now encounters enormous difficulties in the new cultural setting where the top-down approach encounters strong resistance.

A number of years ago I returned to Ireland to organize a course for young people. At a meeting beforehand with some youth leaders to prepare the promotion material I was told the Brazilian version would have to be changed as to mention Jesus Christ and the Bible would turn young people off. Over the years, daily religious classes in schools had transmitted theoretical knowledge about Christianity. But faith is not an intellectual affair. The two pillars of faith have been missing: a personal encounter with Jesus Christ as the human face of God and the Gospel as a program for life. Independent of what was put on the promotion leaflet it was obvious that only a non-formal educational approach, that started with where young people were at, would work. The negative consequences of a purely formal educational approach that gives priority to theory have been dramatic, in the Irish context. A similar phenomenon is taking place in other countries around the world. Within a short period of time there has been a collapse of vocations to the religious life and the indifference and departure of large numbers of young people from the Church are seen as threatening its future. The Church has no longer a captive audience. The Lutheran theologian, Bonhoeffer, who died in a concentration camp due to his opposition to Hitler, put the challenge in this

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<sup>1</sup> Father Joseph Cardijn, later Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, founded JOC in Belgium after WW I.



way: "They must preach the Gospel to a world that has become adult".

### **The option for the poor**

The Spiritan charism gives priority to the sectors of the population that are being excluded from social integration. Libermann was quick to notice that one couldn't work for the emancipation of the poor without working for their education. Education (both formal and non-formal) can be one of the most powerful weapons against poverty, ignorance and disease, by helping people to improve their lives. Here the non-formal educational approach can be very powerful as it starts with the reality of peoples' lives, especially those on the margins, making it easier to integrate faith and life, the Gospel and social problems. This will be the litmus test of the capacity of the Church to continue to be relevant in the future.

### **Micro & Macro Levels**

The non-formal educational approach makes it easier to link two levels: The Micro Level of personal relationships and the Macro Level of how the society is organized through social, economic and political structures that have a powerful influence on the structural causes of poverty. To remain only on the micro level is to deny our duty to form people as citizens to build a better society. The educational process needs to consider two things: 1. the need to change people (personal sin) and 2. an unjust world - political and economic structures in society (social or structural sin). This involves creating awareness of the deeper structural causes of social ills so that people cannot be naively manipulated by unscrupulous leaders. The way we organize society can often favour the interests of powerful elite groups. The process of political and social awareness should consider the educational principle of a growth that is gradual, involves group work, and passes through stages.

### **Training pastoral agents for using the Non-Formal Educational methodology**

A document on education, prepared for the Spiritan General Chapter in 2012, points out: "We need to form educators, by preparing specialized people, such as teachers and managers, for our formal educational works. But we also need to prepare competent people in the use of the non-formal approach that starts with people's lives and uses the inductive methodology" .

Many pastoral agents (priests, sisters, lay people) have been trained to work in a formal educational setting, in an institutional way or within institutions and have difficulty in adapting to the new rules of non-formal education. They are competent when it comes to giving a talk, a class or organizing from the top down. But in pastoral ministry they have difficulty in understanding that the rules, the attitudes and the methods now have to be different. In a school situation, the teacher can count on the continuous presence of his / her pupils. Even with a bad teacher, pupils continue to attend because they need to get a diploma at the end of the course. Without a diploma they will be unable to get a job in the future. And without a job they won't be able to eat, marry, buy a house or raise a family.

On the other hand, in a non-formal or community situation, the motivation is different. The pastoral agent does not have a captive audience but must motivate people to come to the first meeting, return to the next one, and so on. When meetings become tiring, repetitive and mediocre young people tend to opt out. Pastoral ministry does not have guaranteed clients and so, to be successful, a high capacity of adaptation and creativity is needed. The pastoral agent is faced with two options: 1. adapt and respond to people's needs and so motivate continuity, or 2. face failure.

Thus, on the other hand, non-formal education requires us to start with where people are at and with their needs: to love / be loved; to be recognized; to have material security and an identity; to be part of a community or group that gives them the skills for living together with their peers, to have emotional fulfillment in inter-personal relationships; to be kind and receive kindness; to give meaning to one's own life, to transcend oneself, to be in contact with the sacred, to be part of a human group and to count on it for dealing with life's challenges. This starting point, if well accompanied, should lead to a deep spiritual experience of a faith which is based on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ as the human face of God and the adoption of his proposal for a life project based on the Gospel values. If we fail to start with young people's interests, we can't hold their interest. To evangelize young people today it is not enough to sit them down and talk at them. We need to enchant them, win their confidence and then start together on a faith journey— a journey which replaces a superficial and hollow life style with a deeper meaning to life. If we fail to present the Gospel as a response to these needs, it becomes irrelevant. A young girl once put the challenge to me in the blunt language young people often use: "The Catholic Church has only the Mass, and that is boring".

### **A concrete experience of how the Non formal educational method can be used**

After my ordination as a Spiritan missionary I very soon decided to specialize in ministry to young people as the major challenge to the Church today. Youth is the phase in human life when major decisions are taken which determine future options and so it is important that the Church is present to help in the discernment process. Also, the future of all institutions depends on their capacity to involve the next generation. As a result, I have written extensively on the methodology of youth work. One of the traditional principles in church documents is that youth are the best apostles of other young people. And that is true. However, it is not enough to announce the principle for it to work. Young people need two things to be effective apostles of other youth: 1. to be trained and 2. to have at their disposal an adaptable program based on the non-formal methodology which they can reproduce and so reach a large number of young people. So, there is a need to train trainers.

In our National Youth Training Center (CCJ) we have developed such a program called "Youth Leadership Training Programs" (CDL). This programmed works on three levels: 1st level. For beginners, 2nd level for committed leaders and



3rd level that uses the arts: music, song, dance, voice training, body expression and theatre to motivate and involve young people. The success of these programs can be gauged by the fact that they have been translated into different languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English, German and the Ukrainian language. In Brazil courses are organized on local and national levels. Participants are mainly young people who participate in youth groups in parishes and schools on a local level. Teams are organized on diocesan or congregational levels and are reproducing the programs in over 110 dioceses in Brazil. The courses have also been reproduced in Europe, United States, and Africa. Because of the methodology used it can be easily adapted to different cultures. Success is a result, in part of a special method, called the Simulation Method, to train the facilitators. Talks and dynamics have to be presented by the members of the coordination team in training sessions and are then evaluated by their peers and more experienced facilitators. Young people who don't take the preparation seriously are unable to bluff and cover up and so are strongly motivated in the subsequent training session not to repeat the negative experience.

Educational material used are manuals, model talks prepared in PowerPoint, a training DVD. New material is being integrated into the original manual and can be accessed online. The aim is to train young people who then go back into their own parishes, communities, movements and organizations to help them renew their organizations and go out to reach more people. To guarantee continuity we only work with candidates who are linked to existing organizations.<sup>2</sup>



Fr. George Boran with Youth Leadership Team

**The informal methodology used is very attractive and successful:**

- A number of short talks are complemented by different exercises. Learning situations are created

where participants learn by doing. They discover their talents, their capacity to communicate with others, to think for themselves. This method contrasts with much of the methodology in the Church today of talking at people and treating them as passive audiences.

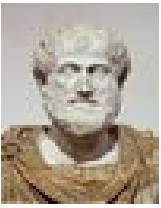
- There is great variety, learning is done in a fun-way and there is a strong spirit of friendship and bonding.
- The program or course can be easily reproduced to impact on more people and so involve an ever-increasing number of people. This is one of the most important aspects of the courses.
- Some of those who have done the programs and are then invited back to give the courses to others and so undergo a second and more profound level of formation. Here we use an important educational principle: "the best way of learning something is by being obliged to teach it to others."
- The programs can also be easily adapted to very different target groups: beginners, leaders, students in schools, in parishes and in dioceses, social movements.
- The program has also been used successfully with adults to help with parish renewal.

**To conclude:** There are many signs of hope. In an increasing number of countries, the informal educational approach for evangelising young people and adults is becoming a priority. Perhaps the Church of the future will have less people. This is not a problem. According to Biblical spirituality, when we are weak we become strong. But it is important that it be the yeast in the dough, that evangelizes, not from a position of clerical power, but rather through the witness and the dynamism of its members, especially young people. The informal educational approach is an important tool for this task.

<sup>2</sup> Further information and material can be accessed on the CCJ site: <http://ccj.org.br/> and online help in training teams to give courses are available by contacting the following emails: [jorgeboran@gmail.com](mailto:jorgeboran@gmail.com) or [centralcdl@ccj.org.br](mailto:centralcdl@ccj.org.br).



# Think about it



"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

- Aristotle



FELIZ NAVIDAD MERRY CHRISTMAS JOYEUX NOËL BUON NATALE



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