A LITTLE-KNOWN LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE:
THE USE OF A TRAINING SUPERVISOR OF NEW TEACHERS
(2/2)

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5. Times when the training supervisor intervenes

5.1 In the first year

We have seen that when the new teacher leaves the novitiate, he gets practical experience as a teacher for a year under the supervision of an experienced teacher before he is put in complete charge of a class. It is the training supervisor who personally chooses the class and the experienced teacher (17).

5.2 After the first year

This first year of teaching enables the new teacher to take charge of a class without, however, being able to do so in a completely independent manner. It is at this point that the training supervisor takes over from the experienced teacher and becomes directly and exclusively responsible for him (18). He does not, however, interfere directly in the teacher’s work. As his Rule says: “He will let the teacher have full authority with regard to whatever concerns his work” (19).

6. The work of the training supervisor

The training supervisor tries above all to create a feeling of mutual trust between himself and his student teacher, by persuading him that he comes to observe him not in order to find fault but to help him. It is only when he succeeds in creating this trust that his frequent visits to the school will not embarrass the teacher nor inhibit his activity, and he will behave as naturally and spontaneously when he is there as when he is alone. It is only under such circumstances that he will be able to offer useful advice (20).

This being the case, the training supervisor can be of great help to the teacher by observing carefully all he does in class, without missing a single detail (21). Subsequently, back at the house, in private and in a friendly fashion, he tells him what he noticed wrong about his way of teaching and suggests improvements.

Another way in which the training supervisor can be of great help to the teacher calls for a certain amount of delicacy and tact. He can suggest to him that a good way of finding the means to overcome his difficulties and any repugnance he may feel for his work is to speak to him about them in all simplicity and honesty (22).

And yet, in Lasallian educational thinking, the training supervisor has another responsibility which is, if possible, even more important: it is to draw up a psychological profile of each new teacher in order to discover his special talents. He has, therefore, to know his teachers thoroughly. To a great extent the contribution of the school to society depends on this thorough knowledge, because it is on the basis of their gifts and talents that teachers are assigned specific classes (23).

For the teacher this constitutes a second selection process. The first sought to exclude from teaching persons lacking the minimum requirements and ability to do the work properly. The second, based on an assessment of the teacher’s talents, approach and results, obtained by observing him in the classroom, involves a value judgment which makes it possible to assign teachers to classes to which they are most suited.

It is important to understand that the reason for this approach is the good of society. In the final analysis, this means the good of the pupils and is the reason for which teachers exist. The Conduct is adamant on this point. It says that care should be taken “that a teacher is not put into any school or left there unless he is capable of doing his work properly there and teaching the children entrusted to him in a satisfactory manner” (24).

7. The profile of the training supervisor of new teachers

Manuscript 43 does not hesitate to say that of all the positions in the Institute, that of the training supervisor is the most difficult to fill properly. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is one which requires the greatest concentration of talents in one person.
First of all, he has to be very perspicacious and have a sound judgment if he is to get to know the temperament, character, intelligence, inclinations and interests of his student teachers. He has to take all this information into account when training them (25).

Secondly, the training supervisor must have a great deal of experience in all school matters and both theoretical and practical expertise in all school subjects. The reason for this is that his work involves the supervision of all the student teacher's activities, and only in this way will he be able to inspire in him feelings of respect, veneration and trust with regard to himself, his advice and his lessons (26).

Apart from these professional qualities, he must have others that are of a purely moral nature. One of these is optimism, reflected in the courage he must inspire in his student teachers when they fail to overcome difficulties as fast as perhaps they should (27). He must be patient, not expecting his teachers to be perfect from day one. He must always be affable towards them, pleased when they tell him of their difficulties, answering them kindly and explaining to them the reason for the advice he offers (28).

However, Lasallian educational thinking is far from confusing the patience and optimism of the training supervisor, which is always necessary, with weakness that is completely contrary to the spirit of the Conduct. In this connection the Latin tag is very apposite: "Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo". If the new teachers prove to be indolent or not inclined to follow his advice, the training supervisor has to have recourse to whatever firmness is needed in such cases (29). If he notices that a class is making little progress, he finds out the cause, tells the teacher, explains what he has to do, and then observes if he follows the instructions he has been given (30).

The moral profile of the training supervisor would be incomplete if we did not mention two other qualities he must have. The first is extraordinary flexibility. He must not have a reputation for being an unbending and severe person who goes strictly by the letter of the law which kills. On the contrary, so long as he does not compromise his professional integrity, he should be accommodating, polite and attentive. Above all, he must like young people, so that it is a real pleasure for him to show them how to be good teachers and to use the means to become so. In this way he will ensure that student teachers will turn to him with full confidence, convinced that they could not be in better hands (31).

However, since his work involves offering guidance and advice, he needs also a good deal of prudence. Such prudence will lead him to choose the right occasion, opportunity or moment to let his student teachers know what mistakes they are making in their teaching. And as he does so, this prudence will help him to choose the best way to tell them, so that he offers his advice with courtesy and uses language that is friendly, helpful and encouraging. It will prevent him from adopting a distant, superior and brusque attitude which is always discouraging, puts people off the training supervisor, and makes him lose the confidence he needs in order to do his job properly.

A final point must be mentioned to complete this profile of the training supervisor of new teachers, this innovation of Lasallian educational thinking: student teachers must never think of him as a spy, for that would render all his talents and qualities quite useless (32).

NOTES
(17) RFNM, p. 314. Cf. also MS. 43, pp. 350-351
(18) Conduct, p. 187
(19) RFNM, p. 314
(20) MS. 43, p. 331
(21) MS. 43, p. 332. Cf. also MS. 44, p. 34
(22) MS. 44, p. 33
(23) MS. 44, p. 323
(24) Conduct, pp. 189-190
(25) MS. 43, p. 332
(26) MS. 43, p. 332
(27) Id. pp. 336, 344-349
(28) Id. pp. 336-337, MS. 44, p. 4
(29) MS. 44, p. 4
(30) Id., p. 7
(31) MS. 43, p. 334
(32) Ibid.

Abbreviations
RFNM: Rule of the Training Supervisor of New Teachers
MS. 43: Manuscript 43 (Conduct of the Christian Schools)
MS. 44: Manuscript 44 (Conduct of the Christian Schools. Draft of an edition of the Conduct of the Christian Schools in four parts, including boarding schools)