

**A LITTLE-KNOWN
LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL
PRACTICE:
THE USE OF
A TRAINING SUPERVISOR
OF NEW TEACHERS
(1/2)**

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1. The help given to new teachers in their first years of teaching.

There are many 18th century documents which speak of the pedagogical training given to new teachers and which started during the novitiate. We shall restrict ourselves to quoting from the most important of these: The Rule of the Training Supervisor of New Teachers.

In it we read that "novices should be given frequent teaching practice during the novitiate, and should be shown how to do everything" (1). We see that this directive was followed fully at St. Yon where a practice school was located next to the novitiate (2).

However, Lasallian educational practice did not limit itself to this initial professional training of the teacher. And so, at the end of the novitiate, the young teacher is not given a class of his own. He has to continue his specific apprenticeship for a longer or shorter period under the authority and supervision of an experienced teacher.

How long does this second apprenticeship last? The 1706 Conduct of Schools speaks of the 6 months probation teachers have to do in a school (3). And the 1720 Conduct adds that this probation is extended to last the whole year following the novitiate (4). Probably experience quickly showed that six months were not enough to train a teacher to manage a class on his own.

Manuscript 44 restates the directive given in the 1720 Conduct and explains in detail in what the professional training of the new teacher consists. Addressing itself to the training supervisor of new teachers, it

says that 1) he should suggest to his student to watch an experienced and competent teacher who can serve as a model for him; 2) he should make the pupil alternate with this same teacher in teaching a class; 3) before giving him a permanent class of his own, he should make him visit various schools and then ask him what he noticed and why certain schools seemed to be better run than others; 4) he should make use of what the student says in order to make pertinent observations and offer him useful advice (5).

Lucard also mentions the year-long probation, during which the new teacher works as an assistant to an experienced teacher who gives him practice in acquiring the authority which will ensure order and impose respect. It is only after the new teacher has successfully crossed this pedagogical hurdle that he is given a permanent place in a community and entrusted with a class of his own (6).

2. The training supervisor of new teachers

We have just referred to the training supervisor of new teachers. This job is mentioned as early as in the 1706 Conduct, and the third part of the work is given over to a consideration of both this job and that of the inspector of schools (7)

3. The Director, the training supervisor, the inspector and the senior teacher.

It is clear from the preceding paragraph that, at least initially, each of the two jobs - that of training supervisor and that of inspector - not only had its own distinct aim, but was entrusted also to a different person.

The fact that these two jobs had distinct aims can be seen from the description of the duties of the inspector of schools in the Conduct. Here it says that his work consists principally: 1) in keeping a careful watch on schools, teachers and pupils; 2) in assigning them to classes and indicating the lesson they should follow; 3) in changing their lesson when they are capable of following a more advanced one (8).

As for the Rule of the Training Supervisor of New Teachers, it explains that this training consists in eradicating defects most likely to hinder the teachers in their work, and in helping them acquire the qualities they most need (9).

It can be seen, therefore, that the two functions were quite distinct. Although one of the responsibilities of the inspector concerns the teachers, it is mainly coercive in nature: it consists in making sure that they do their work properly according to the rules laid down in the Conduct. Obviously, the inspector, to

some extent, has also a formative influence on the teachers, but his responsibility extends to all teachers without distinction, including also the longest serving and most experienced. The responsibility of the training supervisor, however, is limited exclusively to new teachers.

Manuscript 44 insists on this distinction. "The Brother in charge of looking after schools is called the inspector: he supervises them and changes the pupils' lessons as their progress makes it necessary" (10). No reference at all is made to the specific responsibilities of a training supervisor of new teachers.

However, this same document explains in another place that, since the Director is normally both inspector and training supervisor (11), he can delegate the two functions to a teacher. This teacher has to report to him twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and tell him how the teachers are getting on and if the pupils are making progress (12).

It also happened that the responsibilities of the training supervisor were taken on by the senior teacher (13).

From what we have seen above we can draw the following conclusions: 1) that there have always been persons in the Lasallian educational approach whose specific responsibility was to give professional training to new teachers once they had completed their novitiate and before they were given a class on a permanent basis; 2) that this responsibility was entrusted to a person called the training supervisor of new teachers; 3) that this responsibility belonged by right to the Director of the school and, if he delegated the responsibility, to the inspector or the senior teacher; 4) that regardless of the person who held this responsibility, the specific function of the training supervisor was quite distinct from that of the Director, the inspector or senior master.

4. The importance of the training supervisor of new teachers

The training supervisor of new teachers has a position of the utmost importance in Lasallian educational thinking. In the final instance, the professional future of the new teachers depends on him, since he is the one who selects those who have a basic chance of becoming successful teachers, and rejects those lacking the basic qualities which would enable them to do their work successfully. One could say that on him depend the future of the schools and whatever fruit they produce.

His close supervision of the new teacher is necessary for two basic reasons. The first is that the professional training given in the novitiate is not sufficient: it has

to be continued and completed. This is because the teacher training given in the novitiate does not clearly reveal the potential of the future teachers (14). The second reason is because Lasallian educational thinking requires teachers to go through a selection process, and those unsuited for teaching to be rejected at all costs. Of course, such judgments cannot be made lightly. Before a final decision can be made with regard to the potential value of a new teacher, a sufficiently long probationary period is needed, during which there is constant follow-up by an expert training supervisor. The new teacher must be given a chance to see good teachers in action and to face one or two easy classes himself.

The need for this is obvious: all professions demand intelligence, time and practice. The training of a teacher clearly needs the undivided attention of the training supervisor (15). It is only in this way that it will be possible to judge with any degree of certainty whether the new teacher is suited to the teaching profession. On the basis of such a judgment it will be possible to decide whether to keep him or send him away. This is the basic and somewhat sensitive function of the training supervisor of new teachers.

From what has been said it is easy to see the importance Lasallian educational thinking attaches to the training supervisor. In fact, it does not hesitate to put him on the same footing as the director of novices. He is as important in helping the new teachers to be successful in their work, as the latter is in helping them to persevere and to strengthen their piety and the spirit of their vocation (16).

NOTES

- (1) RFNM, p. 313
- (2) Annals I, p. 357
- (3) 1706 Conduct, p. 161
- (4) 1720 Conduct, p. 157
- (5) MS. 44, p. 32
- (6) Cf. Annals I, p. 332
- (7) Cf. Conduct, Preface, p. 6
- (8) Id., p. 230
- (9) RFNM, p. 305
- (10) MS. 44, P. 63, N46
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Cf. Conduct, p. 229
- (13) MS. 44, p. 1
- (14) Id., p. 1
- (15) Id., p. 2
- (16) 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)