

ON THE ROAD TO TOMORROW

The pandemic and the future

The Umec-Wuct webinars

The World Union of Catholic Teachers (UMEC-WUCT) has launched a series of webinars on topics related to education at this time of the pandemic and the prospects for the future. Each seminar involves teachers (from kindergarten to university) from different regions of the world. The debate is introduced by the President of the Union, Mr. Bourdeaud today, and concluded by the Union's Assistant E., Mgr Dollman. Values, planning, exchange of experiences characterize each meeting.

*By Giovanni Perrone**

The virus arrived like a sudden earthquake that ravaged the whole world, undermining the many certainties on which our path towards tomorrow continued. It highlighted our fragility, causing the sudden collapse of bridges and the landslide of highways on which we were accustomed to running with our powerful means and sometimes with our contemptuous arrogance and self-sufficiency.

Some immediately understood the seriousness of the situation, others deluded themselves and remained at the window ... Yet, there were some warnings and several "prophecies" were considered voices of crazy Cassandra.

The isolation to which we were forced has put us in crisis, forced us to renounce the many commitments we had undertaken, to question ourselves in order to look for alternative ways, to implement unknown resources. The unimaginable has become a daily reality. We had to experiment with new ways of relating and learning. Schools, universities, teachers, parents were challenged to act differently than usual, and in this, they showed a generous commitment, despite the daily toil of distance teaching. Pupils also had to adapt to unusual forms of segregation and learning.

Now tomorrow awaits us. We cannot delude ourselves that the curtain will close to reopen on the world that once used to be. We are all invited to look beyond the horizon, valuing what we have learned and committing ourselves to manage the new that advances.

Monsignor Zani, in recent days, pointed out that "this pandemic has caused other pandemics: the social pandemic and the economic pandemic, but above all a pandemic of which little is said: that is the educational pandemic, which is very serious. As Pope Francis says, education requires mind, heart and hands, and through distance education, we put the emphasis on the mind, but the heart and hands are missing". How can we take the opportunity to enhance - where appropriate - distance education interacts with the necessary relationality "in presence" that also involves the heart and hands? How to bring children, young people and young people back to the centre of educational attention?

Distance education has largely favoured wealthy families and young people, but it has certainly damaged the most marginalized and poor, causing or increasing various forms of marginalization. We ask ourselves: "How can we allow the growth of a more inclusive society and school, where everyone finds full space to be valued and valued? How to overcome (both in classroom and distance teaching) the various forms of disadvantage and marginalization? How can schools, universities, spaces and times be organised to guarantee safety and quality of teaching and learning for everyone?

It will be necessary to know how to combine distance and in-presence teaching and didactics with proximity pedagogy and didactics (*P. Moliterni*) and develop creativity, competence and foresight, coming out of rigid, sovereign, repetitive schemes. Life, in fact, is a journey towards new horizons and high goals, rich in discoveries, encounters, risks, conquests, uncertainties, dialogues and silences, fatigue and rest, wonder and contemplation. Jesus' journey with the apostles is an example and an encouragement to us.

In our daily wanderings, we need to know how to orient and reorient ourselves, to question and question ourselves, to evaluate and discern, avoiding sirens and "magic pipers". A good life is, in fact, one lived "with

others and for others, in good institutions" (Fr. Ricoeur). The pandemic highlighted people's attachment to life and reawakened the existence of a universal impetus towards a good life lived in well-governed societies (*E. Banywesize*).

It is a daily and priority commitment for the school to promote good life!

Almost always the school facilities have been a privileged place to "go to school" and the exits from school have been experienced as moments of escape. Yet the territories where we live are rich in stimulating resources and high educational value. Why not enhance, for example, the woods, museums, monuments, city spaces, etc... as places of learning, positive relationality and growth? Why not find effective ways to explore the nearest territory? Why not meet young people in the open air, finding the most appropriate situations and responsible choices? In the world, there are many good experiences in this sense.

Distance learning has allowed us, as in this webinar, to interact with colleagues far away from our own. It was nice to meet, get to know each other, confront each other. In these months the various institutions have offered many good opportunities for exchanges via the web. Why not continue along the way, networking universities, schools, teachers, pupils, parents and encouraging a fruitful dialogue?

UMEC-WUCT will continue to work in this direction. This will not mean putting an end to international meetings, a precious opportunity for interpersonal relationships and personal growth, but starting common paths that will make long-distance exchanges interact with "*de visu*" meetings.

The same for the students, who will have the opportunity to confront themselves with peers from other cities, nations, different realities, not only to get to know each other, but to share experiences and projects. And so on.

When we go back to school we must value what these exhausting months of physical isolation have taught us. It has been a period of "physical distancing" that has made us reflect on the need to get out of our "dens", out of our small world - sometimes self-referential - to open ourselves to others, overcoming petty borders, stereotypes and prejudices.

Pope Francis reminds us that "if we have been able to learn anything in all this time it is that no one saves himself. Borders fall, walls collapse and all fundamentalist discourses dissolve before an almost imperceptible presence that manifests the fragility of which we are made.... Let us think of the project of integral human development for which we yearn, which is based on the protagonism of peoples in all their diversity ... for a human family united in the search for integral human development. Here is the alternative of the civilization of love, founded on a committed community of brothers".

This presupposes a new mentality that knows how to transform and make national educational systems interact, guaranteeing "equity, inclusion, quality and lifelong learning" (UNESCO - Objectives 2030), favouring resilient and flexible educational systems, in the awareness that we are part of a single ecosystem (*Laudato si'*) where each person is enriched by the relationship with others, and every other - whoever he may be - is a precious gift given to us by the Creator, so fraternity, solidarity, subsidiarity, responsibility are not empty words, but common ways of working and relating to one another, founding criteria of the new humanism for which a new educational pact is needed, as Pope Francis often reminds us.

The year of reflection on the "*Laudato si'*" is about to begin and next October there will be a world event (also online) on the global pact of education. These are opportunities for all of us (institutions, teachers, educators) to question ourselves and reflect in order to plan the new path that awaits us.

We are grateful to all those who with their generous commitment have guaranteed and guarantee the vitality of our Union. With the help of all and the full exploitation of every resource, we wish to promote other webinars, avoiding any form of self-reference or sterile protagonism.

Everyone knows how to make proposals and make appropriate commitments.

* *UMEC-WUCT Secretary General*