

Promoting collaboration

The scholastic situation in Pakistan. Education is provided by both state and private schools, but illiteracy is widespread. The sisters work to encourage mercy and compassion towards those in need of instruction. The Congregation administers 16 schools (Urdu and English). The majority of students are Muslims. Teaching staffs include Christian laity, sisters and non-Christians. Inter-religious dialogue. Being "women of fire and of blood" for the sake of the Kingdom.

*From notes by Sr. M. Lillian Raphael
(Original text in English)*

Pakistan is a developing country with a total population of 180,808,000. Minorities, who make up 1.6% of this total, are struggling for their identity. Education is provided by the Government and by private institutions (Urdu and English). According to a recent Government survey, at least seven million children are not in primary school, three million will never see the inside of a classroom at all; and less than half of Pakistani women have had any formal education. The situation can be assessed as bad to worse in rural areas, where only one out of every three women has ever attended school. It is sad to see that, in the second decade of the 21st century, two thirds of rural school children between 6 and 16 years of age cannot read a story. It is nothing short of tragic that 50% of rural school children cannot read a sentence.

Among young people in general, the literacy rate is very low. Some 31% of men and 41% of women between the ages of 15 and 24 are unable to read or write. In fact, 30% of the

Pakistan population lives in "extreme educational poverty". As a background to all this, there are many fundamental challenges faced by the country; above all corruption, terrorism,

On this and the following pages we see pupils and teachers in various school activities. The sisters instil the Dominican charism and teach collaboration and inter-religious dialogue.



fear, insecurity, fundamentalism, poverty, child labour; and natural disasters, like last year's flooding.

There is a dire need to promote value-orientated education and quality education, to bring quality teachers and relevant teaching techniques into our institutions if we are to meet global demands. In this turmoil and upheaval, how can we plan and organise, when we do not know if we shall be alive tomorrow, or whether or not a school building will still be standing after the summer holidays? In Pakistan, education is often commercialised and dealt with as a business venture. Teaching is just a job; teachers are often mere employees on low salaries, carrying out the terms of a job description.

What about the ideals of collaboration and service, the reaching after real objectives? What about "showing generous and intelligent concern for those who are thirsty for truth and for love...caring for the whole person and promoting human dignity" (**Constitutions no.19**)? The curriculum has to be programmed, prepared, implemented and evaluated; and without the collaboration of teachers, parents and students, this cannot happen. The ideal of service has a sober and sublime value. It nourishes compassion and mercy for poor and needy students and "encourages life" (**Constitutions no.19**) in society. It promotes commitment, dedication, passion, the search for justice and peace as we discern and make choices in order to achieve the aims and objectives of our mis-

sion and to organise the curriculum.

The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Pakistan have education as their main apostolate. We have a presence in 16 schools (Urdu and English), all registered with the Government's Education Board. Most belong to the

are completely different from those of earlier times. Keeping in mind the signs of the times and called to be a "sign of unity... we allow ourselves to be challenged by the truth present in all people, cultures and religions, and encourage dialogue by our words and silence, service and simple presence" (**Constitutions no. 20**).



diocese, but are administered by Dominican Sisters. The majority of the students in these institutions are Muslims, and the teaching staff includes both Christians and non-Christians. The sisters have been in Pakistan for 76 years, and their contribution in the field of education has been much appreciated in the dioceses and by the Government Board of Education. In the second decade of the 21st century, with rapid changes having taken place in modern technology, the mass media, teaching techniques and methodology, cultural context, etc., contemporary demands

Schools are the place where education provides a pathway to improved living standards and plays a key role in the development of the nation and individuals alike. In a society like Pakistan, only education can bring originality, creativity, awareness, confidence, patriotism and tolerance to the lives of its people. Education "is the pre-requisite to all-round development of the natural aptitudes which the child must ultimately employ in the service of society as an adult" (Quddus, 1990).

In the face of chaos and confu-

sion, terrorism, insecurity, disasters, calamities, innocent deaths, poverty, low standards in education, deficiency in physical and economic resources, what is our role as Dominicans? Do we not need to concentrate on our physical, spiritual and socio-economic resources more than ever? Do we have a clear vision for the future of our institutions? What is the future of our Congregation's educational activity in Pakistan? Do our vision and our mission project meet the demands of the signs of the times with strategic programming, short and long term objectives? Do we need more strategic programming, preparation, implementation and evaluation of the results of our educational activity? What are our priorities, opportunities and possibilities? Do we need to concentrate on value-orientated education and work hard to achieve quality education?

Let us concentrate on our primary resources: that is, our personnel. We have teaching staffs made up of Christian and non Christian teachers, plus all the young religious, the Dominican Sisters who teach in these institutions. Some are specialized and capable in one area of education others in another. There is a continuous need for follow-up and renewal, the acquiring of new teaching techniques and methodology. Institutions always need people who are prepared and conscientious, in order to fulfil educational demands. It is essential to seek and invite intense collaboration at all levels - administration, lay and



religious teachers, parents, students, professionals and volunteers. All are part of the team. All need to collaborate with one another, to acknowledge the presence of others, to see that change will be brought about when the vision is shared and worked on together. In fact it is only through collaboration that institutions will achieve their goal.

How do we promote collaboration and why it is relevant?

To *promote*: the word comes from the Latin word "promovere", *pro* meaning forward and *movere* meaning to move. It means to further or encourage progress. There are needs that need stimulating and fostering. The English dictionary defines collaboration as *working on a joint project*. It is team work, partnership and cooperation. Collaboration is a natural part of life. It is written in the book of Genesis: "God said, it is not right that the man should be alone. I shall make him a helper"

(Gen 2:18). Collaboration implies partners, more or less equal, working together and making relevant contributions of knowledge and experience to the school's **vision and mission**. **Vision:** *vision* is an image of the future, specifying our future hopes and aspirations and our forward planning with its specific aims and objectives: in other words, the goals of the particular institution.

Mission defines our purpose and reason for being. It explains who we are and what we do. It provides reasons to move ahead, clarifying aims and objectives that serve perhaps just for three or four years and later need to be changed according to what the signs of the times tell us. Priorities will change, and opportunities and possibilities will vary.

Is there a real need to promote collaboration? What are its benefits?

We have a fundamental need to confront, to seek guidance, to seek wisdom, knowledge, expe-

rience, to find opportunities to interact with others in educational instructional activities. This is beneficial in the area of curriculum implementation, when teachers face problems or difficulties in teaching; working together is a means to get dynamic feedback and ideas from those who have expertise. Collaboration helps to develop a sense of responsibility and co-responsibility, communication, knowledge and sharing of skills. It increases the teachers' spirit of team work and promotes better knowledge of the students, with all their potentials and talents, needs and interests, choices of subject, behaviour problems etc. Collaboration implies better understanding at all levels between administration and employees, and provides better assessment in order to improve quality education and the spirit of service.

There are other elements that help to develop strategies important for the success of the Institution. When we work together, trust develops; ideas and analysis are discussed freely; goals are shared. Aspirations, research, creative explo-

rations and experience are considered for future planning. The group learns to bring order out of chaotic situations, and to face challenges with courage. Collaboration develops communication and community spirit, improves knowledge and increases the effectiveness of teachers and administration alike.

Collaboration at times may take the form of curriculum planning

This is a fertile area for collaboration. There is much competition among schools, and good results are highly prized. Curriculum content is assessed. Does it meet the needs of the students? Does it present global knowledge and wide orientation to the students for the future challenges they will face, or does it offer only a bookish knowledge that cannot fulfil real demands? The curriculum should be child centred, concentrating on each individual's objective developmental needs and behaviour, as well as the optimising of their results. Our long-term aim is to produce integrated and re-

sponsible human beings.

Collaboration brings transformation

There is a continual discrepancy between our resources and the choices we want to make for the poor. We often differ in the understanding of our vision and the implementation of our mission. Choices made are not clear, or do not fulfil needs; and for this there could be many reasons. Education has become an area of profit and business, and usually only those who can afford it can be educated. The poor are unjustly deprived of the possibility of education; and so they always remain poor. It is only through universal value-orientated and quality education that society will be transformed.

Value-orientated education Quality education

Ancient writers like Plato and Socrates, and many writers of our own times, have written extensively about character building. Various websites provide material and strategies on this subject. Value-orientated education is relevant in every age. In the fast-paced digital



world we live in, value-orientated education has become the need of the hour. Through cooperation between parents, teachers, the community and students, the dreams of making children into good citizens and good human beings could be successfully realised.

In almost all our institutions, whether in villages or cities, we have a good tradition of educating children about values that will develop their characters. All Christian and non-Christian teachers, parents and students show much interest in understanding character building activities and prepare themselves well. We celebrate National Days, religious functions and charity programmes; patriotism is born and virtues and values are inculcated, bringing a meaning to life which will be passed on through the generations.

In "Thought for the Day" activities during assemblies and in their classrooms, students motivate each other through drama, short speeches, art and craft displays, graphical representations highlighting particular values such as discipline, courage and honesty. Experience shows that this method convinces children of the importance of particular values.

Through modern teaching methods such as integrated method and cooperative learning, children work together on projects; they develop important attitudes towards team work, cooperation and mutual help; they practise patience, understanding and courtesy; and



in some, leadership qualities emerge. Library reading, literary forums and library bulletin boards help juniors and seniors alike to acquire knowledge and use their time profitably. School is the best place to learn about human rights (and non-violation of human rights), for celebrating important World Days, for learning about our global responsibilities for the needy, for the Earth and the environment. Interfaith dialogue and awareness of the day's burning issues are distinctive features of value-orientated education, and help children to become more caringly attentive to humanity as a whole. In value-orientated education, prayer and recollection days are organised, valuable role models are introduced through posters, activities and stories; and all in a way that is cheerful and engaging. In our institutions, promoting human and Christian values is a priority and this is our indirect and only way of preaching the

Truth. There is a lot to be done. Like St. Catherine "consuming her life for the Church", we must become women of "fire and blood" (cf. **Constitutions no. 16**), "prolonging the presence of Christ walking with mankind... a prophetic proclamation of the Kingdom" (cf. **Constitutions no. 15**). Value-orientated education reaches deeply into the curriculum and invites administration, teachers and students to work in close collaboration.

Quality Education: The Pakistan Government and all private institutions, including ours in St. Joseph's Province, believe that quality education is the basic right of every child; but there are many challenges, from teacher training to the curriculum itself. We have quality teachers and quality teaching methodology techniques, strategic programming and planning and provision of materials in English middle schools,



for our institutions. The knowledge, wisdom and understanding of each member are a meaningful contribution to the discernment involved in choosing guidelines for the common good. "Meanings, choices, and relationships are inextricably and dynamically interdependent and are at the core of collaboration" (*Bringing schools back to Life: Margaret Wheatley, 1999*). Collaboration: yes; "we are constantly in search of God, together with our brothers and sisters" (cf. **Constitutions no.17**).

whereas in Urdu middle schools requirements and provision alike are less developed. But teaching techniques, physical facilities and resources of educational equipment play an important role in children's growth, and each school has to supply them according to children's needs.

Any discussion about quality education needs to focus on aims: how to improve the student success rate, how to make the school prosper, how to encourage the development of a tutoring programme, how to explore ways and means for ongoing research, and how to identify and help develop leadership qualities among teachers and students.

It is true that collaboration is time-consuming, yet it is clear that it can bring about changes in our institutions; through work on meaningful projects. Collaboration encourages cooperation and teamwork. It is good at times to celebrate others' work, to show appreciation of their efforts for the betterment of the institution plus, to give credit to

those who have put all their talents and good will at our disposal. Quality education is incomplete without value-oriented education concerning beliefs, principles and values. Both complement each other.

Conclusions: There are many issues and possible approaches to the transformation of rural and urban schools in St. Joseph's Province. It is absolutely necessary for sisters, teachers, parents, students, professionals, volunteers and administration to cultivate and develop a more collaborative ethos, continually updating methodology and the curriculum through teamwork. Their clear vision and shared mission will serve and help all our students.

None of us exists independent of our relationships with others. Dynamic relationships are beautiful! Cultivating healthy relationships and promoting collaboration helps to create a social context where there are opportunities to share information and make choices, *quality choices*

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