

## EdU -NH

Zoom meeting - 13th June 2020

*Coronavirus Emergency – Education  
My experience and my expectations*

Educators, teachers, parents, students across the globe:  
share together how we are living this emergency and  
what we look forward to in the field of Education.

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#### Introduction- Teresa Boi (Italy)

Greetings to everyone. I'm Teresa, I'm Italian and I'm a teacher. I welcome you to this virtual meeting organized by EdU, an acronym for education and unity, inspired by the thought and life of Chiara Lubich. **EdU** is an international network of researchers, teachers, and educators, an integral part of the **New Humanity** non-governmental organization accredited by the United Nations and therefore by UNESCO as regards culture and education.

We share two great passions: the first for **education** as an intrinsic value to the full realization of our common humanity, and the other for the **united world**, for that process, which involves many persons, towards the realization of universal fraternity.

In recent months, the Coronavirus emergency has made us feel the world one even in its vulnerability. In most countries schools have been closed. Unable to meet we suddenly found ourselves experiencing educational relationships in different ways. The emergency is gradually resolving, but we are aware that this experience has changed our perception of the world and education. This meeting was born precisely with the desire to share thoughts, experiences and reflections on the future of education. I will now give the floor to Cecilia, from Argentina, who will coordinate this meeting.

#### Presentation- Cecilia Gatti (Argentina)

I am very happy to be able to be with you in this venue, which we first thought of, to be a meeting place, an invitation to **an experience** where people from five continents having different roles in education: teachers, students, parents, politicians, can be together.

So the challenge during this one and a half hour will be to share as the invitation says 'Coronavirus Emergency – Education: how I'm living it and what I would like'.

We are proposing **a real international workshop in pedagogy** that many of us have been used to living for some years. This experience has made us aware of **the importance of dialogue as a way to weave deep relationships among us** where we share our personal wealth and value that of others so that we can think of new ways in which we can build a world in which there is more fraternity and solidarity.

As a result of our work together, we would now like to invite four pedagogues who will share with us their points of view, born of their experience in their own continents: Valentina from Asia, a group of educators from Europe, Alfonso Alarcón from Latin America and Justus from Africa.

### Contribution- Valentina Gomes (Pakistan)

Valentina Gomes from Pakistan, He is a Mathematics teacher at a Secondary School in Karachi.

Hello. I'm Valentina. Teaching was not my choice, but I came to love the profession as I realized that it's the only way we can bring about a change for the betterment in society. I have witnessed how ex-students have returned with gratitude for what they have received in our Catholic institutes and continue to work as able citizens in the country.

Pakistan is facing a serious challenge to ensure all children, particularly the most disadvantaged, to attend, stay and learn in school. There are socio- economic factors involved. While enrollment and retention rates are improving, progress has been slow to improve education indicators in Pakistan. *An estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 are out-of-school.*

We were all taken aback when on February 26<sup>th</sup> the province declared that all schools were to remain closed until further notice. We had heard it coming as many other countries, like Italy had been suffering before us, but now it seems that the world, and hence every sector in civil society will not be the same, not even education. Already the lack of financial means had rendered it impossible for some families to even think of sending their children to school; and now this. We at school had been conducting normal classes and in these days were focusing on extra-curricular and project works, however no one could have dreamed about how the system would be affected. It has been a calling towards the essentials in life, like family, prayer and most importantly health.

#### **A key-word to tell our experience**

The word that everyone is using these days is Stay at Home. It is at home and from home and inside the home that at activities and communications are done; so just like some students are home schooled, studying at home, in other modalities has become a world wide challenge. Even for us technology had to be mastered within days and examinations cancelled and planning done for further action. In this process, I think a strong net-work among teachers, parents and students has been developed where each one has been rendered more vulnerable but more fraternal. Every individual, related to the section, is trying to put themselves in the other's shoe, students help teachers for the tech part, parent's are patiently paying the fees, even though they may not have received their complete salary and teachers are managing various programs from home. The sense of having a common home, which is unfortunately sick, is helping towards common goal setting and at this moment in history, these processes should not be undermined, in my opinion.

#### **On which priority, challenge, open question must I (we work) so that my role as a teacher is a valid answer to today's education?**

Apart from learning from this situation, that has many lessons to give us, even mechanical, I need to ensure that the situation does not become a reason to drift apart from the reality of teaching and learning and maintain a healthy balance in order to continue our work as teachers. The means available do not always permit maximum effect, especially when I think of teaching algebra with Zoom, but I have had positive experiences of using research and creativity that fostered an interactive class, so that one student said: "Miss, finally I have understood cumulative frequency"! The challenge of teaching across the screen and the inability of perceiving the emotional well-being in this pandemic situation is the challenge that I think I am facing. My role as a teacher is not merely passing on information, but helping students to make sense of that information in a larger context and hence I believe that together with upgrading myself technically, I need to upgrade

myself psychologically and socially to be able to do justice to the formation of young adults so that we can all come out of this crises, renewed formed together.

#### Contribution – Alfonso Alarcón (Bolivia)

**Alfonso Alarcón from Cochabamba in Bolivia** is Professor of Educommunication at the Bolivian Catholic University. He is working on validating the stories and popular narratives of ancestors so that each person and culture is understood and new pathways of improvement are found. He is director of a national programme of transdisciplinary communities and uses a collaborative approach to come to terms with complex problems in vulnerable populations in five Bolivian provinces.

Lately I came upon a phrase, whose author I do not know but which has a lot to do with what I will say. It says: ‘The change that you would like to effect in the world, your students will do.’

Today more than ever we wanted to be close to the indigenous people who live in the countryside, with whom we have started this experience of ‘comunita’ de aprendizaje’, communal learning. So we needed to meet their urgent needs, putting aside our own concerns, and go to them with material for their physical safety and to tell them that we were close to them, that we were sharing their fears and anxiety with them.

We did this quite discreetly but in front of our students to show them through example that we did not want to use the fact that we were going to them for our own goals as researchers, but wanted to build a reality of proximity and of mutual collaboration with them.

We can now reach out to our indigenous communities as friends. We wanted to take to heart Pope Francis’s call for us to ‘go out’ and wanted our university ‘to go out’ to a very rich cultural context but also one which is in need and is limited economically and technologically. We tried our best to create a transdisciplinary learning community with the help of participative methodological kits and using service learning.

There are many experiences that we can share in this regard like youths telling me that they cannot work just for the marks anymore, or as they would say later on for money, but they want to work to help people who need their support.

Besides it is very encouraging to see how the youths want to try out actions that are effective in real contexts and problems of the communities that they are close to. At the same time, knowing that they can teach and help resolve small problems in these societies, motivates our youths.

At this time of the pandemic for example, we are working to teach old people not to be overwhelmed by ‘fake news’ and our older teachers how to use digital technology in their classes. We are also helping students how to organize their activities in this time that we have to be distant from each other.

Of course we have successes but also failures that we have learnt lessons from – mainly linked to the delicate intercultural relationships that need a platform of relationships and attention so that we give more attention to the processes rather than the product.

Before the pandemic started we worked with a group of students and rural populations of the quechua language on how to take care of water sources.

In this context, in implementing their project, our students learned that to make their project more sustainable it was more important to teach communication techniques to a small group of natives so that then they in turn would replicate the process of learning in any other subject to the whole community.

The result of this was that the communities and their leaders understood how important it was to have their youths go and train as communicators of the community together with our students. So this activity started by the students is now involving the whole region and the university itself.

There I understood that 'making yourself one' with the other, understanding the other, suffering with those who suffer, as I had learnt from Chiara Lubich when I was young, can be used very well in my work as a teacher. I can transmit this vision to other generations in a way, that they in turn will continue to build a society and reality where one can realize honest intercultural communication, without losing one's identity and where non invasive processes of learning can be activated.

So I started with the phrase about the change you want to make in the world – your students will realize. And I will now conclude that the actual situation we are living now, confirms our hopes, the possibility that 'together' we can change the world

### Contribution – Jesús García (Spain)

Jesús García a pedagogue from Spain will now share a vision *which is the fruit of the communion of about 25 educators. A broad view, which though local, can illustrate the reality lived in Europe at this particular time, at least in some of its aspects.*

*(That is why) we asked ourselves what key words can summarize our experience? The words would be these...*

Bewilderment, suffering and emotion have made us experience **new and profound vital realities**. It was an inner journey within ourselves as educators and within education itself. We were led to "reinvent" methodologies, resources and educational attitudes. It was a very accelerated process of **adaptation**. It was also **an examination of conscience** at a time when we were experiencing great **effort** and having to **overcome challenges** in dimensions never imagined before, overriding the previous challenges we had.

Furthermore, there was no other way than for the school to be open to families and other educative realities in this circumstance.

There were various alternatives that we could have taken, two of which then proved to be no alternative at all, but unusually important: the use of **new** information and communication **technologies** and **working in a team**.

In short, we 'found' ourselves going to what is **essential** in education and of our being educators. It was a vital moment that made us go back to recuperate and re-evaluate **relationships in education** as being the aspect which needs to be privileged in the educational process itself, as it is truly the founding nucleus of it.

In a word: education has presented itself more than ever as a possibility of fraternity, uniting all the members of the educational community in a very fast way.

*However, these collective experiences and reflections have left us with some open questions, questions that lead us to ask ourselves what is the near and radical future of what education entails...we would like to summarize it like this...*

First of all, it poses a great question for us about new forms of work and in particular about our capacity and availability to work in teams, not only among teachers themselves but with families and the rest of the members of the educational community.

A second question leads us to review the content itself, i.e., to what extent is it necessary to include more experiential, more relational or cooperative learning pathways in the learning process? How can the development of digital skills, flexibility and a richer curriculum increase learner motivation? It is a call to vitally develop certain competences that were neglected such as ecological awareness which is now something marginal in practice. Teachers as well must be a part of Emotional education, both in daily life and in their training.

A third question concerns the profound revision of the type of person we want, a person who is able to face the world of the future. This obliges us to review priorities in aims and methods,

changes in academic structures, and above all to overcome our fears and limitations in the face of these epochal changes. Which structures can lead us to a more humane and inclusive education, and to a greater awareness of our strengths and weaknesses? We need to find strategies that are motivating, without neglecting educational excellence, that can help the whole community to place learning above achievement.

Another question, a real challenge..... the use of electronic devices of communication that can be positively instrumental in non contact learning and for inclusion purposes, but which also means that we have to be careful to reduce as much as possible any gap that they can cause. And here it's not only an economic gap that can ensue, but also one in the world of adult education, or of pupils with special educational needs (physical or mental). This necessarily leads to thinking about new educational paths for families and teachers.

Finally, an essential question. How can we strengthen the school as a real space for relationships? How can we re-personalize education, placing relationships in education as its backbone, considering it as the engine that propels, motivates and is able to overcome any difficulty?

*To conclude, the need for a true EDUCATIONAL PACT, has been highlighted as never before - a pact that is coherent, serious, intelligent, far from polarized ideological positions. Faced by issues that involve the human being in its complexity and integrity, there is a need of a pact that is open to dialogue and conciliation.*

#### Introduction to dialogue – Maria Teresa Siniscalco (France)

I am Mimma Siniscalco, I work in the field of educational research and I volunteer in an association that provides support courses for students in difficulty.

A few words to introduce and prepare us for this moment of dialogue.

Thinking about this zoom it seemed important to us that we all had the opportunity to give our contribution. And so we thought to take advantage of one of the possibilities of technology that is to divide ourselves into groups of 5 or 6 people, finding ourselves in different virtual "rooms", so that in each group everyone can talk and listen.

This moment in small groups wants to be an opportunity to share what we have understood and heard in this period and to listen to each other. Listening to each other with attention and curiosity. Let's try when the other person talks to be 100% "there" for him, grasping the novelty he brings and putting ourselves in his place to see things from his point of view. Perhaps the essence of this moment is precisely listening, collective listening. In this way we can make room for a new understanding, to which each one contributes, but which goes beyond the sum of the parts.

To guide the dialogue we have two questions:

- A keyword that says my experience in this time...
- What open question (...aspiration, hope, need for change) do I take as an educator or as a student today?

For the dialogue we will have a time of 20 minutes. Each one when he takes the floor can say besides his name, in which part of the world he is and then his answer to these two questions, taking care to speak for 2 or 3 minutes, so that everyone can speak. There will be a notice telling us that there are 5 minutes left until the end of the time in the group, so we can adjust with the time. Then we will all meet again in plenary together. It is an experiment, let us try it together.

Now let's take a deep breath to get here fully, to be 100% present. Let's let ourselves be questioned by the two questions that you see also written in the chat. And let's take pen and paper and write our answer, thinking about our experience, what we feel. Writing will help us in the dialogue to go to the essentials.

- **What is the key word that says my experience in this time?**
- **What open question do I bring in?**

As we write Andrea divides us into small groups.