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# Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

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Global Compact on Education and  
Service-learning

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## Italo Fiorin

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## 7. GLOBAL COMPACT on EDUCATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING

Italo Fiorin

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### Summary

The chapter intends to analyse how Service-learning can be a pedagogical resource, aimed at reinventing the Global Compact on Education endorsed by Pope Francis, capable of harmonizing the multiple dimensions of the person in an integral development, the relationship among people and the people relationship with respect to the social and environmental reality. According to Pope Francis, education is the strongest instrument of change in the world, but it is necessary to rethink it in depth, because is going through a deep crisis, even more acute today because of the pandemic. And yet, the emergency that confronts us with our human fragility allows us to better understand what the necessary education should be like to rebuild the compact on education that has been fragmented. True education is an invitation to step out of ourselves to the encounter, the compromise, the personal transformation and to transform the contexts in which we live. Educating is an expression of that social friendship contained in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, it is

*According to Pope Francis, education is the strongest instrument of change in the world, but it is necessary to rethink it in depth, because is going through a deep crisis, even more acute today because of the pandemic.*

service. The Pope's words make us rethink the contents of a renewed curriculum and the ways of educating. From this new point of view, Service-learning is proposed as the guiding principle for this exceptional mending, a

manifestation of a coherent pedagogical vision, capable of embodying the words of the Holy Father in renewed education paths.

### Global Compact on Education and Service-learning

Pope Francis, from the beginning of his pontificate, has addressed the issue of education in a creative, challenging and concrete way, insisting on its centrality and its ability to produce change. In this context, the invitation to reinvent the Global Compact on Education emerged, a demand that arises from an alarm that frequently resound in

his speeches. We are in an educational emergency, caused by the loss of common values to build a collaboration among those who have responsibilities in the education field. Education is an enterprise that demands that all those responsible—the family, the school and social, cultural and religious institutions—be involved in solidarity.<sup>25</sup>

But what does the Holy Father mean when he says: “Compact on Education”? And how can school and university respond? And in particular, what can the pedagogical approach contribute to Service-learning?

## Scenario

We live in a world where uncertainty, precariousness, the risk of deep and dramatic social transformations prevails. The society described by Zygmunt Bauman as a liquid society (Bauman, 2002, 2007, 2009), witnesses the emergence of a new poverty, that of massification, in which individuals are drawn to the desire to standardize themselves, adapting themselves to the schemes, the lifestyle and the aspirations of the mass, so as not to feel excluded. In the global world village, the interdependence of different cultures was intensified, the main problems that affect us locally are not only local.

Pope Francis writes:

*Local conflicts and disregard for the common good are exploited by the global economy in order to impose a single cultural model. This culture unifies the world, but divides persons and nations, for “as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers” (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 12)*

Training systems seem dominated by the aspiration to be shaped according to the demands of this global economy, oriented towards the ideal of profit understood as the ultimate value to which everything can be sacrificed. Education is then challenged in its deepest values.

On a global scale, we are witnessing the tendency to prioritize the school curriculum by including those disciplines and competences considered to be most useful, while humanist knowledge is marginalized, the one that has to do with questions of meaning.

Nussbaum (2011) recalls that democracies need a humanistic culture, the economy itself needs it.

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25 Pope Francis (2020a). Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to participants at the seminar “Education: The Global Compact” organized by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Vatican City, 7th February, 2020. Retrieved from: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200207\\_education-globalcompact.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/february/documents/papa-francesco_20200207_education-globalcompact.html)

Personal expertise, the spirit of initiative, autonomy are important resources which can be oriented in quite different directions. They can serve the mere individual interest or be directed to increase the collective well-being.

*Only the culture of encounter and the practice of solidarity can bridge this gap, reconciling the development and equity aspects.*

The Supreme Pontiff has many times condemned the risks of an increasingly steady social fracture, between an economic, technological and

scientific development as has never been before and an extreme, growing poverty. Only the culture of encounter and the practice of solidarity can bridge this gap, reconciling the development and equity aspects.

*In our time humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications. At the same time, we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 52)*

The widespread global selfishness tendency, protecting acquired rights and privileges, numb economically developed nations to the needs of the most disadvantaged parts of the world. The culture of indifference, which is both globalized and localized, is growing in every country.

The correlation between the growing individualism and inequalities, between the search for individual affirmation and the loss of the feeling of solidarity, can only be contrasted by rediscovering the sense of being part of the common human family. In light of this belonging, it is necessary to rethink the notion of development, declined today in technocratic and selective terms: it is necessary to reconsider the concept of development, since there can be no true development except with respect to man as a whole. For this reason, education must encourage giving up an idea of development, understood only as economic development, and the idea of progress as something absolutely true, helping to become aware that, in no way, it can be taken for granted that the path of humanity is already written according to the principle of progress.

*Giving up on progress guaranteed by the 'laws of History' does not mean giving up on progress but recognizing its fragile uncertainty. Renouncing the best of all worlds does not at all mean renouncing a better world. (Morin, 1999, p. 48)<sup>26</sup>*

26 t/n UNESCO official translation (1999) "Seven complex lessons in education for the future" <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117740>

Education is entrusted with the task of teaching to face uncertainties and try to achieve sustainable development to weld the demands of the person and those of society, recovering the necessary balance.

## The urgency of a Global Compact on Education

On 12th September, 2019, the Supreme Pontiff promoted the idea of holding a highly symbolic event, aimed at signing a Global Compact on Education, welcoming all institutions and people who share the importance of creating a great educational alliance.

*However, every change, needs an educational path. We cannot make a change without educating for that change. (...) We must base our educational processes on the awareness that everything in the world is intimately connected and that it is necessary to find other ways to understand economy, politics, growth and progress. We must have the courage to train people who are willing to put themselves at the service of the community.<sup>27</sup>*

It is not an impromptu proposal, but an initiative to entrust the *pars construens* of the rigorous analysis carried out on many occasions and witnessed by speeches, by official pronouncements, by documents, by the great encyclical letter *Laudato si'*; on the dangers

*The Pope coined the metaphor of the educational village.*

of the globalization of the culture of indifference and the throwaway culture, of the iniquitous use of economic

and environmental resources. To a vision obsessively focused on a false centrality of man, as an individual person and an individual species, Pope Francis opposes an alternative vision that requires to be translated into work. The throwaway culture contrasts the culture of care, the globalization of indifference is opposed by the globalization of fraternity; and this will be possible thanks to educational action. That is why the Pope coined the metaphor of the educational village.<sup>28</sup>

The metaphor of the village is powerful and suggestive. It points out the importance of developing neighbourhood, proximity and belonging relationships. The village is the meeting place of generations, the memory of the past is guarded and rules are passed on from older to younger generations. The logic that informs life is that of the community,

27 Pope Francis (2019, September). Message of his Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of the launch of the Global Compact on Education. Text available in Spanish and Italian at:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190912\\_videomessaggio-patto-educativo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190912_videomessaggio-patto-educativo.html)

28 Ibidem.



not that of formal rules. In a true community everyone is involved, everyone has meaning, the concern is oriented to the common good. (Bornatici, 2020, p. 18)

Education is called to work to build this new global village, where the search for unity and harmony will make it possible to overcome the great fragmentations that are lacerating the human consortium.

*Education is called to work to build this new global village, where the search for unity and harmony will make it possible to overcome the great fragmentations that are lacerating the human consortium.*

In the commitment to rebuild the Compact on Education, there are many companions on the road. The explicit reference that the Holy Father makes to the Orthodox Patriarch

Bartholomew, as an inspiring source for the *Laudato si'*, is exemplary; or the analogous one to the Great Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb for the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

*The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society.* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 271)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, in Article 1, that all men are united among themselves by bonds of brotherhood.

The great religions indicate the foundation of this brotherhood and, acknowledging God the Creator, extend it to all creation.

The fraternity bond is the first major expression of the covenant that binds men and women together and with the environment, and sets the foundations of a relationship that cannot be one of exploitation and profit (among human beings), or one of possession and domain (with respect to animal and natural reality). Fraternity expresses itself in caring about each other. Care guarantees the strength of that covenant that bind human beings to support and enrich each other, to continue the creative work through the responsible and passionate use of one's own intelligence.

## Mending the fragmentations

The launch of the compact on education is in the midst of the two encyclicals, *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, which provide the key to interpretation, highlighting three

big fragmentations that need to be mended: one among human beings themselves (from individualism to fraternity), another one between human beings and nature (from the logic of possession and exploitation, to the logic of responsibility and care), and the last one between human beings and God (from self-centeredness to openness to transcendence).

Within these three major problems areas, we acknowledge numerous fragmentations:

#### a) *Mending sectoral knowledge*

No particular scientific sector has an overall vision, no knowledge is self-sufficient, capable of reading and interpreting complexity. The predominance of a fragmented knowledge in the different disciplines makes it impossible to know the crucial problems. To grasp the complexity of human condition, education has to aim at the formation of a thinking adequate to complexity.

Complex global realities are shattered, the human is dislocated and redistributed. The biological dimension, including the brain, is enclosed in biological departments; the psychological, social, religious, and economic dimensions are separated from each other and relegated to social science departments; the subjective, existential, poetic qualities are restricted to literature and poetry departments. And philosophy, which by nature is a reflection on all human problems, becomes a self-enclosed realm. (Morin, 1999, p. 16)<sup>29</sup>

A fragmented thought fails to recognize the connections between economics, technology, politics, ethics and, prisoner of partial points of view, it is incapable of recognizing the unitary meaning of experience. The excessive simplification of complexity, produced by hyper specialized visions of reality, prevents us from recognizing the deepest dimensions of existence, which cannot be brought into measurable parameters: love, gratuity, suffering, joy and pain, fraternity... (Morin & Ceruti, 2018).

It is necessary to harmoniously mend scientific, technical, technological, and humanist knowledge, including also that non-formal knowledge that comes from the cultural wealth of peoples. Scientific knowledge has to 'think' what hand and technique do, but all this must be enlightened by the heart, that is, by art, poetry, spirituality, love.

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29 t/n UNESCO official translation (1999) "Seven complex lessons in education for the future"  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117740>

### **b)** *Overcome technocratic dominion*

There are natural and technical resources in the world that would allow everyone to have what they need to live with dignity. However, the reality is very different. The cause is the predominance of a 'technocratic' paradigm that puts knowledge at the service of production, with the specific purpose of profit. In this way, individualism and consumerism are nurtured, injustices and inequalities are generated, the planet is polluted and looted.

Technology linked to finance, "in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others" (Pope Francis, 2015, LS, 20).

There is an urgent need for an education that promotes development, not only the ability to *know*, but also to *think* critically. The *knowledge* that allows the production of scientific thought is not enough to elaborate the necessary wisdom for a good use of science, because the mere production of knowledge is concerned with guaranteeing control over reality, it does not question the meaning of what is done, while the *thought* is driven by the need to recognize horizons of meaning.

It must be recognized that knowledge is a global public good and every human being has the right to knowledge, because where knowledge is oligarchic and ignorance is widespread, deprivation and injustice grow in a vicious circle. Knowledge is also a responsibility, because it must be at the service of environmental protection, peace building, peaceful coexistence, and human advancement.

It is urgent to link science and technology to ethics to achieve a sustainable development that everyone can enjoy.

### **c)** *Dialogue among cultures and religions*

In the *global village* world, walls cannot hide the multicultural and multireligious composition of our society. Regardless of their causes, the constant flow of people creates a more plural society. This new reality requires individuals and institutions to get involved in itineraries of confrontation and dialogue, capable of generating an encounter between the different identities that give life to society. The one we call "other" is our neighbour. Fear raises "fences" of mistrust, the encounter brings us closer and the dialogue makes us discover members of the same human family. The challenge is to transform closure into openness, mistrust into trust, the encounter into reciprocal enrichment.

In this context, religions have a great task ahead, because they can help women and men of our time to raise their gaze—stuck to the ground by a materialistic conception that has taken over mind and heart—and to open up to the dimension of the transcendent, rediscovering one's interior and spiritual life.

**d) Turn throwaways into cornerstones**

When the logic of profit and results dominates at all costs, the throwaway culture spreads. Elderly are thrown away, because they are no longer useful, children are thrown away, who are used as tools and consumption objects, young people are thrown away, who do not find a job. Education has the task of restoring harmony among generations, because memory is necessary and the elderly are the guardians of memory, and there is a need for hope and children and young people make it happens in our lives. The present is poor if it is deprived of the past and the future. It is important for society to work together in the political, social, educational and religious domains, to create better human relationships, overcoming the different forms of marginalization and building a great network of solidarity and collaboration.

**e) Overcoming existential fragmentation through inner harmony**

In the reality we live in, fragmentation does not occur only in the cultural, economic and political domains, but has roots in the shattered personal experience, which ignores how to mend itself as a unity.

It is an *existential fragmentation* (Milan, 2019), constituted by a personal experience disintegrated in many parts isolated from each other, which cannot be put together.

And even when considering the needs of the human person, this is done in a dissociated way, focusing on particular aspects, instead of focusing on everyone's totality and uniqueness.

*Less and less will people be called by name, less and less will this unique being be treated as a person with his or her own feelings, sufferings, problems, joys and family. Their illnesses will be known only in order to cure them, their financial needs only to provide for them, their lack of a home only to give them lodging, their desires for recreation and entertainment only to satisfy them". (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 193)*

The current human condition is experiencing loneliness and it is not mitigated, but exacerbated by the communication possibilities offered by the big internet network. As connections multiply, authentic interpersonal relationships diminish. The 'virtual places' where exchanges take place are similar to the 'non-places' indicated by M. Augé, referring to such many highly frequented but anonymous places, as airports, department stores, shopping centres... where people get close, but do not meet (Augé, 2009).

And together with the 'no-places,' especially young people, they live the experience of 'no-time,' deprived of memory and the hope for improvement.

The Holy Father invites us to place the person at the centre, in his integrity, in his relationship with others and with nature. It is necessary to act so that the educational process, formal and informal, are intertwined and nurture an educational path of integral ecology.

## From event to process

When Pope Francis launched the Compact on Education with his video message on 12th September, 2019 and fixed the date to celebrate the solemn signature of the Compact, no one could have imagined that, just a few months later, the world would have been hit, as by a tsunami, due to the pandemic caused by the outbreak of Covid-19. The pandemic would change all the agendas and require the review of every programme. The signing of the Compact, scheduled for October 2020, would be cancelled, but not the determination with which the Pope invites us to continue the path of the great educational alliance. The pandemic, rather than interrupting its path, contributes to further underline the urgency.

*On 12th September, 2019, Pope Francis launched the invitation to participate in the event that had to take place in Rome on 14th May, 2020, on the Global Compact on Education, but everything was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, the Pope himself had delved into the subject many times in various speeches and initiatives had been launched in many parts of the world, that multiplied expectations and traced specific learning pathways, aimed above all at educators and young generations.*

*On 15th October, 2020, a new stage began, with a subsequent video message in which the Pontiff placed the Global Compact on Education in the context of the dramatic phenomenon of the pandemic, spread everywhere, and relating it to the encyclical *Laudato si'*, as he had done in the previous message to the new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. (Zani, 2021, p. 26)*

We may say that what had to be a symbolic event turned into a wide-ranging process, which, as time goes by, becomes even more engaging and necessary. *The Global Compact on Education launched by Pope Francis, began a process that for months now has been rippling everywhere, in many paths and modalities, at various institutional levels.*

*In conclusion, the Global Compact on Education launched by Pope Francis, began a process that for months now has been rippling everywhere, in many paths and modalities, at various institutional levels. The Congregation for Catholic Education, which has the task of accompanying his actions, in addition to collecting and monitoring the most significant experiences promoted in many countries of the world; coordinates a Committee, created for this purpose, which is preparing the guidelines for educators and follows, together with the Foundation “Gravissimum educationis” and the University School “Educare all’Incontro e alla Solidarietà” (EIS) of the University LUMSA, the beginning of the work of further scientific studies of the initiatives. (Zani, 2021, p. 26)*

## Learning to learn

At the beginning of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis recalls, among the characteristics of our time, the acceleration of changes and the increase in complexity,

*Pope Francis recalls, among the characteristics of our time, the acceleration of changes and the increase in complexity, pointing out the concern for the diminishing sense of the common good.*

pointing out the concern for the diminishing sense of the common good.

*The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called*

*“rapidification”. Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. Moreover, the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development. Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity. (Pope Francis, 2015, LS, 18)*

For training systems, having to measure against rapidification is a very difficult challenge. In a society where everything changes rapidly, the traditional teaching model of transmission becomes useless, school curricula are forced to be profoundly renewed.

The knowledge economy requires education to include a theoretical understanding of complex concepts in study courses; in addition to the ability to use them creatively to generate new ideas, new theories, new products and new information.

The centrality of Learning, expressed in the slogan *learning to learn*, is universally recognized, but the way of interpreting what this Learning should consist of is not unambiguous. Simplifying, we can say that two different visions face each other: the *functionalist* and the *personalist* (Fiorín, 2014).

In the functionalist vision, the economic reality dictates, both to school and university, which should be the priorities that decide the quality of these institutions. They will enjoy a better reputation to the extent that they know how to better respond to market demands.

In the personalist conception, purpose and objectives must respond to the development requirements of the human person, considered in the integrity of its dimensions. The quality of the learning pathway will be evaluated, not only on the basis of the ability to respond to the demands of the labour market, but also to promote the harmonious development of students. The functionalist vision mainly emphasizes the productive aspects and the cognitive dimension of learning, while the personalist conception also considers the relational and social aspects, of the construction of the personality and of the personal significance of the experience.

## What motivation should be offered to students?

### a) *Utilitarian motivation*

From the functionalism perspective, what counts is the result. Individual action is highly appreciated, the capacity of the individual to make autonomous decisions, to manage alone, to emerge, possibly “taking the first step”. These qualities are associated with values, such as achieving excellence, merit recognition, the ability to compete and achieve success. This vision presents aspects that should not be underestimated. No one can deny the importance of personal commitment, the value of trying to solve problems autonomously, not giving in to the first difficulties. But frequently the emphasis on personal fulfilment is accompanied

by an individualistic conception of education, where there is no place for others if they can represent an obstacle to the desire for personal affirmation. The culture in which we live pushes, in a thousand ways, in that direction, favouring an autistic dimension of personal life and a competitive dimension of the relationship with others. It seems that the only motivation to act is personal interest and the profit that can be derived from it.

### **b) Inner motivation**

Resorting to external forms of recognition to induce commitment to studying is strongly biased and runs the risk of producing more harm than good. Such a narrow understanding of the learning value omits that, for young people, it can be much more exciting to be involved in a project to transform reality; “be bothered” about an ideal that may even seem utopian because it is so great. It is not said that the praise of individual success within an old world where to integrate quickly, is more appealing than the prospect of a new world to be built; than a generous leadership, whose purpose is not the preservation of what already exists, but a profound change. Not only can young people be offered a private sense, but also a social sense of the commitment that is asked of them; they can be associated with a great hope, which is to involve them in building a better world.

Pope Francis addresses young people asking them:

*to correct models of growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations. Sadly, few have heard the appeal to acknowledge the gravity of the problems and, even more, to set in place a new economic model, the fruit of a culture of communion based on fraternity and equality.<sup>30</sup>*

A motivation based on external recognition does not mobilize the internal dimension of the person and, therefore, does not build interdependence, autonomy, confidence in one's own possibilities, that is, those values that one wishes to achieve.

In education, it is much more effective to link the desire for success with personal responsibility, and not with competitive confrontation with peers, avoiding increasing opposition and favouring the exchange of success attributes.

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30 Pope Francis (2019a). Letter Sent by the Holy Father for the Event “Economy of Francesco,” 1st May 2019. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190501\\_giovani-imprenditori.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190501_giovani-imprenditori.html)



## Education is transformation

The Holy Father frequently repeats that “only by changing education can we change the world.” It is an important statement, which contains two messages.

*“only by changing education can we change the world.”*

First, the relevance of education as a “gear lever” is affirmed. Educating is a risk, a

bet, an exercise of hope that helps the weakest to overcome determinism and fatalism, and that contrasts the egoism of the strongest.

Second, Pope Francis says that education as it is does not work well, and that it must be profoundly changed. He invites us to question ourselves about its meaning and about the ways in which we develop the educational process.

We face a serious dichotomy.

Thanks to the contribution of technology, the learning environment expanded enormously, going beyond classroom limits, it became reticular. Also the learning time extended beyond schools to encompass the whole span of life (*Long Life Learning*). For these reasons, our society defines itself as the ‘knowledge society’<sup>31</sup>

But this does not refer to everyone, moreover, educational poverty is rapidly increasing and generates a deep gap between rich and poor countries; the phenomenon of school dropouts, inequalities and punishment of the weakest is also growing within the economically more advanced countries themselves.

There are many more similarities than meets the eye, between school systems in countries with economic welfare and those in poorer countries; both threatened by the invasion of a mercantile culture that, in the interests of profits and dividends, which knows no rules, produces selective education, reserved for the few who can access it.

Along with this, we are witnessing a mass education that is not concerned with the human and social promotion of the poorest, but with reassuring and ‘taming’ *“an education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless*” (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 60). We are facing a training system that pursues a double standard:

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<sup>31</sup> A European relationship, which has had a lot of influence in Europe to guide teaching processes towards greater coherence with the demands of modernity, is the European Union White Paper on Teaching and Learning (1995), Brussels, subtitled “Towards the Learning Society”.

a standard of excellence for the privileged few who can access the best opportunities; a standard of mediocrity for the vast majority of those who, as Eduardo Galeano (1999) writes, “*are neither rich nor poor*”<sup>32</sup>, and whose destiny is to be consumers. A system that Illich (1973) describes as an enormous “*didactic funnel*” that transforms the diversity and originality of each person into the “*man of consensus*”. Educating is a liberating work, promoting the human person and society; it is an inclusive enterprise, which should not leave anyone aside, because it cannot be accepted that together with the “*people who have the means needed to develop their personal and family lives, but there are also many ‘non-citizens,’ ‘half citizens’ and ‘urban remnants’*” (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 74).

To build this new humanism, which the reconstruction of the Compact on Education focuses, a first essential step is to educate people “to a new thought, that can reconcile unity and diversity, equality and freedom, identity and otherness.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to change. “*It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed*” (Pope Francis, 2014, EG, 74).

## Service-learning and the Pedagogy of Pope Francis

Service-learning has its origin well before the Compact on Education proposal (early sixties). First developed in the United States and Latin America, today it is widely implemented in schools and universities around the world, where educators and students of all beliefs and cultures live the experience. Although the philosophy that inspires this approach cannot be considered an expression of the pedagogical culture of the Catholic world, there are multiple contact points with the educational thought of Pope Francis and it is interesting to make a pause in these contact points, which highlight a double positivity.

On the one hand, Service-learning is presented as a pedagogical and educational practice proposal, capable of materializing the many requests with which Pope Francis invites us to rethink education. On the other hand, the thought of the Holy Father contributes to enrich the meaning of most characteristic educational aspects, so that, when finding that meaning, the educational spectrum of Service-learning is further enriched.

32 Galeano (1999) writes in a beautiful text: “Day after day, children are denied the right to be children. The acts that make a mockery of this right, impart their teachings in everyday life. The world treats rich children as if they were money, so they get used to acting the way money acts. The world treats poor children as if they were garbage, so then they become garbage. And those in the middle, the children who are neither rich nor poor, are tied to the television set, so that from an early stage they accept being trapped in life as their destiny. Children who can actually be children have a lot of magic and luck”.

33 Congregation for Catholic Education, 2020. *Instrumentum Laboris*.

<https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/resources/Risorse/instrumentum-laboris-en.pdf>

We can consider Service-learning as a concrete, practicable possibility of responding to the Pope's call; a great opportunity offered to teachers to contribute to the reconstruction of the Compact on Education, initiating processes of change based on their own reality and the links with their own culture and community.

*The true service of education is education to service. Moreover, educational research also increasingly recognizes the central dimension of service to others and the community as a tool and as an end of education itself.*

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*Think for example about the great development of Service-learning. This kind of research shows how service can be not only a training activity among others (the importance of volunteer work in the training of young people is well recognized), but more radically how it can become the fundamental method*

*through which all knowledge and skills can be transmitted and acquired. We could point to this process as a development from education to service to education as service, whereby our brethren are both the way and the goal of education.<sup>34</sup> (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2020)*

In his message to young people, on Palm Sunday 2020, Pope Francis focuses his reflection on the meaning of 'service.' The speech is delivered within a very difficult situation due to the pandemic that made women and men worldwide undergo a hard test. But the pandemic, revealing the fragility that characterizes us as human beings, leaves us in a position to better understand what is truly important when people are in dire need, and to appreciate the capacity for service witnessed by many men and women who care for and comfort people tested by Covid-19.

These are the heroes to admire.

*The tragedy we are experiencing at this time summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others (...)*

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/resources/Risorse/instrumentum-laboris-en.pdf>

*Dear friends, look at the real heroes who come to light in these days: they are not famous, rich and successful people; rather, they are those who are giving themselves in order to serve others. Feel called yourselves to put your lives on the line. Do not be afraid to devote your life to God and to others; it pays! For life is a gift we receive only when we give ourselves away, and our deepest joy comes from saying yes to love, without ifs and buts.<sup>35</sup>*

The pandemic, says the Holy Father, makes us understand that, in our vulnerability, we are all in the same boat; called to rediscover that “*awareness that we are part of one another, that we are brothers and sisters of one another*” (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 32).

Solidarity, competence at the service of those in need and mutual care will save us from the storm.

With brave words, Francis offers young people an alternative proposal to the message they continually receive from a culture soaked in egocentricity, which Forde (2005) calls *dissocialized*.

The Pope condemned in many opportunities the close relationship between the growth of individualism and inequalities, between the search for individual affirmation and the loss of the feeling of solidarity. He recommends that young people adopt a different logic, against the tide, the logic of service, being aware that the human person is not a monad, isolated, closed in on itself, self-sufficient:

*We are not isolated monads, like billiard balls that meet and hitting one another on the green carpet of life. We are social beings, although conflictive, selfish, who need the altruism of others. This contradictory situation makes coexistence difficult and learning to live together appears, once again, as the main educational task.* (Marina, 2013, p. 6, own translation)

Service-learning—understanding learning in terms of advantage not only individual, but also social—educates to open up to others, enabling an authentic and supportive encounter. It has a dual purpose: to promote in students the development of disciplinary and general skills (*hard and soft skills*), closely related to the development of the curriculum; and to make available such skills, to address needs present in the context of life itself, through the design and implementation of competent interventions (Fiorín, 2016).

Service-learning trajectories reveal multiple contact points with the richness of Francisco’s pedagogy.

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35 Pope Francis (2020c). Message to the Youth, Palm Sunday.

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200405\\_omelia-palme.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200405_omelia-palme.html)

*Service-learning trajectories reveal multiple contact points with the richness of Francis-co's pedagogy.*

In the strong and poetic message that Pope Francis addressed to Scholas Occurrentes, on the occasion of the launching of

the University of Meaning, the three criteria that education must follow are indicated: *“Education is listening, or it does not educate. If one does not listen, one does not educate. Education creates culture, or it does not educate. Education teaches us to celebrate, or it does not educate... Harmonizing the language of thought with feelings and actions. That is what you heard me say many times: the language of the head, of the heart and of the hands, synchronized. Head, heart and hands, growing harmoniously.”*<sup>36</sup>

#### a) Listen

Educating is not just academic, observing the world from afar, but committing to reality. Milan writes (2019, p. 12):

*Pope Francis' 'pedagogy of harmony' goes hand in hand (...) with which we could define his 'exit pedagogy.' We know that 'going forth' is another of the ideas-force that Bergoglio uses, almost as an imperative to listen and coherently obey on the part of each one, all the more on the part of educators. This concept is closely linked to the very effective 'do not sit on the balcony'”.*

The expression *sitting on the balcony* indicates to be observing from the balcony in slippers, without being questioned and moved; having eyes and not seeing, ears and not hearing; indifferent or sceptical.

As the Pope states: *“Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others.”* (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 270).

Becoming a 'neighbour' means get out of one's own cage, and going to meet those who are in need.

Service-learning educates this human availability.

36 Pope Francis (2020d). Video Message of his Holiness Pope Francis to Mark the Global Cyber Meeting organized by the Pontifical Scholas Occurrentes, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200605\\_videomessaggio-scholas-occurrentes.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200605_videomessaggio-scholas-occurrentes.html)

Each Service-learning experience starts from listening to reality, an attentive and empathetic listening, which allows us to accept the problematic aspects, the evident or hidden needs, that demand that someone take care of them. Service-learning is 'looking with the heart', as the Good Samaritan did in the evangelical parable, who did not pass by the body of the wounded man, did not look away. Rather, he felt challenged and knew how to listen to the request for help.

Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that helps students to listen with their hearts, to see and feel they are called to the cause; it places them in front of real problems, which they can face thanks to the school or academic competencies they are developing. But it is not about carrying out a simple exercise or a drill, but about carrying out solidarity and competent actions, capable of responding to problems that are really present in the social context. The pedagogical device used is that of research/action/reflection.

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The first moment foresees research, study, because it is necessary to know in depth the problems on which the attention is focused. A superficial knowledge is not enough, a deep understanding is required, critical thinking is required

(analysis, recognition of correlations, conceptualization, evaluation). It is necessary to pay much attention to the *Learning* dimension, which is nurtured by the disciplines provided in the curriculum. Otherwise, solidarity action would be developed as a voluntary service, it would not satisfy the nature of Service-learning, which provides for an essential integration between learning and service. It is the integration between these two dimensions which represents the originality of Service-learning and highlights its educational value. As many investigations show (Furco, 2001), if students use the competences acquired in the educational path to respond to problems present in the social context, they improve not only the quality of their learning, but also the motivation to learn and their openness towards the others.

Getting students to test themselves with real problems requires including into the school curriculum a strong openness to reality in its social, cultural, and environmental aspects.

In this way the meaning of curriculum is rethought, which must be connected with the experience of students; and the conception of school subjects is renewed, understood not

as deposits of lifeless knowledge, but as tools for solving problems, keys to understanding the needs present in the context of life.

### **b) Create**

“*Responsibility*” comes from the Latin “*Respondeo*” (I respond).

The desire to respond, to commit oneself, to give one’s own contribution is born from listening to reality with our intelligence and our heart. Responsibility, as an answer to the problems we have discovered, creates the bridge between academic learning (*Learning*) and solidarity intervention (*Service*).

Testing yourself with real problems is the best way to develop creative thinking, capable of recognizing solutions, of generating positive changes.

But it is not enough to educate critical thinking without an education to ethical thinking and the assumption of personal responsibility, which allows not only to overcome the limit of an educational process focused exclusively on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of competencies limited to the classroom reality, but enriches the learning carried out with social value. Committing yourself by offering your own contribution to respond to real needs increases the sense of the importance of what has been learned. Didactics becomes an invitation to encounter, to emerge from self-referentiality, a contribution to understanding the problems of today’s world, to feeling challenged, to be engaged.

You become responsible citizens when we care about the reality in which we live, not simply our individual interest; when we take care of the natural and social environment for which we feel responsible. Education is fulfilled when training students who do not only care about being highly prepared, but also enhanced in humanity.

### **c) Celebrate**

Listen, create and celebrate, that is the pedagogical itinerary indicated by Pope Francis. The celebration closes the circle; it is the moment of awareness and gratitude, the moment to party and share. An experience is meaningful if it makes us grow as people, and being aware of it produces gratitude. We discover that the path made has been interwoven with encounters that have spiritually enriched us. These encounters

are intertwined with unexpected knowledge, with new views of the world, especially with relationships, with ties that were strengthened, with a sense of community that has been enriched, with what we were able to offer, with how much we have received. Celebrating means acknowledging the gift we have received, which is much more than what we have been able to give.

What is being celebrated is a reversal of logic. From the utilitarian culture with the scale of values of personal success that places *possession* in the highest rank, to the personalist culture where, thanks to the value of the *gift*, ranks change. The value of becoming and being comes first: to be richer in meaning, to be at peace, to be human.

It has been said that education is a double gift process. The first gift is the one that the educator gives to young people, a gift of wisdom, of teaching, of testimony; the second gift is the one that young people themselves will then give to their own community, where they will bring the benefit of what they have learned (Puig-Rovira, in Bornatici, 2020). But a third gift could be added: the one that is received in exchange, thanks to the gift that was given to others.

In Service-learning this is very evident. Students receive much more than what they do through their solidarity actions; educators can testify that the same thing happens to them.

Service-learning is not a welfare-like approach, it does not have a unidirectional trajectory—from the benefactor to the beneficiary—but it is a circular movement also with regard to service. In Service-learning, the one who gives also receives, in a symmetrical relationship according to the principle of solidarity. Service-learning is an experience of solidarity that involves all participants in a meaningful and enriching relationship for all.

*The word “solidarity” is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. (Pope Francis, 2013, EG, 188)*

Service-learning projects anticipate a final moment called ‘celebration,’ where the results of the experience carried out are shared and very frequently it happens that this takes place in a party context, with all the participants of the project. We can see this final moment as a moment of celebration, of mutual gratitude for what each one gave to the others, the moment of the ‘third gift.’



## Integral education and universal fraternity

Everything that has been said so far allows us to affirm that Service-learning is a proposal that addresses the integrity of the person, promoting the development of the *head* (a well-made head), of the *hand* (competence in action) and of the *heart* (availability towards others, solidarity). No wonder we can recognize that it is a proposal that assumes the perspective of integral ecology in the educational and didactic fields.

Educating to know, to think critically, to intervene responsibly, is the condition to help students to build a unitary vision and to locate themselves in historical and geographical spaces and times, but also in those of nature and the cosmos. Both scientific and humanistic training contribute to the training of a person aware of its own identity, history, local and planetary location; aware of the multiple interdependencies that unite spaces, times, societies, environments; capable of assuming responsibilities. This is how the school experience and existential demands are composed of, the school becomes a place of life and openness to the external world, the required learning becomes good sense, meaning, turning into a resource for the person and a gift for the community.

The key word for building a different society is *fraternity*. The new paradigm that opposes the predatory and destructive paradigm of individualism is the paradigm of gratuity. The invitation for those who want to contribute through education to improve society is:

*to think gratuity, and therefore fraternity, as key factors of the human condition and, consequently, to see in the practice of gift the essential requirement for the State and the market to work with a view to the common good. Without extensive practices of gift, an efficient market and a strong (and even fair) State may be possible, but people will certainly not be helped to reach the joy of living. The reason for this is that efficiency and justice, even when they are together, are not enough in order to guarantee the happiness of people. (Zamagni, 2009)*

## Conclusion

Facing the challenges imposed on the human condition by an individualistic culture that projects “dark clouds over a closed world” (Pope Francis, 2020, FT), with the risk of imposing a unique cultural model, which manipulates man and destroys the environment, the Holy Father asks education to be renewed, working to rebuild, according to the principle of a Global Compact on Education, the new *educational village*. The proposed challenge to education requires not only to reinforce awareness of human rights, both individual and social, but also to understand the insufficiency of affirming them with vigour and even making them an

object of study, if this does not translate into personal and collective commitment. School and university are called to contribute to this vision and to this commitment, bringing learning communities to life, where the values of listening, meeting, dialogue, solidarity, and the common good are experienced and put into practice. Service-learning represents a particularly effective instrument for this to be done.

School and university are called to participate in the beauty of the commitment to change the world. Therefore, can we affirm that educational action is political action? And that Service-learning is a pedagogical instrument of political action? Or better yet, political love?

We think that it is indeed, in the terms that Pope Francis himself suggests:

*Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian...becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the 'field of charity most vast, namely political charity.'* (Pope Francis, 2020, FT, 180)

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*Uniservitate* is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning in Catholic Higher Education. It aims to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), through the institutionalisation of service-learning (SL) as a tool to achieve its mission of an integral education and formation of agents of change committed to their community.

***“We will not change the world,  
if we do not change education”***

*Pope Francis*

## **2** Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church

We are pleased to present the book *Service-learning pedagogy and the teachings of the Catholic Church*, a polyhedral text, born in different parts of the world, an expression of different voices and an invitation to reflect on Higher Education in view of a greater commitment to the universal human family. Its intention is to contribute to the generation of Higher Education Institutions (university and non-university, Catholic and non-confessional) capable of networking and generating life, of learning and generating meaning in their being and from their knowledge and doing, for others and with others, and not only cloisters that live for themselves. It is a text with a plural, global and diverse perspective, which opens up dialogue and builds bridges that contribute to achieving a more fraternal society.

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