

DOCUMENT OF THE 44TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF FE Y ALEGRÍA

“Inclusive Education in the Mission of Fe y Alegría”

1. Inclusive education in Fe y Alegría.

1. The vision of Fe y Alegría motivates us to believe in inclusiveness, an inclusiveness in which quality and equality are inseparable and where diversity is celebrated in all its richness. In the 44th Congress of Fe y Alegría, whose theme was “Inclusive Education and Its Challenges,” we concluded that inclusive education is the right of every person and that it is directly related to our identity and our *raison d’être*. Inclusiveness is intrinsic to the origins and the mission of Fe y Alegría and is essential to its task of popular education and social promotion: the mission of Fe y Alegría is to work with and for the excluded sectors.

2. It is through its dedication to popular education that Fe y Alegría understands and practices inclusive education. The option that Fe y Alegría makes for the poor and the excluded helps to explain why it struggles to put the right to inclusive education within the reach of everyone without exception and why it struggles to make education an engine for transforming social realities that exclude people into social realities that include them. Fe y Alegría invites everyone to join with us in our mission: ensuring that the impoverished, the excluded, and the marginalized enjoy, along with everyone else, the right to an inclusive, high-quality education.

3. Speaking from the different contexts in which Fe y Alegría is working, we are witnesses of the many forms of exclusion suffered by our peoples, and we understand such exclusion to be a violation of their human rights. We feel deeply about this exclusion, and our indignation makes us react by denouncing the societies that produce exclusion and by committing ourselves to providing inclusive education.

4. Fe y Alegría bases its commitment to inclusive education on fundamental principles: *“All human beings have equal dignity; this dignity is absolute in each and every person, and we have dignity simply by virtue of our humanity. This dignity does not depend on anybody or anything. It cannot increase or diminish. It is equal for everyone and for all time.”* Moreover, we have *“faith that we are all children of God and that God’s favorites are those who are poorest, most needy, and most excluded.”*¹

¹ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Identity and Spirituality of Fe y Alegría in Service to the Mission.* 42nd International Congress, Bogotá, Colombia, 2011.

5. Fe y Alegría's conviction that education is meant to transform our society is rooted in our spirituality, which urges us *"not to flee from reality but to submerge ourselves in it and try to humanize it .. by practicing a spirituality that promotes a more decent and happy life for all."*²

6. Our popular education perspective leads us to believe that educational communities have a key role to play in the construction of an inclusive society. Since society is diverse, its educational spaces and experiences should also be diverse. It is very difficult to build a society that includes everybody if some people are educated separately. Educational communities should play a strategic roles as microsystems of the society we desire to create: a society that is just, participative, and fraternal;³ a society respects the dignity of all persons; a society with structures and ways of acting that make it possible to overcome inequality, poverty, discrimination, and exclusion. Fe y Alegría finds the reconciliation of society in the God revealed by Jesus, who demands just relations and righteous institutions.

7. Father José María Vélaz held that Fe y Alegría is founded on the humanistic thesis that integral education brings forth all the potentialities that God places in every man and woman. He urged us to believe in the "marvelous human mystery" that allows us to have confidence in the transformation and self-advancement that are possible for educated individuals and that enable them to create better paths toward collective solidarity as members of the great human family.⁴ *"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to the simple folk"* (Mt 11,25).

2. Responding to our unequal contexts

*"Being a Movement of Popular Education means permanent creative destabilization and incessant analysis of reality from the perspective of the poor and the excluded. It requires an attitude of serious adventure with large doses of boldness, inconformity, sincere and constant self-criticism in order to overcome incoherencies and make our practices meet the demands and the challenges that are presented by an ever changing reality and by the increasing impoverishment and exclusion of the masses."*⁵

International Federation of Fe y Alegría

² *Ibidem.*

³ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Vision and Mission of Fe y Alegría.* Caracas, Venezuela, 1985.

⁴ **Fr. José María Vélaz.** *Fe y Alegría: Principal Characteristics and Instruments of Action.* 1981.

⁵ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Popular Education Today and the Way It Becomes Concrete in Our Practices.* 32nd International Congress of Fe y Alegría. Guatemala, 2001.

8. As a Movement of Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion, we are committed to the historical process of the popular sectors in the construction of a just, fraternal society, and we are deeply moved and motivated by the social reality that surrounds us.⁶ We live a world marked by inequality, a world where incomes, resources, and opportunities are systematically and disproportionately concentrated in one small segment of the population.⁷ This situation of growing structural inequality is the consequence of the neo-liberal policies that have prevailed since the 1990s, producing many types of poverty, both new and old.⁸

9. Great inequality is expressed not only in terms of income but also in access to health, housing, education, work, and participation in society. Inequality deprives the poor of full enjoyment of their human rights and makes them more vulnerable to abuse of their rights. This is evident both in the never-ending situations of poverty and in the general social environment. “The profound crisis of social cohesion and fragmentation in our societies has aggravated old social problems like violence and discrimination and has given rise to new phenomena like large-scale migration and geographic segregation. ... Neighborhoods become differentiated, separated, and homogenized. The rich join together to live by themselves, and the poor remain grouped together in the most degraded sectors of the urban landscape. ... People live increasingly only with others like themselves and less and less with those who are different from them.”⁹

10. The tendency to exclusiveness is reproduced and exacerbated in our educational systems. In most of our countries the educational systems have not known how to respond effectively to the challenge of being inclusive. They have failed in the duty of delivering quality education for all students. In many cases the educational systems, instead of correcting the inequalities, legitimize them.¹⁰ “Education is a right of all persons and should be attainable in equality of conditions. ... If the right to quality education is available to only a part of the population, as is the case today, then far from contributing to inclusiveness and development, it produces social disintegration.”¹¹

11. We are only two years away from the date established for fulfilling the “Goals of Education for All” that were approved by UNESCO in Dakar (Senegal) in the year

⁶ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Vision and Mission...*

⁷ **Ocampo Prado, M.** *Contexto y enfoques de desarrollo en América Latina*, Módulo 3, Diplomado en Gerencia Social Ignaciana. Universidad Javeriana. Bogotá, Colombia. 2013

⁸ Letter of the Jesuit Provincials of Latin America on Neo-liberalism. Mexico. 1996.

⁹ **López, N.** *Equidad educativa y desigualdad social. Desafíos a la Educación en el nuevo escenario latinoamericano.* IPE-UNESCO. Buenos Aires. Argentina. 2005.

¹⁰ **Bolívar, A.** “Equidad Educativa y Teorías de la Justicia.” *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 3 (2). 2005. 42-69.

¹¹ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Commitment to Education. Six Proposals for Dialogue and Action.* Madrid, Spain. 2008.

2000,¹² and the panorama is not at all encouraging. According to the 2012 “Progress Report of Education for All,”¹³ there has been slow progress toward many of the goals, and it is quite probable that most the goals will not be reached.

12. Thanks to political effort, social pressure, and the advocacy of international agencies and civil society, recent decades have seen an expansion of educational systems so that they are able to receive the great majority of children and adolescents. Nevertheless, this progress still leaves many pockets of actual or potential exclusion, such as youngsters who enter the educational system late, those who fail repeatedly, those who suffer discrimination, and those who do not find an educational setting that allows them to develop their capacities.¹⁴

13. With regard to access to education, the influence of the students’ socio-economic level becomes greater as they advance in age and educational level. In Latin America, for example, four out of five students from high-income homes manage to finish secondary education, but only one out of five students from low-income homes does so. This situation is especially serious in rural contexts and among indigenous populations.¹⁵

14. The indigenous peoples have been affected historically by conditions of inequality and discrimination. Their educational opportunities are reduced by the difficulties of access to the educational system, the distance to the schools, the deficient quality of

¹² **Education for All: Goals and Advances until 2012:**

Goal 1: The improvements in early childhood education have been too slow. In 2008 approximately 28% of children under age five were below normal size and weight, and less than half the world’s children have access to education.

Goal 2: The advances aimed at making universal primary education a reality are losing steam. In 2010 there were still 61 million children in the world without schooling. Of every 100 children who are not in school, it is estimated that 47 will never be.

Goal 3: Many young people do not have basic skills. In 123 countries with low to medium-low incomes, some 200 million young people aged 15 to 24 have not even finished primary schools. This represents one out of every five young people.

Goal 4: Achieving adult literacy continues to be a difficult objective. The number of illiterate adults decreased only 12% between 1990 and 2010. In 2010 some 775 million adults were illiterate, and two-thirds of them were women.

Goal 5: The disparities between boys and girls are of various types. In 2010 there were still sixteen countries with fewer than nine girls for every ten boys in primary school. In more than half of the 96 countries that have not attained parity between the sexes, the girls are in a situation of inferiority.

Goal 6: The inequality in the results of education continue to be very great on the world scale. No fewer than 250 million children reach fourth grade without being able to read or write.

¹³ UNESCO. *Progress Report of Education for All in the World*. France. 2012

¹⁴ UNICEF and UIS/UNESCO. *Report on the Global Initiative for Children Not Attending School*. 2012. Available at <http://completarlaescuela.org/>.

¹⁵ United Nations, Social and Economic Council. *Challenges for Education with Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2011.

the centers to which they have access, and the irrelevance of the curriculum to their cultures.¹⁶

15. The 2012 report on “Gender Discrimination in Education” reveals that gender discrimination and stereotypes are deeply rooted in the educational systems. Although the rate of enrolment of girls increased, they are more likely to leave school before finishing primary than boys are. Apart from access to and permanence in school, the educational trajectory of girls and women is often obstructed by situations of violence, abuse, and exploitation. Furthermore, school environments and educational materials and curricula continue to reproduce gender stereotypes.¹⁷

16. At present between 500 and 600 million persons in the world have some kind of disability. This includes between 120 and 150 million children and young people, of whom only 2% have access to education. Those who do receive education often attend special segregated schools in which the students do not have the same educational opportunities as are offered in regular schools. This situation of exclusion is more serious in the higher levels of the educational system.¹⁸

17. The situation of migrants offers great challenges to educational proposals in contexts of cultural diversity since such proposals attempt to achieve a social harmony that overcomes discrimination and xenophobia. Persons have the right to migrate in search of new opportunities for work, and migration is a permanent worldwide reality. Especially difficult is the situation of refugees and displaced persons. At the present time there are approximately 43.3 million refugees and displaced persons in the world. Of these, some 22 million are children and young people under age 22. As regards the education of refugees, the governments of the receiving country often do not have the capacity to admit young refugees to the local schools, and sometimes there are serious problems because of the lack of accessibility, the differences in curriculum, or the language used. There is also a need to consider the difficulties faced by returning populations as they attempt to reintegrate themselves into their native countries.¹⁹

18. Every day people in different parts of the world have their right to an education violated because they experience discrimination and violence as a result of their sexual orientation or their gender identity, whether real or perceived. In December 2011

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ **World Campaign for the Right to Education.** *Gender Discrimination in Education: The violation of rights of women and girls.* 2012. Available at: http://campaignforeducation.org/docs/reports/GCE_INTERIM_Gender_Report.pdf.

¹⁸ **Dávila et al.** *Las personas con discapacidad, el derecho a la educación y la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño.* In *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva.* Vol. 4. No. 2. Santiago, Chile. 2010.

¹⁹ **Entreculturas and JRS.** *Educación en tiempo de espera. Un derecho vulnerado para millones de personas refugiadas y desplazadas.* Madrid, Spain. 2010

UNESCO organized the first international consultation of the United Nations to discuss bullying of students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersexual, or transvestite. The consultation concluded with a declaration urging governments to eliminate all such unacceptable and devastating harassment in educational institutions around the world.²⁰

19. Given these marked levels of social exclusion, Fe y Alegría considers it imperative to insist on the urgent need to change the focus of educational policies so that quality education is considered a public good that is the right of all persons and the responsibility of the whole society. “Education is a powerful instrument for human development and social transformation. It is a force that contributes to a just society, a committed citizenry, and the integral development of every person. This conception of the educational task involves influencing the social context and working with people in concrete situations; it means being devoted to collaborating with those who are excluded while at the same time being present in the public realm and creating spaces which favor active and responsible participation in decision-making.”²¹ Consequently, this conception leads us to consider educational activity and the role of national educational systems as the responsibility of an “educating society” that promotes learning communities and spaces and maintains strong bonds with the diverse social and political agents.²²

3. Inclusive education that opposes exclusion

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1

20. Fe y Alegría considers inclusive education to be a binding right in the development of societies that are just, equitable, and democratic, and it considers that education should be of good quality and equally accessible to all. These principles have been reaffirmed by the international conferences sponsored by UNESCO,²³ the most recent of which was eloquently titled, “Inclusive Education: the Road to the Future.”

21. Given its immersion among the most disadvantaged sectors, its direct knowledge of the social contexts, and its work in popular education and social promotion, Fe y Alegría

²⁰ UNESCO. *Gender Violence and Homophobic Bullying in the School Setting*. 2012. Available at: http://issuu.com/unescosantiago/docs/bullying_esp_web__4_?e=7592412/2019146.

²¹ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría**. Fe y Alegría: International Actor and Sensitizing Agent for Social Transformation. 35th International Congress—Spain 2004. Caracas, Venezuela. 2005.

²² **Barrios Yaselli, M.** “Por un continuo educativo en clave de desarrollo humano. Una visión desde Fe y Alegría.” In **International Federation of Fe y Alegría**. *A Better Education for a Better Society*. 2008.

²³ Jomtien in 1990, Dakar in 2000, and Geneva in 2008.

makes an option for inclusive education, and it views education as a vital means for transforming the reality of exclusion. Education should be available to all the diverse persons who experience exclusion for social, economic, gender, religious, cultural, physical, psychological, physiological, or any other reasons. They are the ones with whom we are committed to work in order to forge new social and power relations. Accordingly, Fe y Alegría takes up the great challenge of advancing toward a type of education that is ever more inclusive even as it realizes that in our countries such a goal means engaging in a countercultural process that needs to be contextualized.

22. Inclusive education is a theoretical pedagogical concept that considers the ways in which we should respond to the diversity that is becoming ever more characteristic of our societies. The term “inclusive education” arose in the 1990s as an alternative to “integration,” which until then was the dominant one in educational practice. The basic premise was that it is necessary to modify the educational system so that it responds to the needs of students instead of assuming that it is the students who have to adapt to the educational system and become integrated into it.²⁴

23. In some countries inclusive education is still thought of in terms of the treatment given to children and young people with different abilities. At the international level, however, the term is understood more broadly; it means the reform that accepts and supports every sort of diversity among students (cultural, gender, sexual, socio-economic, religious, and every other sort). This is the perspective of Fe y Alegría, which considers quality education to be the right of all persons and is determined to work with the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded.

24. *“Inclusive education is seen as **the process** of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners by increasing their participation in learning, cultural, and community activities and by reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of an appropriate age range and with the conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. Inclusion is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non-formal educational settings. Rather than being a marginal issue of integrating some learners into mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that seeks to transform educational systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenging way to enrich the learning environment, rather than a problem.”²⁵*

²⁴ Yadarola, M. E. *El aula inclusiva, el espacio educativo para todos*. I Congreso Iberoamericano sobre Síndrome de Down. Buenos Aires, Argentina. 2007.

²⁵ UNESCO. *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris. UNESCO. 2005.

25. Given this perspective, Fe y Alegría sees diversity as richness, and we embrace it, refusing to homogenize students or educators. Nevertheless, we assume this perspective from the place to which our identity and our mission have led us, which is the place and the perspective of the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded whom we are called to serve. In our educational contexts and communities with their diverse educational modalities and areas (formal and informal, technical, radio classes, special education, social promotion, community development, etc.) we treasure and celebrate cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and social diversity, as well as diversity of abilities, learning styles, and gender, because we know that such diversities enrich our educational communities and benefit every one of us.

26. Developing truly inclusive educational communities is a challenge. It requires a profound transformation of ways societies and individuals think and act. There need to be changes of mentality, of attitude, and of action, and these changes will have repercussions on the educational system of every society.²⁶

27. Inclusive education requires educational communities that can respond to diversity and design methodologies, learning systems, infrastructures, and organizational structures that respond to the diversity in the whole population,²⁷ as we will see further on.

28. Given its focus on popular education and the institutional options expressed above, Fe y Alegría agree with experts in inclusive education²⁸ who hold that such education should achieve harmony by considering the following factors:

29. Inclusion is a process: it should be conceived as a constant search for better ways of responding to the diversity of persons. The educational systems should learn to live with differences and take advantage of them; they should value difference as a stimulus that helps both students and educators to learn. There is a need to be patient and persevering and to realize that time is needed before changes are assimilated and integrated.

30. Before the need for inclusion could be recognized as an essential part of the right to education, it was necessary to overcome a long series of exclusions. The process can be summed up in three basic stages:²⁹

²⁶ **Valenciano, G.** *Construyendo un concepto de educación inclusiva: Una experiencia compartida.* INICO. Salamanca, Spain. 2009.

²⁷ **Yadarola, M. E.** Op. cit.

²⁸ **Ainscow, M., Booth, T., Dyson, A., Farrell, P., Frankham, J., Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and Smith, R.** *Improving schools, developing inclusion.* Routledge. London, England. 2006.
Echeita, G. "Inclusión y Exclusión Educativa. Voz y Quebranto." *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 6(2). 2008. 9-18

- The first stage was the concession of the right to education to those to whom it had been denied historically (women, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, and disabled persons). This stage supposes the passage from exclusion to segregation; that is, access to education was granted to these groups, but they were still confined to special educational centers.
- The second stage progressed from educational segregation and advanced toward integration: the groups were integrated but they had to adapt to the available educational processes, regardless of their native language or any considerations of religion, ethnicity, gender, or disability.
- The third stage requires adaptation of the educational process to the diversity of the students and the educators. The requirement that the recently arrived adapt to the available educational process is replaced by the adaptation of the teaching methods to the equal right that everyone has to an education.

31. In accord with this schema, UNESCO³⁰ proposes inclusion as the fourth step of a process that begins with **Exclusion**, by which one or more groups are simply left without access to education; the second step is **Segregation**, where special schools are opened for specific groups, such as schools for children with Down syndrome or schools only for “gifted children”; the third step is **Integration**, which means that units are created in the schools to attend to the “special” students, who must then adapt to the existing educational culture; and the fourth and last step is **Inclusion**, whereby the schools accept the challenge of creating a new culture in which quality and equality are inseparable and diversity is considered something valuable.

EXCLUSION >>> SEGREGATION >>> INTEGRATION >>> INCLUSION

32. For Fe y Alegría, true inclusiveness requires a permanent sense of “pilgrimage,” moving from the pole of exclusion to the pole of inclusion. Along the way it is essential to have a clear view of the system’s own limits and to know what personal and institutional resources are available for moving conscientiously and responsibly toward greater inclusiveness. Achieving true inclusiveness is a long process. For Fe y Alegría, inclusiveness requires *presence*, *participation*, and the *integral development* of all the students. *Presence* is required because it is assumed that the school is a common space to which all students have access; all students should be assured that they have a place so that they assist regularly at their schools. Presence also challenges the tendency to separate people into different groups according to the levels of learning.

²⁹ **Tomaševski, K.** *Contenido y vigencia del derecho a la educación.* Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos. Serie Cuadernos Pedagógicos. 2003.

³⁰ **UNESCO.** *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All.* UNESCO. Paris, France. 2005.

33. *Participation* refers to the quality of the students' experiences while they are in the educational center, whether engaged in formal or informal education, social promotion, or community development. The educational community should therefore take account of the viewpoints and the “voices” of the students and should watch out for their personal and social well-being.³¹

34. *Integral development* refers to the results of the integral learning processes in relation to the curriculum of the educational system and the specific objectives of the educational center. It goes beyond evaluation by examinations or by standardized tests. It means assuring that all the students achieve the greatest possible integral development of their potentialities by means of learning processes that allow them to become active citizens and that guarantee them social integration and work opportunities without risk of exclusion.

35. From its beginning Fe y Alegría has worked to guarantee the presence of excluded students in their educational works. It was for this reason that Fe y Alegría committed itself to isolated and marginalized zones. But with time it became aware that presence alone was not enough; it was also necessary to guarantee the quality of the education, and this has been a central focus of the last two strategic plans of the international federation of the movement, for it is conscious of how much work needs to be done in this area. At the same time, our many experiences with informal education and social promotion have provided new spaces which allow us to encounter diversity directly, to embrace persons previously excluded from the educational systems, and to encourage their presence, participation, and integral development.

36. For all these reasons inclusion for Fe y Alegría demands identification and elimination of barriers that impede or prevent access, presence, participation, and integral development. To achieve inclusiveness it is necessary to identify the barriers set up by educational communities that can thwart the process of inclusion. Popular education contributes many elements that help an educational community identify and overcome the barriers that might impede the full exercise of the right to an inclusive, high-quality education.

37. *“Generically, we should understand as barriers the beliefs and attitudes that people have with respect to this process and that become concrete in the cultures, policies and school practices that they implement individually and collectively. When these barriers interact with the personal, social, or cultural conditions of certain students or groups of students—within the framework of the educational policies and resources that exist at the local, regional, or national levels—they generate exclusion, marginalization, and*

³¹ **Ainscow, M. Echeita, G.** *La Educación inclusiva como derecho. Marco de referencia y pautas de acción para el desarrollo de una revolución pendiente.* Congreso “Un marco de referencia y pautas de acción para el desarrollo de sistemas de educación incluyentes”. Granada, Spain. 2010.



*failure. In order to improve inclusiveness, then, an indispensable strategy is the collection and evaluation of information from a variety of sources for the purposes of detecting which students experience such barriers, where in the school setting they are located, and what plans there are for improvement of educational policies and renewal of practices. At the same time, efforts should be made to take advantage of the evidence presented to pursue creative ways of changing the barriers that are found.*³²

38. Since these barriers impede the effective exercise of inclusive education, they should be examined conscientiously with the instruments of popular education. *“This should lead Fe y Alegría to constantly check to see whether we have still any mechanisms of exclusion, either evident or hidden, whether we are truly attending to the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, and whether we are offering special assistance to those who have the most deficiencies or difficulties.”*³³

39. In this regard, it is interesting to mention that “disabled persons” are said to be such because of the external barriers that prevent them from developing satisfactorily.³⁴ It is the external barriers that make people disabled, not any personal characteristics that make them different from the majority.

40. Inclusive education, together with popular education, places particular emphasis on preventing those groups which might be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or educational failure from being victims of such risks. Fe y Alegría makes an option for those who have more difficulties, and by virtue of its mission it assumes responsibility for insuring that the most vulnerable groups receive more attention. Moreover, as long as may be necessary, Fe y Alegría should adopt measures which will guarantee their presence (and perseverance), their participation, and their integral development in the educational system.

41. It is for this reason that Fe y Alegría, with its long tradition of popular education and social promotion, has by different means made an option for groups that are at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or educational failure. Fe y Alegría understands inclusive education to mean the definitive advent of a new culture, a new ethic, and new values.³⁵ We understand by inclusive education the process which seeks to put into practice the values of equity, justice, and appreciation of diversity, and which does so through the construction and collective appropriation of a new educational culture.

³² Ibidem.

³³ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *The Identity and Spirituality of Fe y Alegría at the Service...*

³⁴ In its first article the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons defines disability in terms of a person's interaction with the environment and the presence of barriers: *“Disabled persons include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory disabilities which, upon interacting with diverse barriers, can prevent their full and effective participation in society in conditions of equality with others.”*

³⁵ Parrilla, A. “Acerca del origen y sentido de la Educación Inclusiva.” *Revista de Educación.* 327. 2002. 11-30.

These new cultures should promote 1) *cohesiveness, coordination and collective work* on the part of the educators; 2) *collective commitment* toward the educational project on the part of the community, and 3) *active, positive participation* of the whole educational community for the sake of improving the educational center and the community itself.³⁶

42. Our commitment to inclusive education should move us to give the best of ourselves and to provide all the means possible to achieve it. Often “*we nourish the illusion that there exists ‘someplace out there’ for people who are unusual.*” This false illusion makes us desist prematurely from developing proposals for inclusive education since it encourages us to believe that there are places better than our centers for educating those who are “different.”

4. The dialectic of inclusive education

“Education is a factor of cohesion when it takes into account the diversity of individuals and groups and at the same time avoids contributing to social exclusion.”

Report of the International Commission on “Education for the 21st Century”

43. In facing the challenge of promoting inclusive education, we must reflect seriously on certain existing tensions.

4.1. Inclusive education—the option for those who are excluded

44. Fe y Alegría recognizes two perspectives for approaching inclusive education. For some people, inclusiveness means attending to the most vulnerable persons, those who have been victims of exclusion. For others, inclusiveness means being open to diversity that encompasses all kinds of children so that the excluded are included instead of being educated in marginalized ghettos.

45. The risk in using the first approach is that the marginalized youngsters will be educated all by themselves. The difficulty of the second approach is forgetting that our evangelical option for popular education urges us to go to the margins where the excluded are to be found—and this is particularly true in present-day Africa and Latin America. Despite the differences in the two approaches, it is clear that both of them make a definite option for non-exclusion and for the equality which is inseparable from true educational quality.

³⁶ Murillo, F. J. *La investigación sobre eficacia escolar*. Octaedro. Barcelona, Spain. 2005. 316 pp.

46. In either of the two approaches, this option for non-exclusion has concrete consequences. It implies a constant revision of the criteria for admission, selection, accompaniment, and/or dismissal of students, and it requires identification of both the obvious and the hidden mechanisms of exclusion, which should be eliminated.

47. For Fe y Alegría the option for inclusiveness means making a preferential option for those who are excluded or who are at risk of being excluded. It means assuring that the most vulnerable groups are given special attention. It means adopting measures for insuring their presence, their participation, and their integral development in the educational communities. It means promoting inclusiveness at the level of public action and raising of consciousness. And finally, it means embracing the countercultural potential of this proposal. Our search for equality will guide us to seek the resources needed so that the poorest, most excluded, and most marginalized come to receive fully the education that is rightfully theirs.

4.2. Inclusive education—educational quality

48. We commonly hear it said that inclusive education levels students downward and that opting for inclusiveness means renouncing quality education. Fe y Alegría responds to that by saying that one of the first things we must do is revise our understanding of educational quality. In this context there is a need to understand that inclusive education integrates quality and equality in such a way that inclusiveness means implementing good processes and obtaining good results for all the students. For Fe y Alegría quality and inclusiveness are inseparable since any education that excludes people ceases to be quality education. Given the factor of equality, it is essential that the measure for quality should consider the actual learning that is effectively achieved by all the students. If we integrate the diverse definitions of quality and try to summarize them succinctly, with the risks that that implies, we can conclude that we understand educational quality to be the integral development of all the students.

49. There is an urgent need to opt for both quality and inclusiveness because if we do not achieve educational quality that is inclusive, we will be creating disjointed systems in which only some students learn well while others are left stranded, uncertain not only about who they are but about what they are capable of learning and doing. Poor-quality education *“undervalues the students’ knowledge, ridicules questions, discourages curiosity, clips wings, destroys self-esteem ... it can definitely do more harm than good.”*³⁷ Consequently the responsibility of Fe y Alegría is to make sure that all its educational processes, whether formal or informal, whether in classes or by correspondence, are of high quality and inclusive.

4.3. Inclusive education—ideologies

³⁷ Torres, R.M. *Educación para todos, una tarea pendiente*. Educación Popular. Madrid, Spain. 2000.

50. The history of education is heavily marked by political and ideological factors. By means of their educational systems, governments form their citizens with “predetermined paradigms or visions” based on their founding ideologies.³⁸ The origins of formal education derive from the need to educate persons to be citizens and functionaries of the state. Consequently, the academic contents and the ultimate objective of education have always had to do with the type of society we want to create.

51. At the present time the ideological debates present different models.³⁹ On the one hand, there is education based on the homogeneous, “objective” transmission of contents; it presents knowledge that is to be assimilated by the students, and it focuses on the results of the learning process. This type of education is seen as necessary to establish social control and to introduce young people to the prevailing industrial and political system. On the other hand, there is the liberal-democratic model, which places emphasis on education’s role in personal and social development; it uses a more subjective learning process that takes into account individual differences and allows students to develop their knowledge integrally.

52. Obviously, these two ideological approaches need to enter into dialogue since education has in recent years been accused of failing to make explicit these diverse factors that affect daily practice in the schools. The perspective of inclusive education sees the need for a society that both belongs to everybody and is created by everybody, and such a perspective demands structural and cultural change. In keeping with the ideals of Fe y Alegría, we engage in public advocacy against any barriers that promote exclusion,⁴⁰ and we actively promote an ideology of inclusiveness.

4.4. Inclusive education—appreciation of diversity

53. In many Latin American contexts we find voices and policies arguing for the need to separate students, putting “the good with the good, the bad with the bad, and the different with the different,” on the supposition that in this way they will all achieve better results. This premise ignores studies⁴¹ that show the benefit and the superior results of

³⁸ We understand “ideology” in the broadest sense of the term, as the whole complex of fundamental ideas that characterize the thought of a person, a collectivity, an epoch, a movement (cultural, religious, or political), etc.

³⁹ **Davies, D.** *Organizaciones que aprenden*. Gedisa. Barcelona, Spain. 2005.

⁴⁰ **Parrilla, A.** *Acerca del origen ...*

⁴¹ Cf. the following studies:

Kishi, G. S., & Meyer, L. H. “What children report and remember: A six-year follow-up of the effects of social contact between peers with and without severe disabilities.” *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*. 1994. 19 (4). 277-289.

Sharpe, M.N., York, J.L. & Knight, J. “Effects of inclusion on the academic performance of classmates without disabilities.” *Remedial and special education*. 1994. 15(5). 281-287.

a collaborative learning system that includes heterogeneous students as opposed to a system that includes only homogeneous students. Any differentiation in smaller social systems contributes to the creation of an unequal social model that diminishes the overall possibilities of learning and of being enriched by differences.

54. This debate is very real nowadays in Latin America since in many countries there have been movements toward greater educational exclusiveness. Students are separated according to their condition or their abilities, and colleges are graded according to the results of standardized tests which take no account of the students' origins, conditions, or diversity. Considering this, we of Fe y Alegría reaffirm our option to work with the least advantaged in order to provide them educational opportunities that will allow them to become protagonists in their own personal development and in the transformation of society, while respecting and valuing diversity.

4.5. Inclusive education—economic investment

55. Education is a living concept that is shaped by the society of which it is part. Given the contexts in which Fe y Alegría works, our possibilities are greatly influenced by the resources that are available. The limited resources we have (a monthly public subsidy per student) are a key variable we must consider in our conception of education.

56. Inclusive education costs a community more than segregated education since educating students with different characteristics requires not only professionals with special training but in many cases more personalized treatment for the students. However, if we consider the cost of the educational system as a whole, it comes out the same.

57. Because of the low investment in education in our countries, we find ourselves without the personnel resources needed to do justice to diversity. The educators in our educational communities (that is, all the staff working in them) often do not have the mindset, the motivation, or the personal or professional talents that complex diversity requires, nor do they have time for the reflection, training, and planning needed for dealing with diverse problems, demands, and modes of action. The whole educational culture needs to be reoriented so that it can deal with inclusiveness as a global problematic and not just a particular one. Well financed educational models, such as the Finnish, have shown that it is possible to develop inclusive systems of high quality

Hollowood, T. M., Salisbury, C. L., Rainforth, B., & Palombaro, M. M. "Use of instructional time in classrooms serving students with and without severe disabilities." *Exceptional Children*. 1995. 61(3). 242-253.

Tundidor, M. "Issues raised in the name of inclusion: Perspectives of educator, parents and students." *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*. 20. 1995. 31-44

Manset, G., & Semmel, M.I. "Are inclusive programs for students with mild disabilities effective? A comparative review of model programs." *Journal of Special Education*. 31. 1997. 155-180.

without segregating students. They have the highest rating in international measurements of quality despite having heterogeneous schools and not investing more than similar countries.

4.6. Inclusive education—advocacy

58. Fe y Alegría holds that the purpose of education is the transformation of society and that the public character of education demand that it be inclusive. Given this vocation, all the Fe y Alegrías have the task of working with other social actors to raise consciousness about the importance of diversity and the need to seek educational strategies that promote inclusiveness.

59. We understand that working for inclusiveness is countercultural and is therefore a very complex task. The neoliberal system promotes values (individualism, competition, consumerism, etc.) that are opposed to the ones we promote in Fe y Alegría. It is therefore necessary to establish synergies and networks with other public and private forces that are working to overcome the causes of exclusion. In this regard Fe y Alegría should take full advantage of its international dimension to intensify its public advocacy and to promote synergies within the Society of Jesus.

60. As a popular education movement, Fe y Alegría should stimulate and support the protagonism of excluded individuals and groups in advocacy activities, helping them to make their voices heard. Such advocacy should be reflected on, planned, and executed by the whole educational community (students, parents, neighbors, educators, etc.).

5. Transformations needed in culture, policies, and inclusive practices

5.1. Toward the development of an inclusive culture among all

61. In order to increase the extent of inclusive education, we must assume that no fixed model or pattern exists. Rather, we are dealing with educational communities that are “in movement”⁴² toward improving their ability to respond to diversity. This is a journey that in some ways never ends. Inclusiveness or exclusion are not definite states or situations; they are processes whose extremes (inclusion-exclusion) are in constant tension so that movement toward one extreme can happen only by moving away from the other.⁴³

⁴² Ainscow, M., Booth, T., Dyson, A., with Farrell, P., Frankham, J., Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and Smith, R. *Improving schools...*

⁴³ Echeita, G. *Educación para la inclusión o Educación...*

62. To facilitate this movement, educational communities (whether formal or informal, whether involved in social promotion or community development) should be seen as tending toward an inclusive culture in which roles, values, and behaviors⁴⁴ will determine the extent to which inclusiveness has been achieved.

63. In our 43rd congress we became aware of how many of our educational communities are unfortunately pervaded by a culture that is passive and static. They have difficulty taking full account of the contexts from which their students come, and they continue to reproduce the exclusion which has already affected many of the students. As a result, some institutional cultures run the risk of unwittingly becoming agents of exclusion in their educational systems, classrooms, and other spaces. Inclusiveness is not guaranteed simply with the existence of inclusive educational structures; rather, it has much to do with values,⁴⁵ with school atmosphere, with practical activity, and with day-to-day life in the classroom.⁴⁶

64. Fe y Alegría holds that creating inclusive educational communities requires a change in the culture of the educational system and the center itself. It is necessary to advance from integration to inclusiveness. The right to education requires equality of opportunities and full participation. It requires educational centers that attend to the whole community as part of an inclusive system and with the aim of restructuring the educational system and the sociocultural context. If we consider inclusive education as a new culture, we can describe certain traits of this culture: it is collaborative, has high expectations of both students and educators, maintains a consensus regarding values (or an ability to work effectively with the differences), is supported by an orderly and secure environment, and stimulates the educators to assume a variety of leadership roles.⁴⁷

65. Inclusiveness means understanding education in a new way. It involves fashioning a new philosophy and constructing a new culture with novel and diverse ways of analyzing our living and working together and the day-to-day reality of education (whether formal or informal, whether through social promotion or community development). Inclusiveness therefore requires a series of community actions oriented to accepting and valuing the individual differences of all students and to eliminating all barriers that hinder their active presence, participation, and integral development.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ **Murillo, F. J.** *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁵ **Rossi, M and Allevato, C.** *Los principios que orientan nuestra práctica: desafíos y dilemas.* Colección formación de directivos. Federación internacional Fe y Alegría. 2008.

⁴⁶ **Parrilla, A.** *¿Y si la investigación sobre inclusión...*

⁴⁷ **Murillo, F.J.** "El movimiento teórico-práctico de mejora de la escuela. Algunas lecciones aprendidas para mejorar los centros docentes." *REICE: Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación.* Vol. 1, No. 2. 2003.

⁴⁸ **Valenciano, G.** *Op. cit.*

5.2. Toward the formulation of inclusive policies

66. In the 42nd Congress of the International Federation of Fe y Alegría, held in Cochabamba in 2012,⁴⁹ we saw that in several countries our organization is well positioned and is recognized by government ministries and inter-institutional networks. This recognition gives us the opportunity to insist on the theme of inclusiveness and to have influence on public policies. In Fe y Alegría we take on this responsibility and commit ourselves to advocating at different levels for greater inclusiveness.

67. Fe y Alegría fights for policies that are at the service of a just education, which requires *a distributive equality of opportunities*.⁵⁰ This in turn means pursuing more equitable policies that seek to give more to those who need more, while taking care that redistribution does not stigmatize people or create dependencies. Another aspect of educational justice is *social equality of opportunities*, understood as the common knowledge that everyone has a right to acquire. Finally, there is the *individual equality of opportunities*, which means the recognition of every child and young person as a unique and unrepeatable subject who is equal to others independently of his/her performance or achievement. This understanding of educational justice helps to strengthen the self-image of each student and avoids the stigma of failure, so that the students are fully recognized as persons in the different processes of their learning.

68. Given its background in popular education, Fe y Alegría encourages curricula that are centered on the person and not on contents. Such curricula should be inclusive and contextualized; they should take into consideration ways of speaking and thinking that are *pertinent* to the learning context and the particular characteristics of each student. Such pertinence implies meaning and therefore reinforces and links together presence and participation. This involves recognizing the “knowledge” and the “skills” that the students bring with them for these have different meanings, depending on the diverse sociocultural contexts from which they come.⁵¹

69. Given this perspective, the curriculum is no longer defined in terms of areas and topics but is the sum of every type of learning (including the absences) that the students obtain as a result of their participation in the educational experience. A curriculum in and for diversity requires a democratic setting for the contents of the teaching and decision-making in accord with the interests of all members of the educational community.⁵²

⁴⁹ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Inclusive Education and Its Challenges.* 43rd Congress of the International Federation of Fe y Alegría. Cochabamba, Bolivia. 2012.

⁵⁰ **Dubet, F.** *La escuela de las oportunidades ¿Qué es una escuela justa?* Gedisa. Barcelona, Spain. 2004.

⁵¹ Conclusions of the “Latin American Seminar on Schools and Inclusiveness.” 2008.

⁵² **Devalle, A. Vega, V.** *Una escuela en y para la diversidad.* Aique. Buenos Aires, Argentina. 2009.

70. It is essential to treat the topic of curriculum from the perspective of inclusiveness since evidence indicates that in most contexts the curriculum is a source of both explicit and implicit exclusion, insofar as it leaves students outside the educational system and makes many of them feel excluded because they do not learn what the “curriculum” expects of them.

71. We observe in our own contexts that classical institutional policies are often imposed by public policies that are conservative, pragmatic, and short-term. Such policies do not respond to the needs of those who are marginalized. Fe y Alegría is not discouraged by this reality. To the contrary, it feels challenged to be ever more innovative and creative in the formulation and promotion of policies that advance inclusiveness without stigmatizing any group in particular.

72. In this regard, the International Federation of Fe y Alegría promoted the “Commitment to Education” campaign,⁵³ which sought to improve conditions and advance toward more inclusive education. This campaign appealed to governments and civil societies to recognize and implement the right of all persons to a quality education, conceived as a public good that helps people overcome poverty and exclusion. This campaign reaffirmed the inclusive vocation of Fe y Alegría by enunciating six points on which it sought to dialogue and exercise influence: 1) Equality in access, process, and results; 2) Integral and inclusive educational quality; 3) Continuing education for all stages of life; 4) Reinforcement of the teaching career; 5) Adequate public financing; and 6) Educational administration in service of equality and quality.

5.3. Toward inclusive practices

73. *“For Fe y Alegría, being a movement means unending creative destabilization and continual reinterpretation of reality in a confirmed attitude of quest, with large doses of daring, non-conformity, and constant self-criticism so that the educational and pedagogical practices respond to the needs and challenges presented by the ever-changing reality.”*⁵⁴

74. In the 43rd congress in Cochabamba, we declared that policies and orientations are of little use if they are not reflected in the daily practices of our educational communities. We also stated that the various Fe y Alegrías already have experience of educational inclusiveness with diverse groups (persons with different or special educational needs, indigenous populations, populations of African descent, young people at risk, women, migrants, etc.). But we also saw that new excluded sectors are periodically identified, and we feel called to work with them. This requires us to rethink our practices and redesign our organizational forms.

⁵³ International Federation of Fe y Alegría. *Commitment for Education. Six Proposals for...*

⁵⁴ Pérez Esclarín, A. Yo, José María Vélaz. Fe y Alegría Venezuela. Caracas, Venezuela. 2010.

75. Since its beginning Fe y Alegría has opted for inclusive education, and we have tried to make all our practices inclusive. To that end, our educational communities should not have any “entrance requirements” or selection mechanisms except the one that flows from our mission and our focus on popular education: we accept the persons who are poorest, most excluded, and most marginalized in our societies. That means that allowing all the children and young people of a given community to learn together, independently of their personal, social, or cultural conditions, including those with different capacities.⁵⁵

76. Fe y Alegría should develop a pedagogy of inclusion understood from the perspective of popular education. It should practice a pedagogy that accompanies persons and communities in their growth and development. The development of this pedagogy should emerge from each specific context and should involve all the actors in the community.⁵⁶

77. Fe y Alegría has systematized and published studies of the many experiences which demonstrate concrete practices for building inclusive communities⁵⁷ and show how the dream of inclusiveness can be made a tangible reality. Fe y Alegría has also developed various institutional policies, strategies, and actions that seek ever greater inclusion of different excluded sectors (abandoned children, young people at risk, women, indigenous peoples, persons of African descent, migrants, etc.) in diverse educational processes, in social promotion and community development, in training for insertion in the workforce, in the adoption of information and communication technologies in the educational process, in the promulgation of a policy of gender equality, etc. But all these efforts do no more than confirm the fact that inclusive education continually challenges us to do more.

6. The role of educators in the process of developing inclusive education

78. To advance toward inclusive educational practices, Fe y Alegría sees popular education as the ideal means for bolstering the process and motivating educators⁵⁸ to reflect constantly on their own educational practice. Educators should be “professionals

⁵⁵ Requirement of UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Fundación Hineni. In “*School and Inclusion*,” Lessons from the Latin American Seminar, “Prevention of school desertion, reinsertion, and educational inclusiveness.” 2008.

⁵⁶ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** “The Pedagogy of Popular Education.” *Revista internacional Fe y Alegría* (2003)

⁵⁷ See **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** “*Non-formal education and popular education*” (2004); “*it is possible to make dreams real*” (2009); “*Education by radio. A series of educational experiences*” (2009); “*Community development: tracing paths for social promotion and prevention*,” Fe y Alegría Colombia (2007).

⁵⁸ By “educator” we mean every person who exercises some function in an educational center.



who continually reflect on who they are and what they do so as to improve their pedagogical practice and thus respond better to the needs of the students and their communities.”⁵⁹ Popular education also contributes to the collective construction of pedagogical knowledge that engages in “cultural negotiation”⁶⁰ in order to raise questions about the reception of “supposedly neutral and objective” knowledge (such as certain perspectives on history, etc.). Only in this way is it possible to exercise the critical judgment that allows us to recognize the social origins of our knowledge and the consequent need to re-evaluate our own local and national traditions, cultures, religiosity, and wisdom.

79. Fe y Alegría firmly believes that “*Learning means changing*”⁶¹ because it often involves unlearning and relearning, assimilating and modifying ideas, conceptions, ways of acting and being. This is the essence of being a popular educator. In this dynamic process, learning minds twist and turn and change; they relate to everything they encounter and at the same time challenge everything. Learning is therefore a task that involves every dimension of our being and our life. Popular education also sees it as a social process that relates to our environment and to those who inhabit it along with us. People learn more and better along with others. That is why we cannot simply accept the need for change and the need to learn. We must celebrate learning and make it more available, and evaluation is a necessary vehicle for making such an achievement visible and communicating about it.⁶²

80. Fe y Alegría has always been convinced that achieving an inclusive educational community requires educators who are passionate about education. This characteristic, however, is not usually considered to be one of the competencies of a good educator; rather, more attention is paid to responsibility, planning, mastery of contents, team work, etc. Despite being one of the most important variables in achieving inclusive education, the educator’s passion for education is often not taken into account. There are many factors that contribute to making a person inclusive and passionate, such as training, experiences, ideology, vocation, etc. Nevertheless, there is complete consensus that an attitude of inclusiveness should permeate almost all the activities of the educator. The person of the educator is inseparable from the role of educator.

81. Fe y Alegría believes that what is most important for achieving inclusive education is putting inclusive values into action. That means being committed to the values embodied in the desire to overcome exclusion and promote the participation of everyone. These values are the fundamental guides that motivate action and move us

⁵⁹ **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** *Popular Education and its Pedagogy.* In the Collection of the International Formation Program of Popular Educators. Caracas, Venezuela. 2003.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ **Stoll, L., Fink, D. y Earl, L.** *Sobre el aprender y el tiempo que requiere. Implicaciones para la escuela.* Barcelona: Octaedro. 2004.

⁶² Ibidem.

forward; they give us a sense of direction and define our destination. Attaining clarity regarding the relation between values and actions is the most practical step that can be taken in the educational process. The values that make inclusive education a reality are the ones that Fe y Alegría has already clearly defined: justice, freedom, participation, fraternity, solidarity, and respect for diversity.

82. Fe y Alegría believes that being a professional means being committed for life to ongoing formation and learning. It means being active in one's own formation process, for it is through constant reflection on one's own educational practice that the person of the educator becomes integrated into his/her professional role. In this way the educator will be led to innovate and will consequently transmit a passion for learning that will produce good results in the students and in the motivation of the educators.⁶³ Formation in human rights is intimately linked with formation in inclusiveness.

83. There should be no separation between the person and the role of the educator. Educators transmit what they are more than what they know.⁶⁴ In their interaction with the students, their beliefs, their values, and their personal traits come into play. They transmit things both consciously and unconsciously. Being inclusive means believing profoundly that all persons can develop their full potentialities by doing their best; it means concentrating more on people's resourcefulness than on their weaknesses.

84. Fe y Alegría is convinced that the key to inclusiveness is implicit belief in all the students, and this has more to do with the person of the educator than with the role of the educator. Educators who continually undergo the experience of "including themselves" and including others in regard to the diverse dimensions of life are already learning to develop an attitude of inclusiveness. The vocation of educators therefore places a central role. Every educator must follow a personal path in order to be certain that inclusive education can be attained, for "*all exterior change depends on interior change.*"⁶⁵

85. In order to advance toward true inclusiveness, there is required a profound transformation of a person's conceptions of the "other,"⁶⁶ a transformation that necessarily translates into a change of attitudes and actions. In order for the educators of Fe y Alegría to become agents of inclusive education, they should question themselves honestly about what they think concerning inclusiveness and what fears, apprehensions, and hopes they have. Fe y Alegría maintains that if educators reflect on

⁶³ **Day, C.** *La pasión por enseñar*. Madrid. Narcea. 2006.

⁶⁴ **Tardiff, M.** *Los saberes del docente y su desarrollo profesional*. Madrid, Narcea. 2004.

⁶⁵ **De la Herran, A and Paredes .J** (coords). *La práctica de la innovación educativa*. Síntesis S.A. Madrid, Spain. 2009.

⁶⁶ **Pozo, J.I., Scheuer, N., Pérez Echeverría, M.P; Mateos, M., Martín, E. and De la Cruz, M.** (Eds.) *Nuevas formas de pensar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, las concepciones de profesores y alumnos*. Graó. Barcelona, Spain. 2006.

and question their own beliefs about the learning difficulties of their students, they can significantly advance the development of new ways to combat the barriers to learning and participation.⁶⁷

86. It should be mentioned that inclusive practice is not the responsibility of just the support staff,⁶⁸ as is often stated in various contexts. Various studies and our own experience in the 43rd Congress of the International Federation of Fe y Alegría have shown us that all educators should be active in the effort for real inclusiveness. Therefore, if we want inclusive education to become a concrete reality in our educational communities, then it will be necessary to prepare all the members of the school community to educate in diversity and provide holistic accompaniment to all persons. At the same time, space should be made available which allow the educators to share their experiences and work together jointly in the construction of more inclusive educational communities and societies.

87. Another essential point is the role played by the local community in advancing toward inclusive education. Active participation of the community is a key to success. It should be understood that this is a process that is undertaken jointly, because if inclusiveness is not promoted in all contexts, there is little that can be done solely within the educational communities. Moreover, the educators should join with the community to analyze the causes of exclusion that need to be addressed in different instances.

6.1. Role of management teams in the formation of inclusive educators

88. Fe y Alegría considers⁶⁹ that management teams play a key role in implementing ongoing formation. As we have mentioned already, the role of accompaniment is important for achieving inclusive education. In educational communities it is the management teams that are responsible for providing conditions (space and time) that allow the educators to come together and reflect and to constitute themselves as an educational community that takes into account the collective and dialogical dimensions of teaching. This is important if we seek to advance toward greater inclusiveness because, as we have seen, we must transform the educational culture, and in order to do that we must focus formation on giving a fresh significance to the collective culture of the educational community. This will be achieved more by having the educators reflect on their own practices than by giving them courses on inclusiveness.

⁶⁷ **Ainscow, M., Booth, T. and Dyson, A. with Farrell, P., Frankham, J., Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and Smith, R.** *Improving schools, ...*

⁶⁸ We understand by "support staff" those persons in the schools who work only with students who have special needs (e.g., occupational therapists, psychiatrists, special education teachers, audiologists, etc.).

⁶⁹ **Finocchio, S. and Legarralde, M.** *Pedagogía de la inclusión Gestión pedagógica para equipos directivos.* In **International Federation of Fe y Alegría.** Colección Formación de Directivos del Programa Internacional de Formación de Educadores Populares. Fe y Alegría. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. 2008.

89. Reflection on our practices allows us to denaturalize what we habitually do and thus to “spin fine” in the way we treat diversity. Nevertheless, our reflection must be done with accompaniment so that it leads us toward criticism and transformation and to modification or adjustment of the small daily practices that exclude students.

90. It is important for educational communities to practice discernment and reflection so that they can view themselves with transparency. For example, observation of classes by peers or by management teams and subsequent feedback are practices that allow educators to see their “blind spots” and keep improving their performance with regard to inclusiveness. It is the responsibility of the management teams to provide the means for the institutionalization of discernment, reflection, accompaniment, and systematization regarding practices.

7. Inclusive education as seen from the perspective of faith

After Jesus left there, he went to the region of Tyre. When he went into a house, he did not want anyone to know, but he was not able to escape notice. Instead, a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him and came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, of Syrophenician origin. She asked him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and to throw it to the dogs.” She answered, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he said to her, “Because you said this, you may go. The demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Mark 7,24-30

91. The episode with the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7,24-30) shows us that Jesus at first considered that the invitation to the Kingdom was extended only to Jews and not to pagans.⁷⁰ As we see, he initially rejected the woman’s request, and it was only because of her insistence that Jesus came to recognize the dignity of a non-Jewish woman. That is to say, it was only through meeting this concrete woman who tenaciously begged for his compassion that Jesus came to understand that his message should be universal and that every person is intrinsically worthy of it. This change in Jesus was the result of a personal encounter, a concrete bond. That should make us realize that it is precisely such bonds that make human beings change. Apparently Jesus slowly came to the

⁷⁰ **Alonso, P.** “La mujer sirio fenicia en la interpretación patrística.” *Estudios eclesiásticos*. vol.80. No. 314. 2005. pp. 455-483.

realization that his message was universal and that all of us are invited to enter the Kingdom of God.

92. As persons who form part of Fe y Alegría, we also should feel ourselves invited to broaden our boundaries and let ourselves be transformed. But how should we take steps toward inclusiveness? Like Jesus of Nazareth, we must relate to different people with different creeds, cultures, and ideologies; we must deal with people from different countries, churches, and social classes. We must let ourselves be transformed by our close links with people who are different from us, respecting and appreciating the differences. In societies like ours, however, this bonding does not come about naturally. It must be cultivated. The different “other” must be encountered. We have to break the barriers that have been set up by our birth, our family, our education, our culture, our gender, our creed, our territory, and our environment. We need to confront the fear that is often provoked in us by anything that is new and different. Diversity makes us confront our insecurities. Therefore, we should all ask ourselves honestly: given the lives we live, how can we contribute to the construction of a truly diverse society? In order to construct an inclusive society, we need to confront our fears and resolve to transform ourselves and our surroundings. In this way we will bring to birth a new culture where everyone has a place of privilege.

93. Jesus healed the people who were deaf and dumb, epileptic, blind, paralyzed, and otherwise disabled, directing his action toward the marginalized persons of his time. They came first for Jesus; they were the center of his attention. He realized that the people on the fringes did not feel that they were eligible for the Kingdom, and so they were the first to be invited by him. Now the Gospel invites Fe y Alegría to follow Jesus by paying particular attention to those groups of persons who have been excluded and marginalized, those who are at risk of failing in school, and those who are simply deprived of the right to an education. We should try to include these persons in the educational services we offer so that they enjoy the right to an inclusive education of quality. That is our mission!

94. The invitation that the Gospel extends to us is to form an inclusive community, and that means transforming ourselves and our educational communities so that they become a foreshadowing of the society we want to create. Our own transformation should be motivated by the transformation that Jesus himself experienced. If he was transformed, then by his grace we and our educational communities can also be transformed. And this transformation should be realized along with the excluded, marginalized, and impoverished sectors of our countries because Jesus has revealed to us that the Father “has hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to the simple folk” (Mt 11,25).

95. Inclusive education may be seen today as something utopian, but *“only with utopian hopes will we have the courage to join the poor and the oppressed of the world in trying*

to reverse history.”⁷¹ It is the utopia of the Kingdom of God that keeps us moving forward.

Creemos con Fe y Alegría We Believe with Faith and Joy

We believe in the God of the Beatitudes
and in his son Jesus Christ, our companion.

We believe that God invites us to be happy
and embraces our suffering with his death on the cross.

We believe that Jesus draws close, inviting us to be his friends;
he enters our history with affection and compassion.

We believe that Jesus learned to be human
and teaches us that we are all worthy of this earth.

We believe in the Risen Jesus
who invites us to dream of a world that is more humane and more just.

We believe in the construction of the Kingdom of God
where we all have a special place and where justice liberates those who are poorest.

We believe in a simple Church that we ourselves build day by day,
a Church that brings together all the diversity of our world.

We believe in the transformation of ourselves and of our people,
just as Jesus believed in his disciples.

We believe with Faith because it keeps us united,
and we believe with Joy because God walks by our side.

⁷¹ Ellacuría, **Ignacio S.J.** “Final Discourse.” 6 November 1989. Barcelona, Spain. In **Sobrino, J.** *Fuera de los pobres no hay salvación*. Trotta. Madrid, Spain. 2007