Strategies for solidarity education at Catholic schools in Chile: Approximations and descriptions from the perspectives of school principals

Alejandra Isabel Santana López
Autonomous University of Chile, Chile

Natalia Hernández Mary
Alberto Hurtado University, Chile

Abstract

This research project sought to learn how solidarity education is manifested in Chilean Catholic schools, considering the perspectives of school principals, programme directors and pastoral teams.

Eleven Chilean schools were studied and the information gathering techniques applied included: a questionnaire, semi-structured individual interviews and group interviews. The grounded theory model was used to analyse the data. The results describe contexts of emerging solidarity education strategies and one perceives a variety of degrees of effort, bi-directional fields of action and traditional attitudes associated with charity. There is an overall sense of solidarity-in-transition, ranging from welfare-oriented action to promotional activities, channelled through training processes. Strengths, weaknesses, challenges and the need for outside support for the schools are highlighted in order to assure effectiveness and sustainability for the programmes.

Introduction

This article seeks to understand the results of a study about solidarity education in Chilean Catholic schools. It concentrates on findings associated with descriptions provided by school principals with regard to the more commonplace and significant strategies for solidarity education, showing

Corresponding author:
Alejandra Isabel Santana López, Autonomous University of Chile, Gaspar de Orense 465, Quinta Normal, Santiago de Chile, Chile.
Email: asantana@uc.cl

the main characteristics of said strategies, their strengths and weaknesses and the support they need in order to continue.

In order to understand the context of solidarity education strategies it should be pointed out that the institutions involved belong to the private education sector,[1] which nationally offer the best opportunities for a quality education and possess the best available resources for the teaching-learning processes. Furthermore, the study deals with Catholic schools, which express the clear intention of preparing their students according to the tenets of solidarity education.

The article is structured as follows: conceptual background material provides a simple framework, and then the methodology to be applied is introduced, being in this case of qualitative nature. Then the main findings that describe the strategies for solidarity education are presented from the points of view of school principals and staff. Finally, outstanding elements highlighted by the analysis of data and our conclusions are presented.

Conceptual background

Teaching solidarity in the context of Chile

In modern Chile education is one of the significant areas through which to achieve an improvement in quality of life, thus explaining the degree of concern for the quality and integrity of education as expressed as one of the central themes of Chile's various democratic governments. It is well known that from the point of view of the Ministry of Education (Mineduc, 2009), the current challenge with regard to education is the improvement of its overall quality.

The horizon for the personal and social development of people today – to which one must orient the teaching of solidarity – has been translated into the code of studies programming from the perspective of transversality, specifically with regard for the so-called transverse fundamental objectives (TFO) originally promoted in the 1990s by Chilean educational reform efforts and inspired by the 'World Conference on Education for All' at Jomtien (1990), and the sessions of Regional Intergovernmental Committee for the Principal Education Project (PROMEDELAC) between 1991 and 1995, as well as the Delors Report.

TFO refer to the general, final goals of education, strengthening the common tenets of the system, connecting fields of learning and permeating the culture of early scholarship (Mineduc, 2009). 'Transversality' refers to the definition of content, abilities and values present throughout the traditional curriculum, in order to establish a perspective of the entire student experience as an opportunity for the involvement of the full dimension of learning and character building.

These objectives are presented in Chile by differentiating between levels of education, and are built upon successively according to the scope of 'growth and self-affirmation', 'the development of the thinking process', 'ethical development' and 'the person and his environment', the frameworks wherein content, ability and underlying or transverse values are positioned (Alarcón, 2003 in Mineduc, 2009).

To understand how 'solidarity' fits into this picture, it would be convenient for us to take a close look at 'the process of building an ethical character' and 'the person and his environment'. With regard to the former, 'it is expected that the student will develop the capability and the will to control his or her ethical behaviour by recognizing a sense of transcendence, a vocation oriented towards truth, *justice*, beauty, *the spirit of service* and respect for the Other.[2] That is to say that the student is expected to develop the capability to:

- Responsibly exercise increasing levels of freedom and personal autonomy and commonly do acts of solidarity and generosity in the framework of recognizing and respecting concepts of justice, truth, human rights and the common good.
- Respect and value ideas and beliefs that are different from one's own and to recognize dialogue as a permanent source of defining one's humanity, of overcoming differences and for approaching the truth.
- *Recognize and respect and defend the essential rights of all people without distinction* of sex, age, physical condition, ethnic origin, religion or economic condition. (Alarcón et al., 2003)

At the same time, within the scope of 'the person and his or her environment' there is emphasis placed on the 'quality of personal and familial interaction ruled by mutual respect; the *exercise of citizenship and the valuation of national identity and democratic fellowship*. In other words, the students should be able to strengthen their capabilities for:

- Participating responsibly in community activities and get ready to exercise their full rights and fulfill their personal duties recognizing and demanding a democratic social life.
- Understanding and appreciating the importance that the emotions and spirituality, and ethical principles and social norms all have for a healthy and balanced personal sexual development.
- Appreciating the social, emotional and spiritual importance of the family and the institution of marriage.
- Protecting the natural environment and promoting (an appreciation of) its resources as the context for human development.
- Recognizing and appreciating the value of the fundamental of national identity in an ever more globalized and interdependent world.
- Developing (a capacity for) individual initiative, the capability of working as part of a team, a spirit for undertaking new tasks, and to recognize the importance of work as a means of contributing to the common good, to social development and to personal growth, in the context of the processes of producing, distributing and consuming goods and services. (Alarcón, 2003, in Mineduc, 2009)

Solidarity education is present in those TFO that have to do with the building of ethical character traits and with what has come to be known as 'civic training', a reference to what contemporary theory about citizenship calls 'civic virtues' (Kymlicka and Norman, 1996).

Summing up, solidarity education combines with several elements of the institutional scheme of Chilean education.

The notion of solidarity education

In order to approach the idea of *solidarity education* it is interesting to reread the report of the UNESCO Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, also known as the 'Delors Report' (1996) that identifies four structural supports for education in this century. The fourth pillar, 'learning to live together', has to do with good fellowship, with the recognition of Others, with cooperation for undertaking common projects and with understanding the relations of interdependence that effect everyone (UAH, HC and Mineduc, 2007). The idea of solidarity

education is clearly circumscribed in the make-up of this structural element which, evidently, has to do with teaching certain values, or given elements that contemporary society values, among which solidarity and positive social behaviour are important.

Nowadays, in the experience of 'living together' one not only learns and practices the values of diversity or tolerance, and the concepts of one's own as well as Others' rights, but one is led to an explicit recognition of the great asymmetry that characterizes the real world. Therefore, the underlying concepts of solidarity education – or, as Leando Sequeiros put it, *education for solidarity* – emphasize those differences. For Sequeiros (1997), education for solidarity involves the progressive instilling of a new conscience in children, young people and adults that moves away from habitual values and social behaviour toward the assumption of a stance and a manifestation of active intervention on behalf of the poor and dispossessed of this world in order to attain a more equitable and just society.

Educational models that can be applied to solidarity education

The search for strategies that produce results in this conceptual field of solidarity education leads us to certain models of educational practice. One significant reference – albeit not the only one – has been the perspective of service-as-learning (*aprendizaje-servico*), defined as a service performed by the students as an act of solidarity, and oriented to providing an efficient answer to community needs, planned integrally within the focalized objectives of the teaching programme. The goal is to both serve the community and achieve a quality educational experience through the same activity (Tapia, 2007).

Additionally, we can see that Leandro Sequeiros' *didactic model* is noted for involving a gradual process that goes from the most simple to the most complex. Both models are reviewed in the following sections.

The service-as-learning model

The service-as-learning model is a teaching practice based on experience, through which the students, teachers and other members of the educational institution work together to satisfy community needs, involving and applying academic knowledge in order to achieve the teaching objectives for the course. Action, critical thought and research are all involved so that the students become supportive elements for a more just and democratic society (Stephenson et al., 2003, referred to in Ramírez and Pizarro, 2005).

The main objective of the service-as-learning model is to generate more and better learning situations for the students. Therefore it is not an extracurricular activity taking place in the students' free time but rather is a means for developing curricular course content involving the discovery, application and reflection upon academic concepts as associated with real-life situations and involving concrete problem-solving situations (Ramírez and Pizarro, 2005).

On the strictly educational level, service-as-learning is defined as a service of solidarity realized by students, oriented toward an effective response to community needs, and integrally aligned with content expressed in the studies programme.

Among the theoretical bases of service-as-learning are:

- *Experiential learning.* This type of learning is based upon the idea that knowledge is achieved through a transformation provoked by an experience. Permanent learning is achieved through an education founded upon and through the resolution of tasks in real

environments, activities related to real life where learned material is applied and the learning experience is an experience in sharing knowledge. Therefore, by having students actively involved both in the classroom and the community, the learning process and behavioural development take place as a necessary result of the process itself.

- *Social constructivism.* Emphasizing the influence of social and cultural contexts on knowledge, this orientation supports the 'discovery model' of learning. The teacher is located in an active role while the mental abilities of the students develop *naturally* along various 'paths' of discovery. The teacher is not the depository of knowledge but rather is the companion during the student's learning process, making it easier for them to discover the subject being learned through the service experience.
- *Significant learning.* This has to do with that new knowledge that students are able to relate to learned material that is already fixed in their cognitive structure.

We can see that the methodology of service-as-learning is an attractive teaching tool that is available for inculcating solidarity values, integrating the areas of learning and community service, and focused on an experiential-analytical strategy that involves a meaningful, or positive service, considered from the point of view of its relevance to local needs.

Leandro Sequeiros' didactic model

The didactic model for solidarity education suggested by Leandro Sequeiros (1997) is practical, operative, providing specific elements for inclusion in the discussion of curriculum and as classroom activities.

One of the attractive aspects of the Sequeiros model is the fact that it proposes a sequence of different levels at which the person or group can direct acts of solidarity, ranging from those closest to the subject (family, friends, neighbours and classmates) to those which are farthest and/or more wide-spread (the population of the city, or members of marginalized social groups).

According to Sequeiros, there are three different ways of involving solidarity in the processes of education. First, one can consider solidarity as a transverse axis that crosses the educational curriculum, and is present in all of the materials, disciplines and subjects. Second, it can be considered to be an optional discipline, and therefore provided with a program and content of its own. And third, it can be considered as a non-continual educational objective, addressed occasionally by means of annual 'events' held at the schools.

In brief, whereas the Sequeiros model is based on a teaching strategy it also rests from solidarity education the importance of integrating into it the schools' pastoral and curricular dimensions. Social change is posited as the great horizon that can be dealt with from the perspective of solidarity education. Its teaching strategy is centred upon solidarity training given the profile of the student who is involved in the teaching-learning process. That is why it proposes a sequential approach to inculcating solidarity, taking into consideration the students' ages and advancing from what is closest and more familiar to what is more remote and related to the community, based on direct experience as well as reflective thought, and causing an impact in each of the sundry facets of the students' character make-up (the cognitive, the practical, the attitudinal and as part of their general body of knowledge).

Method

The methodology applied to this research was of a qualitative orientation, given that it gathered verbal descriptions (Taylor and Bogdan, 2002) and 'cultural constructs' regarding solidarity

education in the context of Catholic schooling. Furthermore, the study is exploratory-descriptive by nature.

Sample

This study included all of the Catholic schools of a given congregation in Chile. It gained relevance by collecting their experiences of student solidarity and their specific condition for strengthening and/or initiating solidarity projects. The informants were pre-determined: the school principals or directors, the coordinators of pastoral activities, the coordinators of the solidarity programmes, the coordinators of the studies programme cycle and the people in charge of solidarity-related activities. That orientation notwithstanding, the present article only covers the views of the school principals.

Data collection

Three implements were used to gather data: the questionnaire developed for preparing the map of solidarity for the Marist Brothers; and interview with the school principal; and the group interview with the institution's team (the executive team or the pastoral or solidarity team). These elements were structured on the basis of the central research topics.

Data analysis techniques

The interviews were subjected to analysis according to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, in Taylor and Bogdan, 2002), which directs the building of theory on the basis of the knowledge expressed by the protagonists in a field of action/interaction. It provides validity for this type of knowledge and transforms it into a theory. The model suggests three levels of encoding: open, axial and selective. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the more pertinent type of encoding is the *open model* that seeks to 'classify data in more abstract or more orderly categories … This implies breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data' (Krause, 1996).

Limitations

One main limitation has to do with the protagonists of the educational community wherein we sought to understand how solidarity education is brought to life. In this case, considering that it was the first qualitative approach to the world of these schools, priority was given to those who have the highest degrees of authority within the system, in terms of the degree of formality of their position, the official nature of their words and deeds, and the way in which these (expressions) impact decision-making within the educational community. Said option left aside other relevant voices such as those of the students and their families.

Results

The results of the study follow, and include a presentation of the strategies for attaining solidarity that were identified, their strengths and their weaknesses, in order to postulate the challenges that are visualized within the confines of this field. It is important that we point out that the results summarized in this section have been edited on the basis on information provided by the schools' principals.

The types of solidarity strategies that are being implemented

The solidarity strategies that have been implemented by the participating Catholic schools are expressed as pertaining to four groupings: campaigns, solidarity events, volunteer work and experiential actions or sharing events.

Solidarity activities can be understood in broad and varied ways. Just to mention the more recurrent activities, a large number of them are acts realized outside of the school and are considered as an outreach to the community. One person interviewed said: 'We also had to create other activities and we moved closer to the community: social centers, homes for the elderly, where simple tasks were undertaken, nothing too long, just a day when they came by, … something quick, an hour or two, and now what we are doing is to get out on the street at any time during the year and get closer to people, painting some sort of mural or doing clean-up work.'

There are some activities that are of a definitely material natural: collecting foodstuffs, selecting and preparing goods (to donate), and construction work. 'We have gone to take them (to needy people) some sort of food, clothing and … to share with them, because … there's a Christmas party every year and a meal is prepared.'

There are other activities that tend to provide some sort of community service such as holding a social gathering, sharing and/or providing some sort of material aid.

A variety of promotional activities are highlighted, and not just the delivery of material aid. 'There is one class that decided to do tutoring, to help younger students here with their school work, and to help students from other neighbourhoods and other schools, in mathematics, in biology, to reinforce and bring up to date what the slower students are learning, and we also understand that to be an act of solidarity.'

Acts of solidarity can be grouped according to specific strategies: education in general and in terms of transverse themes where solidarity is incorporated; the School Solidarity Project; the pastoral and student movements that are associated with the school; and participation in social projects that are financed with funds obtained from non-school donors.

Acts of solidarity are oriented towards diverse protagonists within the educational community or its immediate environs. The more commonly mentioned are families suffering economic problems, the ill and the community at large. A person interviewed stated that

> it is a matter of providing some sort of spiritual support and sometimes material aid for families that are going through a given situation of ill health, and for financial reasons; so there is one solidarity group that makes visits, to spend time with the sick, to do prayer sessions, to hold mass, and to collect donations for a family in need that is part of the school community, or when a teacher or staff person or other employee of the school needs help … There is also a support network to provide help that may consist of keeping in touch with a person by telephone to making house calls and, if necessary, to collecting some sort of financial aid, or donations of foodstuffs, to help the first person who needs it … within the school.

Mainly responsible for acts of solidarity are sundry members of the school community, but those who stand out are the students, parents and family members, the pastoral staff, teachers and the alumni centre.

The strong points of the solidarity strategies implemented at the schools

Among the strengths of the solidarity strategies displayed at the Catholic schools involved in the study there are three categories: acts associated with the protagonists, those that are linked

with specific activities, and those related to the attitudes of given members of the educational community. Among the first, the outstanding characteristic is to be able to rely on the support of a variety of protagonists who join together in order to facilitate the necessary undertaking.

The acts themselves are also perceived as strong points; the most highly appreciated by the participants are the 'hospitality experience', the 'rural experience' and the projects, those activities that involve community service, the summer camps and volunteer work in general. (The degree of) recognition of these activities is to be found in the quantity of organizational and educational processes that are involved, and according to the degree of importance that the protagonists themselves – particularly the students and the teachers – assign to the experience. It has been stressed that 'the students value the contribution that they make during their vacation to the poor children in the community; … and they also receive training in techniques and skills, etcetera'.

Other elements of the strengths involved in the solidarity strategies being implemented are the attitudes and values that are developed as a result of the participation by the members of the educational community. Accent is given to: motivation, a tendency to share, everyday commitment, the solidarity experience and the perseverance manifested by the sundry protagonists.

The strong points are mentioned as keywords for future research, given the fact that in and of themselves they enclose a key to a possible strengthening of a formal approach to the area of curriculum because put in the formal context of the institutions' own logic, they generate changes in the learning processes of the students.

The weaknesses of the solidarity strategies being implemented

Together with the strong points already reviewed, it is also possible to observe weaknesses in the processes being advanced in the various schools. The weaknesses in the solidarity education strategies vary as identified by the school principals. The points can be organized under three headings: those associated with the school's planning process; those linked to the level of commitment shown by the sundry actors within the educational community; and those associated with the characteristics of the solidarity education strategies themselves.

In the first place, the weaknesses associated with the planning process have to do with those factors related to the management and the planning of the activities, the organization of the School Solidarity Project itself, and the way in which that is melded into the overall school mission. It merits mention to say that each institution has achieved different levels of progress in that sense, some schools considering that the organizational aspects have been settled already, even to the point that they consider their level of organizational preparedness to be a strong point of the institution, whereas others – the majority – recognize room for improvement.

The most frequently mentioned weaknesses are the lack of time to undertake the activities, the absence of evaluation mechanisms and criteria for criticizing the activities, the scarcity of creativity and innovation, the total lack of resources and the difficulties for sustaining and continuing the activities over time. One person interviewed pointed out that:

> I believe that on the human level, and regarding the time available for a person to dedicate himself to this, even if there are people who are very interested, … it is not spontaneous. Time is short, and one isn't able to do everything. So everything has its cost; I'd like to have more people in charge of this. The people doing tutoring say the same thing, that they have to worry about the academic concerns and that they have to make the best of both situations.

A second set of weaknesses has to do with the commitment shown by different members of the educational community. Basically it is a matter of willingness to participate and the real sense of 'belonging to' the activities. One general difficulty is motivation. Special mention is made of the teachers, both the tutorial as well as the teachers of given subjects. One person interviewed stated that 'there is not much participation, not much organization, not much support from the tutors, because sometimes they do not know …'.

A lack of coordination with a sense of 'integrated education' for the students at these schools has to be added to the former weakness. In this area there are descriptions of not knowing what lessons are behind the congregation's solidarity project, its relationship within the curriculum nor its projection for the student after graduation, among other things. Mention was made that:

> There is a lack of teaching that solidarity is a part of life, something integral to the education process, and that is not only an occasional act, and (a need) to insist that acts of solidarity happen in the springtime because the weather is better … Because … I believe that a small child does not realize that another small child does not have the same opportunities, they see each other as equals. So it is very hard to produce a change in a small child's behavior about solidarity in an afternoon, or with a couple of letters, and that happens in first, second, third and fourth grade classes ….[3]

Another weakness that is associated with the characteristics of the solidarity strategies has to do with the nature of their orientation to providing material support. Although some of the strategies have not been designed as such, in practice they are implemented in that way, as a response to campaigns, as a reaction to catastrophes, as a positioning of material aid above personal, nurturing, and reinforcing acts.

In summary, it is possible to envision an organizational or structural weakness here, due to the fact that the means of incorporating solidarity education into the formative processes of the sundry actors who make up the educational community does not have 'formal' confirmation of the authorities. One cannot forget that schools are highly complex and hierarchical organizations, and that the validity given certain strategies by the authorities is fundamental to the optimal development of the changes that one hopes to achieve.

The challenges associated with the solidarity strategies being implemented

For the participants in the study, the challenges associated with solidarity education are directly related to the elements that they evaluated as still being weak spots within the dynamics of this congregation's schools.

The challenges are found primarily in three areas: the school organization, in solidarity formation and in the generation of psychosocial processes within the educational community that would favour the implementation of solidarity strategies.

Regarding the challenges associated with the school organization, these have to do with elements of planning for solidarity education, and the degree of its realization and systematization within the school. It has been mentioned specifically that there is a need to do better and more complex planning than what is done actually with the time and people available for educational tasks. At the same time, there is clearly a sense of uneasiness about continuing solidarity education, expressed by both the schools' and staff members. Following the same logic, it is especially relevant that there be procedures and instruments for evaluating the processes and results so that achievements can be given their due recognition and the strategies applied to date can be redirected if necessary.

A second set of challenges to solidarity education can be identified as related to 'solidarity training'. This was widely recognized by the participants and can be associated with seriously and responsibly facing the focus of training and thinking within the overall context of the congregation. One of the challenges related to training has to do with the 'feeling', or the deep significance, the very roots of solidarity education and how this is brought to life from within the evangelical spirit of the congregation.

Furthermore, there is the challenge to be able to adopt theoretical-conceptual elements that refer to solidarity and solidarity training in order to initiate a cultural change of positioning oneself with reference to certain notions of what solidarity means, and to design and plan from that point of view, thus giving coherence to training activities. It has been stated specifically that:

> I would like it if we, as agents, could handle the concepts of solidarity adequately. I think that there are still very deep empty spaces and very strong confusion about what is solidarity and what is simply a matter of providing material assistance. I think that there is a great need to train ourselves about all this.

From within the challenge of training for solidarity there arise a set of specific observations that illustrate the need to develop specific training strategies, and which make it possible to establish solidarity as the principal axis of the formative process. Among these observations, emphasis has been placed on dealing with the subject of solidarity through recognition of its sense of Oneness, of its nature of leading to Involvement with others, through an understanding of the meaning of evangelizing and opening oneself to belonging to or identifying with the community, through understanding it experientially. It was pointed out that:

> The sense of opening up to the community (should be) understood to be a broad experience because we could limit acts (of solidarity) internally at the level of students, teachers, children, guardians, and the parents or guardians could replicate the activities outside (the school), like I said in my answer to a previous question, but this does not mean that we are established within the community. I feel that we are not islands; no, I mean things are getting done, but it is also necessary to open up to moving forward to do community work so that we become recognized as formative agents in this area.

Finally, among the challenges of training in solidarity there are those elements that have to do with generating processes within the educational community in order to mobilize its sundry actors. Among those processes are: making people sensitive about solidarity; involving people in social change; participation; forming leaders; generating commitment in its widest sense; developing a conscience about the reality of the Other as well as the community in which the school exists; and (discovering) the motivation to act, to stand up and make a contribution to society.

Beginning with the elements that have been presented it is possible to visualize the need to harmonize the various points made by the people interviewed. In part we have the strengths and the challenges that are constantly overlapping each other, creating a feed-back loop that energizes them. When the strengths are dealt with they become a challenge at centre stage of the debate about the very structure of the school, and the type of formation that one hopes to develop with the students, in all its facets, taking into account the statements of intent and the insinuation that it is actually possible to realize an educational program that is coherent with the schools' own principles. Solidarity education is not merely a yearning or desire of a religious congregation, but rather it is a challenge to educational and formative development, seeking to reconfigure the make-up of the (educational) environment in order to provide answers to the requirements of contemporary society.

Conclusion

Finally, we offer a summary of the elements that have been presented, articulated with the thoughts that have arisen during the investigatory process. To begin the study, it is necessary to take into account the situational nature of solidarity that Sequeiros (1997) refers to; it is necessary to identify the conditions that make up the context as defined by Chilean society, implying a basic review of its socio-cultural characteristics.

Said characteristics fit in with the particulars of the contexts of the educational strategies. The structures of the organizations and the dynamics that flow from the educational spaces have direct impacts on the strategies' calendars.

Social inequality is recognizably present in Chile. It is urgent that the multiple manifestations of poverty, inequality in sundry areas and social gaps in general be overcome through governmental action as well as the participation of civil society, and schools and student organizations have to meet this challenge as well.

In the educational programme propounded by the schools observed, the socio-political elements are present in the pedagogical devices that comprise the curriculum. Thus it is understood that solidarity education appears coherently in the institutions' statements of principles, in an effort to imprint the values that sustain the institution upon the teaching program and the students themselves. However, the degrees of the actual realization of these teaching strategies may differ according to the weaknesses or amount of tension present; and one can discern the coexistence of formal academic education with solidarity education without being able to define their practical relationship within the curriculum.

The tensions referred to may have to do with the complexities of a given educational program that has to deal with harmonizing a diversity of interests, persons and cultural contexts, among others.

One axis of tension has to do with recognizing the recipients of the educational programme, and the managers of the programmes identify those who benefit from solidarity education as direct or indirect recipients. Those who benefit directly are the students, who are considered to be the ones who enact the solidarity process. This agrees with the ideas expressed by the statement of principles of the educational program, which consider and recognize the person in his or her medium, conscious of and responsible for their realities, with the capabilities required to build their own destiny and act in solidarity with society, realizing acts of service for others.

Indirectly, the family is acknowledged as an active element that provides a different type of direct support. This is also stated in the mission statement that conceives of the family as the primary responsible party for the rounded education of its children.

It is important to place an accent on the fact that the schools involved in this research have staff members who facilitate the sundry of initiatives and activities undertaken, implying the availability of material resources, positive attitudes and commitment by the members of the educational community. We must also take into account the amount of time given to the realization of solidarity education activities. This is made clear by reviewing the planning material and methodology guidelines that are implemented and concretized through the implementation of a plan covering nursery school through the last year of high school, establishing relationships between values and academic subject matter. This is characteristic of the organized activities described in the notions of solidarity described by Sequeiros (1997) when he pointed out that

> … (solidarity) is enjoined through projects … that are well-planned and agreed upon. This support is not made individually but rather is promoted, organized and evaluated by groups, associations and organizations. … It should be made clear who is the protagonist and in relation to for whom the act or acts of solidarity will be done, and what the problems are that present the need for acts of solidarity.

Furthermore, there are obstacles that place limits on the optimal realization of these acts of solidarity. One of those is the priority given to the academic aspects of education such as subject matter, the university admissions examination (PSU),[4] standards of academic excellence, and so on, which may be inconsistent with other fields such as solidarity education, that appeals to the ethical world of values. That is not restricted to the participating schools; it is the general situation of the educational system wherein the first priority is given to the so-called basic vertical objectives (BVO) rather than the FTO, which are clearly related to the value factors of education.

It has been publicly stated that the projection hoped for from solidarity education in the context of the students' learning processes is that it will favour their learning and practicing good citizenship and that solidarity will become an element of their value systems for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, one hopes that solidarity education will impact the lives of those who make up the school community, producing a change in people and strengthening their sensitivity to Others and toward the world around them.

By recognizing the characteristics and processes involved in solidarity education from what is stated by the schools' authorities, we can postulate a set of challenges that should facilitate the concrete realization of those intentions into the type of formation that the educational communities hope to develop.

To provide solidarity education, certain conditions must be present that allow the holding of the students into persons who are conscious of the need for solidarity, and one of the conditions for acquiring that learning is the existence of an alliance between the family and the school. This will also generate significant progress with attaining the transverse educational objectives because they have to do with social-emotional formation and the teaching of values.

Considering the discoveries of this study, the notion of solidarity that supports the proposal of the participating institutions is not exhausted by simply providing material aid, which is by no means reduced to an isolated act of charity; to the contrary, the training offered by the congregation seeks to clarify the complexity of the social phenomenon, taking it to other spheres that have to do with everyday life, with the condition of *being a person and being with others*. It is worth of mention that this has become an integral part of statements of intent. Nonetheless, by reviewing some of the activities explained in this study one can ascertain that there are both promotional activities and developmental actions, comprising a set of precise and concrete practices that very often translate as the mere delivery of material goods.

Solidarity education is proposed as being a formative program in harmony with the rest of the academia curriculum. Although it has been said that there is still need for progress in achieving formal and explicit coordination of a curriculum of solidarity training, there is evidence of discrepancy among the schools in terms of how they are trying to achieve that articulation (of theory and practice). Some say that they have made considerable progress, including solidarity into the treatment of subject matter; others are in the most preliminary stages of that process of articulation.

As regards the relationship established between solidarity education and the teaching-learning processes, the participants say that the feel can identify with the pedagogical strategies linked to learning-service. There is a key here that should be prioritized in order to be able to achieve the concrete goals as proposed.

However, this formative proposal is based upon the organic structure of a school – or group of schools – that safeguard their continuity. Therefore the active participation of the members of the academic community is crucial, especially that of the students and their families, the staff members and the faculty.

Solidarity strategies seek to open themselves up to the community and to provide a service to 'those in need'. It is a distinctive trait of the participating schools that solidarity is understood primarily as 'towards the outside', which raises some questions about 'inner directed' solidarity

within the educational community. On top of everything there are references to internal strategies such as providing aid to families with economic problems or health situations, and the mutual aid among students. The solidarity strategies implemented outside the school are focused on helping vulnerable children (day-care centres, poor schools), the elderly (in 'old people's homes'), street people and the community as a whole. In the latter case, activities involve beautification, clean-up work or repairs.

Faced with the challenges that imply designing, implementing and executing activities related to solidarity education, there is a consensus among the participants regarding the need to strengthen the role of the teacher. That is mainly because he or she is the person who channels proposals from the hierarchy and at the same time has intimate, privileged knowledge of the doubts and needs of the students regarding learning about solidarity. The teacher is also the one who undertakes negotiations or makes coordinated efforts with other instances such as the family, the social networks and coordinating committees.

That considered, we have to recognize that solidarity strategies for schools are processes through which the members of the educational community acquire important knowledge 'on the move'. That notwithstanding, there are still no tools for identifying what has been learned, for determining what is the quality of the subject matter or lesson learned, nor for being able to project the scope of the future impacts of those lessons.

Notes

1   The Chilean educational system is composed of three types of schools, categorized according to the source(s) of financing: 'municipal' or wholly public; private/subsidized, which are privately owned but co-financed with a government voucher system; and privately financed, without any government financing.
2   The cursives in this reference are ours.
3   This experience is part of the outlines of the Solidarity Project that the congregation suggests for its schools.
4   This is the selection system created by the Chilean government. It involves an examination of the student's knowledge of relevant subject matter from the various disciplines and is measured by a point system. Those students whose scores achieve the required minimum levels can apply for university studies.

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