

Reflection and updating  
of popular education in  
Fe y Alegría





## Presentation

“Education, as we know, is meant to be transformative. To educate is to take a risk and to hold out to the present a hope that can shatter the determinism and fatalism that the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the weak and the ideology of the utopians would convince us is the only way forward. To educate is always an act of hope, one that calls for cooperation in turning a barren and paralyzing indifference into another way of thinking that recognizes our interdependence.”

**Pope Francis**  
**Global Compact on education,**  
**October 15, 2020**

These are very timely words to present the Reflection and Updating of Popular Education Document, in which we are committed to continue transforming lives and communities for Another Possible World.

The question of the validity and pertinence of Popular Education in these times arises in many spaces. Since Fe y Alegría defines itself as a Movement of Integral Popular Education and Social Promotion, this topic is linked to our identity and mission.

Fe y Alegría is a dynamic organization that opposes stagnation. This has allowed it to adapt to the realities and contexts, to respond to the changes in society, and to challenge itself constantly to be an effective response that allows us to walk towards a transformed society through education.

This dynamism is generated by the commitment of the people who are part of Fe y Alegría in the permanent reflection and updating of its proposal of Popular Education.

The challenge is that from each local, national and international Fe y Alegría, the exercise of deepening and rethinking their practices in the light of the demands of the environment is made, and that we can make them concrete in some answers from Popular Education.

The key to this reflection is to continue doing it from the

- Epistemological commitment, from the place and conditions where Faith and Joy happens and means the world, from the place of the poor. It is from the daily life and aspirations of the excluded, marginalized, and discarded that we take charge of this educational project.
- Ethical commitment to take charge of the great problems of humanity and respond to their concrete expressions in the communities. Sustaining Life on the planet, overcoming poverty that has the face of a girl, boy, youth, woman, migrant and all the faces of exclusion.
- Pedagogical commitment to pass through the sieve of popular education, educational methodologies and the adequacy of all kinds of humanistic and technological tools that ensure quality in education.
- Political commitment to transform society into others that are more just, inclusive, in equality and equity at all levels, ensuring that these transformations are guaranteed by agreements of the entire society expressed in public policies.

Popular Education is not going to update itself. This will only be possible if we are able to update ourselves as Popular Educators of the XXI Century.

I would like to thank all the people who participated in this work, especially the commission made up of Gehiomara Cedeño, Beatriz Borjas, Vicente Palop and Antonio Pérez-Esclarín who encouraged the creation of this document, ordering the inputs to provoke us in this reflection and updating of Popular Education whose validity and relevance depends once again on us

**Carlos Fritzen SJ**

General Coordinator

Federación Internacional Fe y Alegría

## Introduction

With this document we close a section of the route that we undertook in February 2019 when the Federation's Board of Directors entrusted us to design a proposal that would allow to concretize the purpose of the federative Initiative "Reflection and Updating of Popular Education in Fe y Alegría", within the framework of the Federative Priorities Plan (FPP) 2017-2020.

At first, we decided to listen to people outside Fe y Alegría strongly linked to the world of education. For three months, we tried to conceptualize Popular Education in the new social, political, economic and educational contexts through virtual exchanges that were very enriching. With them we enter into what is currently understood by educational innovation (Pepe Menéndez), the current challenges of professional technical training (Fernando Marhuenda), the contributions of Miliana schools (Manu Andueza), popular education from planetary citizenship (Carlos Alberto Torres), the ecological challenge (Pedro Walpole and Luis Yanza). We also looked at the current approaches of the popular educators of Latin America (Andrea Faría, Lola Cendales, Santiago Gómez, Rosa María Goldar, Verónica del Cid, Rosa Zúñiga). In this process, the greatest challenge was to link the accumulated history of Popular Education in Latin America with the educational reality of Africa, taking advantage of the contributions of our colleague Alfredo Kiteso, director of Fe y Alegría in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In a second moment, the result of this tour was presented in San Salvador in October 2019 at the meeting of national directors, with the presence of the team of leaders of the federative initiatives. There we had

the opportunity to debate with the participants three thematic axes: the context, pedagogy and public advocacy in light of the principles of Popular Education. In the same way, this meeting allowed us to integrate into our reflections the appreciations of the federative instances from the axes that currently make up the technical team of the Federation.

We then tried to integrate the regional perspective into the base document through virtual dialogues with management staff and national leaders of the Popular Education Axis in Central America, the Southern Cone, the Andean area, Africa and the Entreculturas team in Spain.

The document we present to you is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, we systematize what is in force today in the accumulated history of Popular Education both in the course of its history in Latin America and within Fe y Alegría, thinking, above all, in the new generations that are becoming part of the movement. In the second chapter, we make a reading of the current context that permanently challenges us. While in the third chapter, we address the question: How does popular education work in practice in the educational proposal of Fe y Alegría? This question remains open so that we can continue to nourish it in future reflections from different fields and different actors. Finally, the presence of Fe y Alegría in a diversity of environments (local, national and international), with the purpose of having its educational advocacy influence beyond the walls of educational centers, led us to elaborate the fourth chapter, "From the community environment to the public sphere".

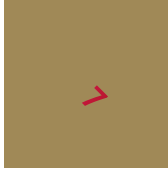
Opting for the interests of the most vulnerable sectors invites us to a permanent and deep review of our assumptions and mental schemes to be able to interpret the world as it is, in its macro and micro, objec-



tive and subjective dimensions. For this reason, we now invite you to continue with this reflective path that we began a year ago. It is time to rethink and analyze our educational practices as popular educators, in light of these ideas collected in this document. Let us not forget that the pedagogy of Popular Education is a pedagogy of dialogue and not of monolithic discourse of the question and not of the pre-established answers. This pedagogy is of the group and of solidarity, compared to those that reproduce individualism and competition. This pedagogy is of freedom in the face of those that reinforce alienation; of democracy and not authoritarianism; of hope, compared to those that talk about historical fatalism. This pedagogy accepts dialogue with the knowledge coming from the different social sciences and thoughts that promote liberation, such as Liberation Theology, feminisms, Ecology, and the indigenous, black and popular thought. This pedagogy is of pleasure, against those that split the desire of reason. This pedagogy

is of sensitivity, love and tenderness, opposed to those that teach aggressiveness and the law of the strongest, as a path to integration in a savage capitalism and in paradigms of domination and discrimination. This pedagogy incorporates feelings, intuitions, experiences, involving the whole body in the process of knowledge. For this reason, as part of the learning process, it appeals to art, play, psychodrama, and direct contact with practical experiences produced in social life.

In addition, from these different dimensions of the pedagogy of Popular Education, we have to discern which the basic components are that will allow us to remain in a horizon of social transformation. Such horizon should be endowed with an ethics of change where the vast majorities with whom we work are included and, therefore, prevent this horizon from continuing to be only for a few enlightened and privileged minorities.



# Today's Popular Education

Talking about Popular Education has a huge resonance in the heart of Latin America and involves connecting with a series of educational movements with clear emancipatory and social transformation intentions. In the face of trends that want to turn education into a means of inserting in today's globalized world, which implies accepting the terrible inequalities and the inhumanity and injustice in which we live, Popular Education is committed to recovering and promoting the transformative potential of each person as the subject of each own history and of history. Education that prepares individuals, communities and nations, no longer to accommodate changes, but to guide them in favor of a project to build another possible world in which the defense and fulfillment of human rights and the rights of the nature, inclusion, respect for diversity and peace prevail. Education oriented not merely to train the professionals that the market requires, which is what the educational reforms and quality education proposals generally aim for, but the human beings that a free and deeply democratic society needs. Armed with a deeply humanistic science, a social and spiritual conscience and the necessary training, to creatively transform their environment and contribute to social transformation where everyone can exercise their rights as citizens and live with dignity.

## 1. Brief history of Popular Education

### 1.1 From Simón Rodríguez and José Carlos Mariátegui

To talk about Popular Education we must go back to the XIX century and rescue the figure and thought of Simón Rodríguez, the Liberator's Teacher, one of the most exciting characters in the history of America, a man misunderstood in his time and still unknown today.

At a time when education was a privilege to which only white boys and children from the privileged classes had access, Simón Rodríguez dared to propose popular education, that is, open to all citizens. He was well aware of the scandal that an education should entail for the people, especially for the marginalized and despised, - the Indians, the cholos, the blacks, those who throw it away -. In fact, in a note of the 1842 Lima edition of his work "American Societies", he ironically stated "It should be noted that Education had never been seen in bad company until the year 28, when it was introduced in the streets of Arequipa as Popular"<sup>1</sup>.

Ahead of his time, Rodríguez saw clearly that, in order to have new republics and prosperous societies, it was necessary to undertake urgently an educational project, which would turn submissive individuals into free and independent citizens "capable of governing themselves", and who

(1) Rodríguez, S. "American Societies in 1828", Arequipa, Peru, in Complete Works, (Two Volumes). Simón Rodríguez National Experimental University, Caracas, Venezuela, 1979.

would not allow themselves to be exploited or deceived. Military independence would be of little use if economic and cultural independence were not undertaken urgently, through an education that taught “living in the Republic”, that promoted “social virtues” and combat selfish individualism.

This education had to be proper, original, conceived in the American heart: “America must not slavishly imitate, but be original!”; “Instead of imitating, you have to think”, “Either we invent or we err”<sup>2</sup>. Education open to all citizens, especially the poorest and most marginalized sectors, the most direct victims of the old colonial order.

Rodríguez was also very critical of this transmissive and repetitive pedagogy and instead proposed an active, critical and creative pedagogy: “A child learns more, in a while, by carving a little stick, than in whole days, by talking to a Teacher who speaks to him of abstractions superior to his experience”. “Teach children to be inquisitive, so that by asking why what they are told to do, get used to obey reason, not authority as limited, or custom, as the stupid”<sup>3</sup>.

But possibly his greatest insistence, which was the reason why he was misunderstood and rejected by wide sectors of society, was his commitment, both in his writings and in his practical experiences, to cultivate a love of work, and to unite academic instruction with mechanical and agricultural trades, since it was necessary to “colonize the country with its own inhabitants”<sup>4</sup>. He was convinced that wealth did not consist of mines but of productive capacities, and that work was the key to progress. In all the educational centers that he created, he set up productive workshops and even called “House of Public Industry”, the first school he founded in Bogotá upon his final return to America. When he could not work as a teacher, in order to survive, he set up workshops to produce soaps and candles. For this reason, he used to ironize, saying, “In this way I will wash the conscience of the Americans and I will light America with my candles.”

It is also necessary to recover, among others, the figure of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, known as El Amauta (in Quechua Maestro), who strongly criticized the elitist, colonial and colonizing character of Peruvian education, which did not respond to the interests of the people but to those of the ruling class. Mariátegui also knew how to see the close relationship between education, economics and politics, and considered that it was not “possible to democratize education without democratizing its economy and without democratizing its political superstructure”<sup>5</sup>.

(2) Rodríguez, S. Complete Works, Volume II, p. 9

(3) Rodríguez, S. Complete Works, Volume II, p. 27.

(4) Rodríguez, S. Complete Works, Volume I, p. 61

(5) Mariátegui J.C, “The process of public instruction”, in seven essays on the Peruvian reality, Lima 1982.



For this reason, he proposed an Indo-American socialism, which would respond to the different reality of our America, since “we do not want socialism to be a copy of it in America. It must be a heroic creation.”<sup>6</sup>

Mariátegui remembers that in Inca society leisure was a crime and work its highest virtue. Consequently, Peruvian society had to return to its roots and consider work as the main means of human fulfillment and promotion. The new man who would be born from the new education would be a thinking man and a hard-working man, capable of interpreting his reality to transform it through productive and liberating work.

### 1.2 A decisive educator: Paulo Freire

However, without a doubt, the best-known and most influential educator in Latin America is Paulo Freire, whom many consider the father of Popular Education, which has been rooted in the proposals of Liberating Education of the Brazilian pedagogue since the 1960s, the XX century. In the face of banking, uncritical, domesticating education, education for submission, serving the interests of the dominant groups, Freire proposed a problematizing or awareness-raising educational practice, which helps the student to understand and overcome the domination he suffers and makes him subject of his history and history.

In traditional education, the educator is the person who knows and therefore places his/her knowledge in the minds of the students. There is no communication, only mere communication from that person, which the student must repeat as faithfully as possible. In the face of this, Liberating Education chooses a pedagogy of resis-

tance and dialogue, born from a critical matrix and generates criticism. In this way, Liberating Education is oriented towards developing, through dialogical and communicative processes, the ability to read reality, say one’s own word and write the history of personal and community liberation.

Freire insists that education is never neutral: it is in favor of domination or emancipation, of maintaining the current world or transforming it. Consequently, all educational practice is political because it involves values, projects, utopias that reproduce, legitimize, question or transform the prevailing power relations in society. For this reason, Freire distinguishes between conservative and transformative educational practices.

Education by itself does not change the world, but without it, it is impossible to do so. Consequently, the popular educator must have an ethical and political commitment for the construction of a fairer world. The educator sees history not as fatality, but as possibility; he/she does not lose his/her capacity for indignation, he/she is not indifferent or neutral in the face of injustices, oppression or discrimination; he/she maintains and promotes hope in the possibility of overcoming the unfair order, of imagining achievable utopias.

“I do not understand - Freire tells us - human existence and the necessary struggle to improve it without hope and dream... Hopelessness immobilizes us and makes us succumb to the fatalism in which it is not possible to gather the indispensable forces for the re-creating onslaught of the world... It is not possible to fight if there is no tomorrow, if there is no hope ... It is not possible to think about transforming the world without a dream, without a utopia, without a project. Dreams are projects for which one fights. Their achievement requires effort, courage, and maturity”<sup>7</sup>.

(6) Ibidem

(7) Freire, P. (1999) Pedagogy of Hope, Editorial Siglo XXI: Madrid, p.8.



Freire was well aware that transformative proclamations had to be supported by consistent practices, and that politics had to be based on genuine ethics:

“What kind of ethics is that,” Freire wondered in alarm, “that only works when applied to my benefit? What strange way is that of making history, of teaching democracy, of hitting those who are different to continue enjoying, in the name of democracy, the freedom to hit? There is no government that remains true, legitimate, worthy of faith, if its speech is not supported by its practice, if it sponsors and favors its friends, if it is hard only with the opponents and soft and pleasant with the co-religionists. If it submits in once, twice, three times to the unethical pressures of the powerful or of friends, it will no longer stop ... until it reaches the democratization of shamelessness”<sup>8</sup>.

### 1.3 Medellín and Puebla assume Freire’s Liberating Education

The proposal of Liberating Education gained great momentum throughout Latin America, when the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference, met in Medellín, Colombia (1968), in line with the spirit of renewal of the Catholic Church initiated with the Second Vatican Council (1962- 1965), adopted the ideas of Paulo Freire, made them theirs own and promoted very widely.

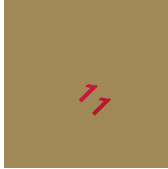
At their meeting in Medellín, the Latin American bishops made efforts to read the reality of the continent from the perspective of the poor in the light of faith and concluded that

“The Latin American Episcopate cannot remain indifferent to the tremendous social injustices existing in Latin America, which maintain the majority of our people in painful poverty close in many cases to inhuman misery... We bishops want to approach the poor with more simplicity and sincere fraternity, making their access to us possible and welcoming”<sup>9</sup>.

The bishops understood that the option for the poor, to be effective, had to include the option for the means that allowed them to escape from their poverty. Moreover, it was where they discovered the liberating potential of Paulo Freire’s educational ideas, which Latin American bishops made their own. According to the final document of Medellín, ignorance is an inhuman servitude and one of the main causes that keep people in misery. Consequently, there was an urgent need to promote an education that would help liberate people from the fanaticism, fatalism and passivity that kept them in their plight. An education for liberation and not for submission:

(8) Freire, P. (1996) Politics and Education, Editorial Siglo XXI: Madrid, p.38.

(9) General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate. Final Documents of Medellín. IV, Education, pp. 3 et seq.



“Our reflection on this panorama leads us to propose a vision of education, more in accordance with the integral development that we advocate for our Continent; we would call it liberating education; that is, the one that turns the student into the subject of his own development. Education is indeed the key means of freeing people from all servitude, making them transcend from less humane living conditions to conditions that are more humane, bearing in mind that man is responsible and the main architect of his success or failure. For this, education at all its levels must become creative, since it must anticipate the new type of society we look for in Latin America”<sup>10</sup>.

Since Medellín, Liberating Education became strongly linked to Christian groups in Latin America committed to transforming the Latin American reality that the bishops had not hesitated to characterize as a “structural sin”. Numerous Religious Congregations, priests and groups of committed Christians went to the disadvantaged neighborhoods and areas, to live their faith together with the people as a commitment to serve those most disadvantaged, and found in liberating education an effective means to develop their vocation of service. Many of them would find in Fe y Alegría an excellent opportunity to live their evangelical commitment and their vocation of service with coherence, which in part would explain the fast growth of Fe y Alegría in these years.

In 1970, Salvador Allende became president in Chile by peaceful means, through popular vote. With the Allende’s triumph, a great hope arose among numerous progressive groups that it was possible to change society without resorting to arms, as the guerrilla groups thought and those who considered that the Cuban revolution should

be expanded throughout America, since it was possible to transform society without class struggle and without violence. In these days, groups of Christians and priests for socialism began to proliferate, and liberating education became very popular.

In 1971, the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez published the book “Liberation Theology”, where he presented a Liberating God, allied to the oppressed, who hates oppression and injustice, and guides them from slavery to freedom and a Jesus close to the poor and to the victims of any kind of exclusion and domination. Liberation Theology entered in tune with and nurtured many of the assumptions of Liberating Education. In the seventies, the theories of dependency (Dos Santos, Faletto), the theater of the oppressed (Augusto Boal), the popular communication of Mario Kaplun, the participatory action research of Orlando Fals Borda, the Latin American philosophy of Enrique Dussel and the critical pedagogies enriched it. They came to us especially from the Northern countries.

Nevertheless, this kind of springtime of hope to transform Latin America through education and non-violent means did not last long. The dominant groups were not going to accept ideas and policies that would endanger their interests. On September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet staged a very bloody coup d’état and Salvador Allende died. A brutal repression began and thousands of people were killed simply for defending progressive ideas and having fostered a social transformation that would allow the victims of the entrenched structures of domination and oppression a dignified life. National Security policies began to spread throughout the continent and Latin America

(10) Ibid, pp. 8 and 9

was infested with brutal and genocidal dictatorships that tried to impose a political and economic project against popular interests through fierce repression.

In 1979, the Third General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate was held in Puebla de los Angeles (Mexico). Despite the fact that repressive policies had taken over most of the Latin American continent and authoritarian regimes looked with suspicion at Liberating Education with suspicion, surprisingly and with great courage, the Puebla Document maintained and even promoted more strongly the ideas proposed by Medellín:

“We take up again with renewed hope in the life-giving power of the Spirit, the position of the II General Conference that made a clear and prophetic preferential option in solidarity for the poorest... We emphasize the need for the conversion of the whole Church for a preferential option for the poor, with a view to their comprehensive liberation”<sup>11</sup>.

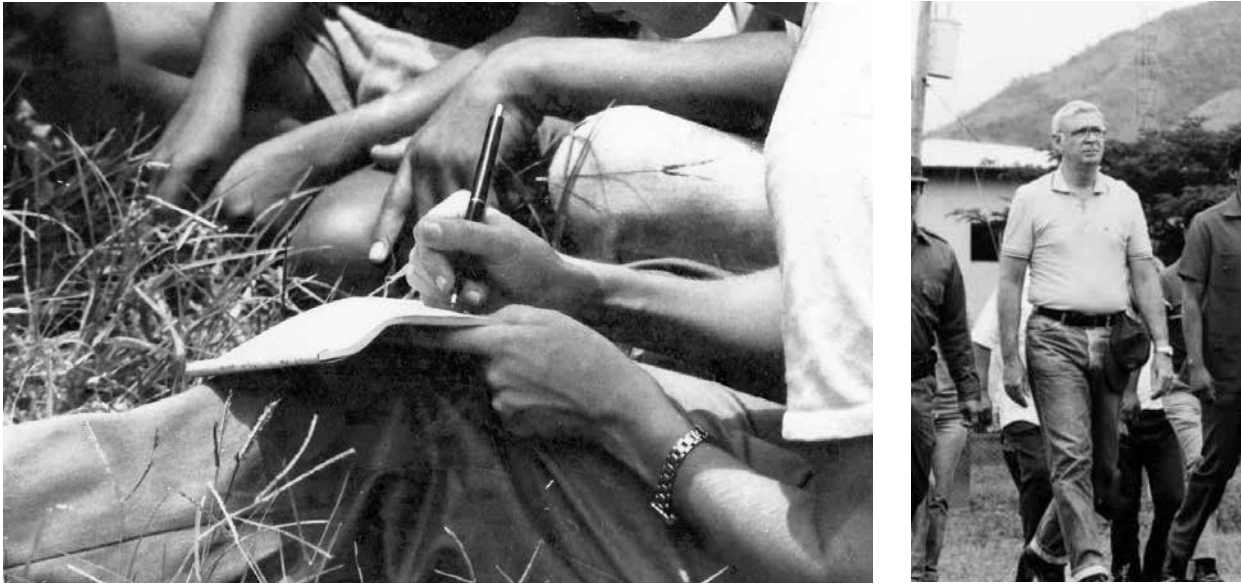
In this same year, the Sandinista revolution succeeded in Nicaragua, where committed Christian groups participated openly. Several priests, among them Scotto and the Cardinal Brothers, held significant positions, including ministers, in the new government. Catholic youth enthusiastically participated in the international literacy campaign, which took up the awareness-raising method of Paulo Freire.

#### 1.4 Liberating Education becomes Popular Education

In 1980, Monsignor Romero, voice of the voiceless, was murdered in San Salvador. He was a simple man who, in the face of the evidence of the cruelty of the repressive forces, which in no way allowed the prevalence of justice policies, gradually abandoned his conservative ideas, until he raised his courageous voice, of prophetic and evangelical roots, against the forces of domination.

In the face of the growing repression that prevailed in almost all of Latin America, Liberating Education allied itself with resistance groups, engaged with the victims of repression (organized or not), and with the movements that fought against dictatorships and became popular. From 1981 onwards, the name Educación Popular (Popular Education) was imposed on the name Liberadora (Liberating Education). Since Marxism had a theory that explained poverty, dependence and domination, Popular Education approached Marxism, but it did so from the Althusserian trend, which considered education as an ideological apparatus of the State, at the service of the dominant classes. As a result, in those years there was a profound disagreement between formal education and Popular Education, which focused primarily on the training of organizations

<sup>(11)</sup> General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla, Mexico. Final Document. Third Part, Evangelization in the Church of Latin America, Communion and Participation. Chapter 3, Means for communion and participation. 4, Education, paragraphs 1024 et seq.



Photographs taken from: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2016/02/20/56c8a41722601ddc168b45c5.html> (1984)

and social movements' leaders, work in literacy, health, alternative communication, the environment, cooperatives and popular economy. These groups considered that popular education was not possible in formal contexts, since the school was the main means to reproduce the culture of domination.

During this period, Popular Education became highly politicized and ideologized, with an emphasis on class consciousness and the seizure of power, regardless of the media and without analyzing how power was exercised in the micro spaces of everyday life and among the own groups that sought to conquer it. The catechism of manuals replaced reflection and analysis; ideology was substituted for pedagogy, and as was often repeated in meetings and congresses - "quoting Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed, it ended up oppressing pedagogy"; indoctrination prevailed over dialogue and reflection. His dogmatism and alliance with Marxism and with the most radical groups made many begin to look at Popular Education with distrust and even oppose it directly. His dogmatism and alliance with Marxism

and with the most radical groups made many begin to look at Popular Education with distrust and even oppose it directly.

Faced with the evidence of absence of political and social results and its strong ideological and even dogmatic character, popular educators began by 1985 a serious questioning and self-criticism of this way of conceiving educational work, which gained a lot of force in the 1990s and that still, continues today. This led Popular Education to review and deepen analyzes, assumptions, proposals and practices so that they would better respond to the new realities. It was considered very necessary to review and expand the concepts of poverty and marginalization beyond the economic and social dimension to assume all the forms, often hidden, of exclusion and discrimination. It was also necessary to rethink and analyze the exercise of power in the macro, meso and micro dimensions; and it was insisted on recovering the pedagogy by linking it more strongly to politics.

This rich process of reflection and questioning was led above all by CEAAL, which, although it was born in the 1980s as the Council for Adult Education in Latin America, in 2012 began to be called the Popular Education Council of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Since then, CEAAL has been strongly advocating the validity of Popular Education, and through forums, meetings and especially with its magazine La Piragua; it has generated reflections, criticisms, proposals and experiences, and has been an important platform for reflection, promotion and socialization of experiences between different social movements in Latin America.

Although the extent and richness of Popular Education precedes and exceeds the space made up by CEAAL, we cannot ignore that this continental network of more than a hundred PE centers in Latin America is a privileged scenario for recognizing contexts, tensions, debates and challenges in this field.

After a brief review of the articles published in the magazine La Piragua, Alfonso Torres (2007), considers that the essential elements that Popular Education has been working on and are still very relevant and necessary today, are the following:

1. Emancipatory ethical-political intention towards the construction of societies that overcome injustices, dominations, exclusions and inequities.
2. Contribution to the constitution of the popular sectors as subjects of transformation from the strengthening of their organizational processes and struggles.
3. As a pedagogical action, it aims to influence the subjective sphere (consciousness, culture, beliefs, interpretive frameworks, emotionality, will and corporeity).
4. Creation and practice of dialogical and participatory work methodologies, such as the collective construction of knowledge, the dialogue of knowledge, participatory research, the systematization of experiences, the critical recovery of history...<sup>12</sup>

### 1.5 Popular Education in Latin America in times of progressive governments

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the XXI century in Latin America, the enthusiasm generated after the end of the dictatorships and the beginning of democratic reforms in almost all the countries of the continent collapsed in the face of the evidence of the disastrous social consequences brought about by the implantation of the neoliberal creed. Poverty and social inequality indicators increased and unemployment, precariousness and informality became the predominant features of the world of work while the plutocracy, corruption and legitimacy crisis worsened despite the policies of state modernization.

(12) Torres, A. (2007): Popular education. Trajectory and news, El Búho, Bogotá.

This situation generated a growing tension among the population, which gradually replaced the oligarchic democracies with governments that proclaimed themselves left wing and anti-neoliberal. Most of the governments of Latin America assumed many of the essential principles of Popular Education, drafted and approved very progressive constitutions, gave protagonism and voice to traditionally ignored sectors (indigenous, Afro-descendant, women...), advanced economic and social policies in favor of the excluded populations, and managed to reduce considerably the indicators of misery and poverty.

However, in some of them, more and more populist and authoritarian practices were imposed, in an effort to remain in power at any costs and at any price. Some even assumed dictatorial and highly repressive behaviors, in violation of essential human rights.

In this period of progressive governments, a process of “professionalization” of popular educators has been leaving political militancy aside, transforming themselves into promoters of government social initiatives. They emphasize a clientele and/or control relationship towards the population, which has led them to dispense with political-ideological debates that could endanger the cohesion of groups<sup>13</sup>, focused on responding to bureaucratic tasks.

We thus enter the second decade of the XXI century with a statement that is collected by CEAAL colleague Verónica del Cid,

“When I called good and bad, I indicated that it is a matter of not confusing the system of domination, that there are interests and projects

in dispute and that we are betting on completely different conceptions of life. It is a matter of not confusing those different positions of power, which keep us in constant contradiction. There are two projects in dispute: one that wants to hegemonize life, to end life with accumulation interests using all the methods of domination that exist to ensure their interests and there is the other project that is being built from the people with all their contradictions”.

According to this educator, the important thing is to “pedagogize” the spaces in which these experiences are carried out by re-dimensioning the strategic and political role of the educational processes.

This means questioning the experiences, asking if they have allowed to create critical thinking, if they have really promoted emancipatory projects, if they have contributed to understanding the logic of hegemonic power and if they are stimulating new ways of building society.

## 2. Essential principles of Popular Education

If we try to look today with the eyes of the disadvantaged and excluded people, the reality of our countries and the world, we see that the fundamental options and the constitutive elements of Liberating Popular Education are still more relevant than ever. In the words of Oscar Jara<sup>14</sup>,

(13) Zibechi, R. (2018) “Half a century of Popular Education” at <https://www.nodal.am/2018/06/medio-siglo-de-educacion-popular-por-raul-zibechi/>

(14) Inaugural conference of the CEAAL Meeting-Assembly, “The challenges of Popular Education processes in the current context.” Quito, August 29, 2014

“In the vast majority of our countries, the equity and equality gaps remain intact...; the challenge of overcoming equity gaps in the economic, social and cultural fields, gender gaps, ethnic discrimination gaps, age separation gaps, remain untouched. Therefore, in the face of the neoliberal paradigm, in the face of the privatization paradigm, in the face of the paradigm of individualism, in the face of the paradigm of education for the market and education as a commodity - that is, where knowledge and educational possibilities are sold - we state another paradigm: a paradigm of a transformative education, a paradigm of an education for solidarity, a paradigm that also ensure the right to a free and quality public education, a paradigm of education as the construction of learning capacities and personal growth throughout life”.

Jara strongly emphasizes the need to continue betting on an emancipating and transforming Popular Education, which covers all fields, modalities and levels, and makes his own the ideas of the Chilean sociologist Helio Gallardo<sup>15</sup>, who states the need to move from the concept of popular into the social meaning to the concept of popular in the political meaning:

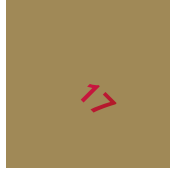
“The social people is made up of all those sectors that suffer some level of asymmetry, gap, and inequality, due to any form of exploitation, oppression, exclusion, marginalization or discrimination. All these sectors make up the social people. Therefore, a Popular Education is an education that rescues the life, the needs, the dreams, the cares, the frustrations, the expectations of that social people. However, the important thing is to advance to the concept of political people: that is to say, the one referred to all those social sectors, organizations and people that fight to eliminate the conditions of exploitation, exclusion, oppression, marginalization and discrimination”.

Therefore, in view of the clamor that Popular Education no longer makes sense today and the widespread ambition to impose educational models at the service of current structures, it is necessary to underline its validity, and claim, among other things, the following principles collected from different authors and from the conversations, we had with some well-known popular educators:

- Emancipatory ethic-political intention and the need to cultivate the hope committed in the transformation of unfair structures and mechanisms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion; hope that becomes a complaint and creative announcement of different proposals, different models, different relationships, and different education, to achieve a different world.
- The need to recover militant solidarity and commitment to the most vulnerable populations and groups discriminated against and excluded for economic, political, cultural, ethnic, sexual, and religious reasons. It is necessary to recreate a culture of rebellion, of resistance, of memory, of solidarity, of diversity, of criticism, of freedom.
- Critical study of the local, national and world reality to detect and confront the old and the new exclusions and discrimination in defense of diversity, considering it an essential value, against the intention of imposing a single thought that it considers as only valid or superior the imposed models.
- Imposition intended not only by countries that openly promote neoliberal democracy, but also by totalitarian regimes, which have adopted the market economy under a strong political centralism of the communist party, as is the case of Russia and China

(15) Gallardo, H. (2011) “The people as a political actor and as a historical subject”, Revista Pasos, N. 152, July-September 2011.





that, in the world geopolitical confrontation, continue to support the experiences faced with North American imperialism.

- Defense of human rights, today so violated, and the rights of nature, today so mistreated, overcoming mere anthropocentrism to assume biocentrism, that is, the defense of all forms of life.
- Permanent self-criticism to recognize excesses, absences, limitations and inconsistencies that distort our ways of analyzing reality and prevent the search for alternatives to transform it.
- The need for a foolproof humility, completely away from dogmatic positions, that respects and values the diversity of proposals and experiences and seeks the articulation of all those people and groups that looks for the transformation of our unfair and exclusive world.
- Contribution to the constitution of popular sectors as subjects of transformation from the strengthening of their organizational processes and struggles by developing the capacities that favor participation and a sense of the community.
- As a pedagogical action, it intends to influence the subjective sphere (conscience, culture, beliefs, interpretative frameworks, emotionality, will and corporeity), prioritizing critical and creative pedagogies, over transmissive and reproductive pedagogies.
- Creation and practice of dialogical and participatory work methodologies, as the collective construction of knowledge, negotiation and dialogue of knowledge.
- Emphasis on the need for systematization as an instrument of training and knowledge of reality, which also provides clues for its transformation and the transformation of transforming individuals. Systematization can become a fertile source of analy-

sis, self-recognition, identity, memory, and collective creation of knowledge.

### 3. Popular Education in Fe y Alegría

In the years 1984-85, after a long process of reflection and debate, not always free of confrontations and internal struggles, since also in Fe y Alegría, conflicting and even opposing positions coexisted, Fe y Alegría defined itself in its Ideology as a **Movement of Popular Education** at a time when, although it began to question itself, Popular Education still looked at the world of school with distrust and suspicion. Fe y Alegría, which had been born as a Christian educational response to the clamor of injustice and considered that ignorance was the main reason for poverty and dependency, never accepted that Popular Education was to be reduced to non-formal educational practices and opted for a Popular Education in all its programs. In this sense, the XVIII International Congress meeting in Cali in 1987<sup>16</sup>, two years after the promulgation of the Ideology, expressed in its conclusions:

“It is seen with satisfaction how the approaches to Popular Education from non-formal education have full applicability in ordinary school educational processes, definitely overcoming the myth that Popular Education is exclusive to non-formal and unschooling processes for adults.”

On the other hand, facing the ambiguity of the expression “popular” and its multiple meanings, Fe y Alegría understands Popular Education not so much by its beneficiaries (disadvantaged, marginalized,

(16) International Federation of Fe y Alegría (2008) Thought of Fe y Alegría. Documents of international congresses 1984-2007). In: <http://www.feyalegria.org.gt/files/identidad/Pensamientos%20FyA%20congresos%20Internacionales%20.pdf>

excluded people...) or by its modalities (not formal or formal), but for its transformative intentionality. Fe y Alegría assumes it as an alternative educational proposal, overcoming traditional or fashionable practices, which aims to build a more democratic and fairer society and fights the structures of oppression and domination.

As was clearly specified in the Congress of Antigua (Guatemala, 2001)<sup>17</sup>, Fe y Alegría assumes Popular Education as an ethical, political and pedagogical proposal to transform current society. For Fe y Alegría, the fundamental root of its political and pedagogical proposal is in ethics. Because we recognize that all men and women, as children of a God who is a common Father-Mother who wants us to live as brothers and sisters, unique and unrepeatable, essentially equal, bearers of values, with absolute dignity, and a mission to perform in life, we oppose to all forms of domination and discrimination. Consequently, we do not accept a society that excludes and denies life and rights to the majority and numerous “different” groups. For this reason, we choose for these majorities and for discriminated groups, increasingly deprived of life and dignity, and with them, as protagonists and historical subjects, we commit ourselves to transform society, to transform our daily practices and relationships, and to be transform ourselves. We are very aware that only to the extent that we strive to be these new men and women, to embody the values we proclaim in our lives and practices, we will be contributing to create the new society. A society that today we visualize as deeply democratic and participatory, of true citizens with voice and power. A society that rejects authoritarianism and fights misery, ignorance, discrimination as attacks against humanity, as essential impediments to the exercise of citizenship and for sustainable human development.

Genuine democracy, a participatory and substantive democracy, supposes a radical trust in human beings, and is strengthened in the sense of personal and collective equality. Nevertheless, equality must be translated into real and effective participation. Equality is a starting and finishing point: because we state the essential equality of all human beings, we work for a society without excluded groups, which recognizes diversity and allows everyone, each one to contribute from their differences. This option translates into a tenacious and persistent fight against poverty, exclusion and discrimination, and against the historical and structural causes that cause and maintain them.

Consequently, we have chosen a pedagogy and methodology consistent with our ethical and political choice. Critical and creative pedagogy, for transformation and not for adaptation, which starts from the knowledge and culture of the students and is oriented, through the dialogue of knowledge and cultural negotiation, to empower them. That is, to promote a training that gives them voice and empowerment so that they become subjects of the transformation of their living conditions and of the excluding and discriminatory society. Misery and exclusion are linked,

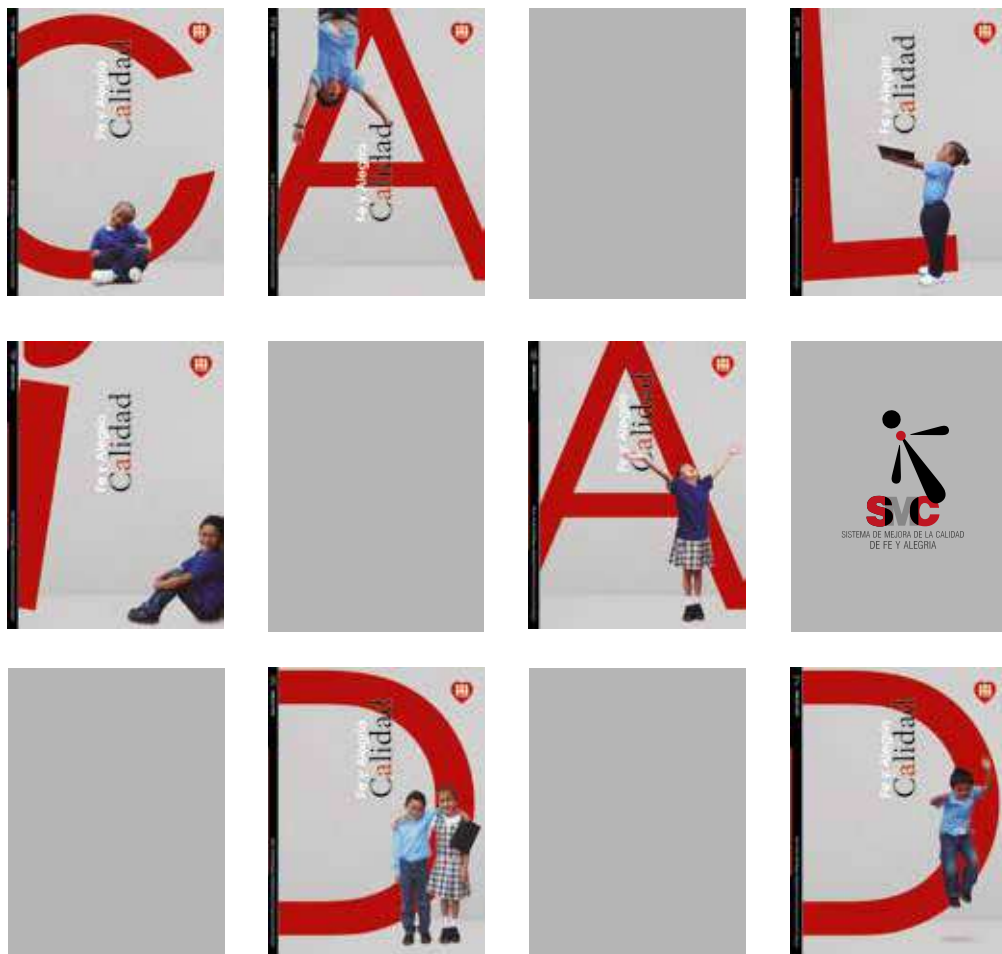
(17) Ibid

definitely, to the lack of voice and empowerment of popular groups. An ignorant or superficially educated people will always be the victim of manipulative leadership and will live in expectation of saving messianisms and under the threat of fanaticisms that will proliferate in a thousand ways of intolerance.

Fe y Alegría defines itself as a **Popular Education Movement**. These words summarize its identity and mission. By defining itself as a movement, Fe y Alegría is opting for a process of continuous transformation and updating. Being a movement implies the permanent creative destabilization, the continuous critical re-reading of reality or context from the interests of poor and excluded sectors. We should have an attitude of proven search, with large doses of audacity, nonconformity, sincere and constant self-criticism, in order to overcome inconsistencies and to adapt practices to the demands and challenges posed by the ever-changing reality and the growing disadvantages and exclusion of majorities as well as segregated minority groups. The identity of Fe y Alegría postulates a permanent, personal and collective discernment that clarifies to us if we are really doing what we should do and we are doing it, as we should be.

In fact, if we take a look at the topics and proposals of the International Congresses after the approval of the Ideology (especially the one in Antigua, Guatemala, which explicitly approached the topic of Popular Education, and the next one, in Paraguay, which followed the reflection from the perspective of pedagogy), the federative programs and the numerous publications of both the Federation and the different countries, it is evident the concern and efforts of Fe y Alegría to adapt its educational practices with increasing coherence to the demands of its identity and mission. In the Congresses, it will always start from a critical reading of the context, and in the light of this study, the topics to be deepened will be delimited, the sense of marginalization will be expanded beyond the social and economic, to include other subjects of exclusion and discrimination based on racial, gender, sexual, cultural and religious grounds. Even though, to better respond to the contexts, the topics that were proposed are diversified, maintaining the option for a transformative education in favor of a fairer and fraternal world will always be as Papadiós wants it and it was the project of Jesus, who invites us to build it. To make this possible, the human, pedagogical and spiritual training of all staff has been privileged, with different programs.

A significant milestone in this trajectory to consolidate an educational philosophy that allows the sustainability of the movement has been the implementation, from the federative instance, of the Latin American project for the training of popular educators, in 2001-2006, which covered about 25,000 educators of all the national offices of Fe y Alegría. To carry out this massive training proposal, a collection of 14 brochures was designed in which the contents of a basic training were developed focused on three dimensions: human, socio-political, cultural, and pedagogical. It was at the XXXIII International Congress of Asunción in 2002 when this project was outlined under the topic “The pedagogy of Popular Education in Fe y Alegría.” While a year later, the XXXIV International



Congress in Bogotá outlined what later constituted the quality system in Fe y Alegría under the perspective of Popular Education that most countries have implemented.

Given the growth and consolidation of the movement, also from the federative instances, the collection “Beyond the asphalt. Our identity from Popular Education” has been developed, whose purpose is to offer educational material for the training of educators who begin to work or have a few years of service in the institution in order to offer them the opportunity to approach the history of the movement and contribute to develop in them a sense of belonging.

The federative training processes deployed over twelve years (2003-2015) have served as the basis, in short, to build a framework of reference for training in Fe y Alegría. The text “Training of popular educators. A proposal for the transformation of practices”<sup>18</sup> tries to systematize the principles and methodology that have guided these processes, which have been enriched by the pedagogical teams of the national offices of Fe y Alegría.

(18) Borjas, B., Ortiz, M., Rodríguez E. and Soto, M. (2015) Training of popular educators. A proposal for the transformation of practices. Edited by the International Federation of Fe y Alegría.

## The context challenges us

### 1. Approach to the global context that we are living

A characteristic and inalienable feature of Popular Education is to start from the context, because only if we know it we can contribute to transform it; we are therefore going to venture a brief characterization, focusing on those aspects that may be of interest to Fe y Alegría's mission in the current circumstances.

We live in societies where it is not easy to manage the present, the response to change is always complex, especially in geographies of exclusion. Nothing is simple, nor unequivocal, nor unilineal, nor does it respond to a single cause. We are surrounded by complexity. Today no one can imagine the near future, we are not able to answer, and so we hesitate less and less to ask the fundamental question of “where are we going?” We look at an unsuspected horizon that presents us with the digital revolution, new biotechnologies, robotization, genetic engineering, the proliferation of conflicts with the latest technology, new diseases, the accumulation of toxic waste, the global warming, and, in general, ecological deterioration that puts in real danger the disappearance of the human species or even of life on Earth.

It is already commonplace to say that we are living a “Change of Era” rather than a “Time of changes” given the speed and depth with which changes are taking place today in the most diverse fields. It is true that, in human history, there have always been changes. What is new is the speed and intensity of these changes. Political, technical, scientific, cultural and social changes are taking place at such a dizzying rate that, as Carandel,<sup>19</sup> “would say, “They leave us no time to assume our perplexities”. This is so true that change itself, that is to say, what is new and original, becomes the fundamental value. Contemporary economic, social, professional and personal life requires, not only adaptation to the new situation, but also preparation to live in permanent adaptation to the demands of the process of continuous change. Therefore, the look of the popular educator must be on everything that surrounds social dynamics, destroying its components to understand its meaning, learning from the changes and knowing that its interpretation and later performance will be unrepeatable, unique, like any other social fact.

Bauman<sup>20</sup>, (2015), from the 1980s in XX century, began to feel that our society had stopped being predictable and was progressively moving towards a collapse more typical of “liquid” states than solid ones. He conceived the term “liquid modernity” based on the concepts of fluidity, change, flexibility, adaptation. The old fixed and immutable structures disappear and flow. The thesis handled by the Polish teacher is related to the principle of theoretical stability of society, defined by social structures, but now perhaps these are no longer defined so clearly; likewise,

(19) Cited by Pérez Gómez, A. School culture in neoliberal society, Morata, Madrid, 1998.

(20) Bauman, Z. (2015). Liquid modernity. Fund of Economic Culture.

everything seems to move towards a manifest solubility, since the limits between social phenomena are increasingly intangible.

The democratic institutions of many countries may be in one of the most unpopular phases in recent history, so a global rethinking of how participation works would be necessary. Paradoxically, in the late XX century democracies have been gaining ground against military governments, especially in Latin America; however, as Ramonet says, economic power has been systematically weakening the libertarian and participatory processes, making democracy itself lose effectiveness, and what is worse, generating corruption and inequality.<sup>21</sup>

Another example is the change in the space-time relationship generated by global connectivity through the internet; thanks to new technologies with a “click”, we connect to a vast information, but liquid, since we improve a lot in information, although not so much in knowledge. We move through swampy lands that have come to be called “post-truth”; furthermore, we have opened new relationships in the digital environment, but the commitment we perceive in the new social ways is very thin, and surrounded by a certain virtuality. However, we can find new bridges of relationship; society is perhaps more intercultural than ever, and actions have become “glocal” (global context from the local reading). The big challenge is to do it without generating the so-called digital gap, that is, only a part of the population has connectivity due to lack of resources. The possibilities of Internet connection in the world only belong to half of the population (ITU, 2010)

since in many countries access requires a certain economic level, and even worse, sometimes this access is controlled by governments because it is a resource that can be used against the State itself. Nobody knows what will happen in the next 10 years in economic aspects; the world has advanced since the 1980s, in a generalized neoliberalism, paradoxically with serious problems in individual freedoms, since access to development opportunities is being limited by opposing economic interests.<sup>22</sup>

Economic globalization, based on productive outsourcing (from central to peripheral countries), has created new markets and certain job opportunities in disadvantaged countries, but has accentuated the inequality between social classes and, mainly due to the precariousness of the labor scenarios presented. Low salaries and few labor rights (non-existent regulations regarding working hours, social security, unemployment...) make up a panorama of difficult survival for workers<sup>23</sup>. These growing levels of misery, insecurity and hopelessness are causing the fervor for democracy that they perceive to be permeated by corruption and incapable of solving the problems of the majority. In addition, violence increases every day: many neighborhoods and towns have been taken over by criminal gangs or paramilitary groups that are the ones who impose their law.

Fear grows the feeling that the doors of the future have been closed for them, also a reason for many people to leave their countries and increase population displacements.

(21) Ramonet, I. (2001). Impact of globalization in developing countries. *Memory Magazine*, 143.

(22) Sen, A. (2000). Development as freedom. *Ecological Gazette* (1st ed.). Planet.

(23) Torres, C. A. (2012). “Production and transformation of the residential space of the low-income population in Bogotá within the framework of neoliberal policies (1990-2010)”. *Cities: Magazine* University Institute of Urban Planning of the University of Valladolid, (15), 227-255.

Billions of people find it increasingly difficult to survive, forcing them to emigrate from their lands in desperate conditions due to economic and political causes and increasingly intense armed conflicts. These exoduses increase the need to search for countries of asylum or refuge<sup>24</sup>. In addition, a new category is emerging because of population displacement: migrations generated by ecological causes. The planetary ecosystem is very affected by climate change that is generating desertification and floods. There is a generalized increase of pollution by human action and we are facing a growing deforestation as a consequence of the industrial invasion of natural sanctuaries, generating in the affected population serious alterations in the way of making a living (work), diseases (many of them curable), loss of drinking water and food security<sup>25</sup>.

These displaced persons are hardly welcome in host countries. A large part of the world's governments still value migration only as a "labor force", and not as PEOPLE who look for alternatives to improve their living conditions. Governments generate discrimination and social castes in the countries of transit or destination, where foreign populations, sometimes for generations, suffer from a permanent reduction in their social and employment opportunities<sup>26</sup>, sometimes leading to inter-ethnic conflicts or simply between groups of foreigners and groups of nationals.

This situation offers us a panorama that crosses the entire planet, but, above all, it affects people, who, as De Sousa Santos says, are more vulnerable due to their social, economic or geographical situation. He identifies three axes of inequality<sup>27</sup>: (1) as it has already been pointed out, there is the economic axis or access to resources in a limited way due to the absence of a regulatory State. However, we can also find (2) the cultural or neocolonial axis, where the population that suffers from it, suffers more inequality if they belong to an ethnic or foreign minority with respect to the host region. Lastly (3) the patriarchal axis, where just because of being a woman, they suffer from multiple discriminations, not only economic, but also social and domestic. This last axis, moreover, penetrates transversally the social pyramid of a good part of the countries of the world, and is translated into deeply rooted customs that range from inequality and the exclusion of women and girls in many processes, to violence of gender, killing more than 130 women a day in the world<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hand, work has lost security, so, in a good way, it is also liquid, unpredictable and of low quality, for different reasons, although perhaps its fundamental mark is its precariousness (as has already been said). Precariousness not only due to the economic income it generates, but also in aspects related to work identity. Trade identities are increasingly blurred. A teenager, according to current trends, will have an average of 40 working years, and will have about 20 different jobs; in addition, he or she will change his or her work identity 3 times. However, it is

(24) ACNUR. (2018). Global trends: Forced displacement in 2017. Global Trends.

(25) UN Environment. (2019). Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6). Kenya

(26) García Roca, J. (2013). The myth of security. EDITORIAL PPC.

(27) De Sousa Santos, B. (2018). "The pains that remain are the missing freedoms". Inaugural conference of CRES 2018. Integration and Knowledge, 7 (2), 8-21.

(28) UN Women. (2018). UN Women Annual Report 2017-2018. UN Women.

possible that the 4th industrial revolution nascent (internet of things and persons<sup>29</sup>), will bring with it new care professions, so necessary in our contexts. It is urgent, therefore, to revalue reproductive tasks, which implies defending the labor rights of people who practice these professions, without losing their emotional charge, since this is one of the keys to sustainable human development.

Perhaps because of this panorama of uncertainty and fear, recently we can find some popular revolts in different parts of the planet. Almost simultaneously we have seen uprisings in Hong Kong, Chile, Spain, Ecuador or Lebanon, to name a few examples, different in culture and geography, but with certain common characteristics: (1) the uprising is intergenerational and in different social strata as far as to the population that attends. (2) The mobilization is called by social networks, skipping government filters. (3) The government response is usually minimizing and violent; and, perhaps most important. (4) It comes from a generalized discontent over the precarious conditions of work and/or the lack of democratic participation that neoliberalism has brought about<sup>30</sup>. Something may be happening in a good part of the population; we may be pushing the limits in many ways.

We are educators and we have a new panorama with a new youth with whom we have to learn to look at new contexts; they and they, they surely have keys; everything is changing, also the new modes of relationship, identities and struggles. Javier Elzo<sup>31</sup> in Spain perceived the new “clusters” in which he groups youth from 15 to 21 years old. In this new classification, the modernity-conservatism axis no longer

appears as an element of divergence. The current axis in which young people seem to be configured is the axis of commitment-disaffection, and in this new group, we find values in the new generations that reveal elements of the future: the family, responsible consumption (environmental), social justice... They are predominant values that youth want to commit to 60% of the time; it is a completely new dimension that deserves to be monitored individually and that will surely have effects in the future.

Because of the above, we see that compared to other historical and cultural times, the current explanations have lost their simplicity. We are surrounded by complexity, and the management of complexity can lead to instability, lack of clarity, uncertainty, generating insecurity, so it is difficult to make plans; but it also offers the possibility to create, to propose, to invent, to be born again. Uncertainty is the companion of freedom and an accomplice of creation. Although it is usually associated with “fear”, with a simple change of vowels, we can turn it into a “means” of creation and proposition, transforming tension into tenacity to assume with energy and strength our vocation as historical subjects. Therefore, as popular educators of *Fe y Alegría*, we claim the hope, committed for the transformation of our world. The current times appear to us with possibilities; they require our audacity and our dedication and service vocation. The transformative and creative potential of the human being has never been more radically evident than today, that although he is capable of causing a holocaust, he is also capable of achieving a dignified and full life for all humanity. Never before has there been a greater awareness

(29) The internet of things (IoT) aims at the digital interconnection of everyday objects with the internet, but also if the internet of people (IoP) is introduced; it aims at the intersection between technology and the improvement of the quality of life and well-being of people

(30) Calderón, M. (2019). The Ghost of Unsatisfied Worlds. Mapping the global protest. Sociotramas.org

(31) Elzo, J. et al. (2019). Youth and values (I). An essay on typology. Reina Sofia Center.



of human rights than today, nor was education given so much importance. However, we can only properly carry out our popular education mission if we commit ourselves to profoundly changing our ideas and practices.

New contexts are changing our responses, but they also provide us with new visions. The struggle for “the common home” gives us new guidelines for political work, as well as visualizing new collective rights, with which society begins to reconfigure its history. As Chomsky said, it seems that “this is not a time for heroes; it is a time for good ideas.”

### Contextual epilogue

It is necessary, in the time of confinement in which we write these lines, to refer to the global pandemic of Covid19. It is proving to be tragic in many latitudes, but it is also being especially amplified as for once, it is having a major impact in The United States and Europe. Mention should therefore be made of other not-so-notorious pandemics, as it seems that the affected people do not deserve priority treatment. Let us remember that, according to the UN, some 300,000 people die from hunger<sup>32</sup> a day, of which 8,000 are boys and girls<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, every day more than 4,000 people die from tuberculosis in the world<sup>34</sup>, and more than another 1,000 die a day from malaria<sup>35</sup>... just to name some very alarming data, but that occur in contexts where the “developed” world does not usually put so much attention.

Covid19, like many of the pandemic diseases (in some or all continents) reveals imbalances, which social observatories have been denouncing for a long time. In the first place, (1) perhaps it is time to begin to assess our relationship to the environment, including the animals we eat, and how they live before they move into the human food chain. It should be remembered that many of these animals have ingested large quantities of antivirals,

antibiotics and even pesticides, not to mention that many of them have suffered displacement due to climate change or deforestation, which has generated imbalances in ecosystems, without the possibility of a gradual adjustment.(2) We should be aware that we are in a world of global affectation in many aspects, such as the transmission of diseases or the economic, social and environmental inequalities. They generate population exodus, which puts two evidences on the table: we do not have global legislation to act, and increasingly, what happens in my neighborhood, affects me (even if I live 10,000 km away). In addition, this globalization has broken ancestral survival structures: local production is fundamental in current times, for example, essential medical equipment in a health crisis, masks, gowns or hygiene gels are products outsourced by globalization, and now in many countries they are insufficient. A similar phenomenon occurs with many food products, which weakens the countries that suffer from these deficiencies and, consequently, the communities due to their productive relocation. (3) There is a clear need to take into account and prioritize essential activities that have gradually lost space, for example, health or research, but also others that usually have not had a recognized “social cat-

(32) UN. (2019). More than 100 million people can die of hunger. UN News

(33) UNHCR (2020) How many children die of hunger a day and what can you do to avoid it? Eacnur

(34) World Health Organization (2018) World Tuberculosis Report 2018. Press Center

(35) WHO (2019) The World Malaria Report. 2019 at a glance.

egory”, and that are being revealed as essential in crises; these are jobs related to cleaning, care, agricultural services, and sale of food products. Along with this, there are other aspects such as education, politics, security and even care for the elderly, which deserve a re-thinking, since their parameters do not seem to respond to the new challenges of our society. It is necessary, in particular, to emphasize the issue of the elderly, due to the huge number that are dying in the “residences” of central countries. Everything seems to indicate that we are facing a new challenge in humanitarian coexistence: how to prolong life expectancy without losing quality of life, at all levels, not only from an economic perspective, but also in terms of relationships, meaning of life, identity...

In short, we need to realize that the current production system should be visualized considering processes that have value in themselves, such as education, health, care ... since they are fundamental because they generate life, although they do not always generate business or money. The “win-win” that tried to reconcile the liberal productive profit-generating system, combining it with a welfare state (the famous third way), may not be an equation that solves all the services that a territory needs. Therefore, a review of our current values as a society is urgently needed.

However, the confinement, in which we find ourselves due to the pandemic, may make us germinate some virtues that we had forgotten as a community: solidarity, the feeling of the same body or the ability to communicate. This is being reinforced by altruistic expressions and dedication, as is the case of hospitals stocked with medical material

thanks to personal initiatives created from nothing, or the provision of food for the elderly to neighborhood communities by anonymous users, for just mention two examples.

These circumstances invite us to think that, in times of isolation, capacities for getting closer are developed, made possible by three circumstances: (1) the feeling of proximity in isolation. It seems that internal silence (perhaps from our gap) is conducive to listening to the needs of others, or in other words, knowing my limitations helps me to recognize those of others. (2) Creativity seems to develop in isolation, that is, empathic reflection arises and feeds itself when we lose direct contact, and memory and discovery grow. The last and perhaps the most definitive paradox, (3) it seems that it is the internal silence caused by distance, which is allowing a transforming emotion to flow that allows communication, that is, it is not the words that carry the relevant information, but rather the emotion that usually accompanies the silence.

## 2. Current challenges for Fe y Alegría from the global context

Once the context, potentialities and problems have been analyzed, we think that the methodological approach should go beyond the classic practice of visualizing problems in order to find solutions; possibly, the contribution of methodologies that focus on dreams can anticipate better realities<sup>36</sup>. However, there may be some preconditions or circumstances, which possibly help to visualize it.

(36) Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2001). A positive revolution in change: Appreciative inquiry. Public administration and public policy, 1-36.

1. Build a work unit in Fe y Alegría respecting diversity, with the capacity to manage change with strong collective and service leadership.
2. Be able to work in the communities for a coexistence in diversity, with respect, equity and justice, promoting a culture of peace based on the defense and fulfillment of Human Rights and the Rights of Nature.
3. Promote an emancipatory and liberating education in all modalities and levels, based on listening, critical thinking and intercultural dialogue.
4. Analyze the ways in which power is exercised in all areas and relationships, working for a power that does not dominate, that does not concentrate, that is distributed, in the style of Jesus, who always used power to liberate, to save, to serve.
5. Insist on a solid and permanent pedagogical and political training, based on ethics. It is necessary to train for the exercise of politics as a search for the common good, which requires a great vocation of service.
6. Respond from Popular Education to major global problems from local “glocalization” contexts, such as the environment, peace, migration, gender issues, global citizenship.... For this, it is essential to articulate with the social movements and organizations that have already been working on it.
7. Work for an education that is respectful of the concerns and interests of youth, listening, sharing the word and the protagonism.

## How does Popular Education work in practice in the educational proposal of Fe y Alegría?

### 1. Educational model with access to all

Defense of public education and opposition to privatizing and exclusionary tendencies. Education as a right and not as a commodity. In those regions and countries, as in many in Africa, where many children, especially girls do not have access to school, ensuring them education must be one of priority tasks of Fe y Alegría.

## 2. Global and deeply spiritual ethical model for a planetary citizenship

- a) Vigorous defense of the Common Home, today so threatened with death, to fight environmental deterioration, extractive policies, misery, and promote and cultivate the values of austerity, respect, spirituality of care for life, responsibility, cooperation, with a view to building a planetary citizenship: we are all children of Mother Earth, and consequently, brothers and sisters. For this, it is essential to rescue both the ecological vision of some indigenous groups, who consider the Earth as the Common Mother of all living beings, which we must take care of and respect; like the one of the mystics who insist that we are part of a Whole and therefore promote universal and cosmic fraternity.
- b) Permanent work for peace as a treasure and a necessary good for the coexistence and survival of humanity.
- c) Promotion of authentic happiness, built on freedom, equity and defense of life, beyond the consumptive and individualist proposals proposed by the dominant culture.

## 3. Quality

- a) As opposed to the conceptions that reduce quality to mere efficiency or the ability to respond successfully to a series of standard-

ized tests, for Fe y Alegría, education is quality. It responds to the realities of its beneficiaries and contributes to the development of free individuals, with capacities to influence the improvement of their life and the transformation of their social environment.

Quality education if it awakens the love for learning, to improve oneself, if it values and recognizes learning from experience and encourages creativity, freedom and love.

Education that forms authentic people and citizens, with the ability to insert actively themselves in the world of work and production, and with a commitment to the common good.

- b) **Comprehensive:** fit trains all people and the whole person (reason, heart, and spirit; knowledge, feelings and values), coordinating and integrating knowledge from different settings (formal, non-formal and informal). This comprehensiveness must be ensured throughout the educational process from Early Childhood Education to University Education, worrying about offering, in parallel, alternatives for young people who are left behind from the formal educational system.
- c) With the best means and resources, always ensuring that the students have the essential means that allow them to learn meaningfully for a meaningful life.
- d) Opting for a multiple and diversified evaluation, which includes self-evaluation and co-evaluation, and is understood not as a means

to classify and exclude but as a means to help and make aware the achievements and gap from the contexts and the diversity of personal abilities. The aim is to promote educational inclusion for anyone, taking into account their starting capacities and adapting the school to each circumstance.

## 4. With a humanizing vocation

- a) Emphasis on training in values through interiority and spirituality, understanding it from working with emotions, feelings and art. Spirituality that loves and celebrates life, protects it and works so that everyone can enjoy of abundant and dignified life. A feminine spirituality that combats the sexist and patriarchal structures and culture, still so widespread in our societies and in the Church itself.
- b) A commitment to emancipation through the culture of the person in community. This will mean, especially in countries with massive immigration, working in depth on interculturality, overcoming mere multiculturalism that, in reality, is an imposition of the dominant culture, since minority cultures are tolerated as long as they live segregated and adapt to the dominant culture. Interculturality requires respect for cultural diversity, promotes inculturation and work with the mother tongue (in every context) especially when there is a dominant colonial language.

Genuine interculturality is a two-way process that can never be unilateral since it is based on meeting the other, communication

and exchange. Interculturality is a cultural, ethical and political process that recognizes in the exchange a positive and enriching fact for all.

- c) Transformation of the curriculum for its adaptation to the environment and the person, which will require not only breaking and adapting the structures (schedules, spaces, media ...) so that they respond to the needs of the students, but also the development of a new intercultural curriculum that starts from the interests of the disadvantaged students. This means, for example, raising economic issues from the situation of disadvantaged persons; gender issues from the position of women; racial issues from the perspective of indigenous, black or minority groups; the problems of urban life, from the experience of people with some functional diversity; the conquests and colonizations from the conquered and colonized populations.
- d) Working in the educational center and in the classroom, but also with the families, who are the first and main educators. They must assume their leading role together with the teachers and with the community, to put an end to that widespread image of an educational center as an island, with its back to life and to the problems of its environment. We must make an effort so that educational centers become a place of learning and community organization, where everyone learns and learns with the contributions of each person.
- e) The articulation with the community will allow knowing well its potentialities and its problems, which will make it possible to make a

good diagnosis of reality to visualize the change processes, and to commit together in the improvement and solution of the problems. Rosa Zúñiga, a colleague of CEAAL (Council of Popular Education of Latin America) warned us that in order to be truly emancipatory, “formal education has the challenge that the processes carried out are articulated to community life, to daily life”.

- f) According to Alfredo Kitheso, director of Fe y Alegría of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the community dimension seems to be the great strength of Fe y Alegría in Africa: “In all the pedagogical projects of Fe y Alegría here in (Chad), in Madagascar, in Kenya, in Guinea, what prevails is the community side. Here we say the school is the community, it is a community issue. It is important for everyone to get involved. I believe that Fe y Alegría could become, in the future, with regard to education, a reference for others. Fe y Alegría fights against social injustices and the perspective is rather national. On the other hand, Fe y Alegría is not a job that you do once, a year or two years, it is a job that lasts over time”.
- g) Commitment to a coherent organization, with collective and service leadership, deconstructing verticality and authoritarianism and deepening the critical analysis and participation of students as well as teachers in decision-making in the educational center.
- h) Recognition of inequalities from a feminist, ecological, and equality perspective, with a desire for sincere analysis and a genuine transforming vocation for the achievement of critical citizenship.

## 5. Seek learning for life

From the cradle to the grave, which means learning to learn, unlearning and relearning permanently. To do this, it is necessary to ensure everyone has a mastery of the learning tools: personal and critical reading in printed and digital formats and reading reality. Writing as a means of communication and of organizing ideas; logical, mathematical and scientific thinking; research, systematization and teamwork; job training; abandoning once and for all that transmissive education that teaches to repeat rather than to create and invent. Today, it makes no sense to memorize googleable content.

## 6. A permanent training of its educators

Visualizamos las dinámicas laborales muy vinculadas a las dinámicas We visualize labor dynamics closely linked to social dynamics, that is, in some way society will be able to grow in respect and equity if it guarantees job quality, which requires a good education for the work, conscious and building societies.

We are aware, however, that this vision may be threatened by the old devaluation of manual labor compared to intellectual work, of certain rent-seeking cultures, and of the reproductive pedagogies so embedded in traditional education where one learns to reproduce rather than produce and where one often studies so as does not to have to

work. In addition, technology, although it generates social spaces of greater equity, also generates labor inequalities due to the elimination of jobs, which increasingly translates into crowds that have to resort to informal work, always insecure, as a means of survival.

The new current contexts are also generating changes in labor relations; for example, union identity, which in the past facilitated improvements in the quality of work, is now being lost, which generates a lack of cohesion in the workplace, and causes precariousness at work in a generalized way.

For all this, we are committed to an education that trains for the work from solid scientific-technical bases, but also social, not only in employability, but also in creative and constructive entrepreneurship of different societies through the participation and cooperation of different organizations of the territory (government, productive world, living forces of the context). We search of flexible professional skills adapted to socio-technological contexts, without detriment to culture itself and without incorporating Western developing views, since it is committed to a social and environmental commitment.

We understand that it is also important to choose an education that promotes personal growth with educational methodologies based on the accompaniment of the person, through processes of theoretical-practical-investigative production, where the capacity to learn is developed, and where work experience can be recognized, even academically, as formal learning.

In this sense, we also value the possibility of assuming vocational training as a way of reintegrating young people into the educational system. Educating in and for work also means ensuring that the children and young people who are in school do not leave without having acquired the essential skills and values for a dignified life. In short, it is about banishing the encyclopedic and memoristic school, to promote strongly a school that teaches to learn and teaches to think, also in the field of education for work and life.

We believe that this practice is beneficial to the communities since it has been found that a large part of the students who graduated from educational centers, if they have grown up trained in these principles, usually participate in the development of their communities.

We understand that it is important, in addition, to undertake participatory community work from the educational centers, which aims at local development, either from the coordination of the community organization, or as a development actor in a network, together with the productive movement, the government bodies and the cultural context in general.

This becomes more important in the experiences of rural education, deeply linked to community practices, the improvement of their productive techniques, the cultural and religious world, and the traditions and values of their context. The educational centers should promote the sense of dignity of each person, the right to have a dignified life and to humanize their conditions and self-esteem; this requires over-

coming prejudices towards their own culture that is often perceived, even by native people in rural areas, as “inferior” or “magical”, and that encourages internal migration and abandonment of the countryside.

## 7. A permanent training of its educators

Training focused on the reflection of their daily practice through strategies that encourage the revision, questioning and enrichment of educational practice itself. From the lived experience, the knowledge that is generated in the experience itself, whose reflection would allow transcending its particularities, is ordered. This way of training, immersed in research processes of practices, in addition to developing learning capacities, produces new knowledge by contrasting what we knew with the new knowledge that arises from reflection.

For this, it is pertinent to introduce in the formative processes, emblematic investigative modalities in Popular Education such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), the critical recovery of history or the systematization of experiences. Their intention of understanding the meaning that an experience has had both for the educators and for their environment with the purpose of improving and transforming the action in the future is emphasized. A self-reflection, therefore, always oriented towards action.





## From the community environment to the public space

Looking at what surrounds the educational action of Fe y Alegría from the perspective of Popular Education requires reviewing the complete framework that has been created around its educational projects and actions. From the closest environment, such as the communities where the movement is alive, to the most remote, such as its work at the national and international level.

### 1. Popular Education is strengthened in the community

We must start from a reality that we cannot ignore: the educational work at Fe Alegría is carried out in a variety of specific and localized contexts (“what we do on the field is so powerful!” Exclaimed a national director of Fe y Alegría). It is in a town, in a neighborhood, in a region... In these spaces, educational programs are always developed with the aim of building and/or strengthening an affective and social network around the people who participate in frank opposition to any individualistic, discriminatory and competitive stance. Hence, the need to revive the sense of the community in the movement and to exercise a management in which the participation of all the people involved in a horizontal and a democratic relationship predominates, evidencing the dangers of authoritarianism and verticalism; therefore, in a permanent questioning of any hegemonic power relationship that generates favoritism, discrimination or subordination.

Although currently there is a very strong emergence of virtual communities through the expansion of communication technologies and social networks, the educational action of Fe y Alegría continues to be rooted locally, among people who know each other for a long time. In such a way projects are shaping the particular stories of each community that saw them born and accompanied them in their first steps. As in most cases, the people who contributed to its foundation have already died; little by little, the new generations ignore what they did to establish the movement in a locality. It is time, in a movement with more than sixty-five years of existence, to carry out processes of collective recovery of the first stories, to reconstruct the memory of the original intuitions of men and women who founded the movement to rekindle the flame. Their memory will encourage and mobilizes the new arrivals to the new problems they face. These are times to return to the roots that founded the movement in each country, to discern the reasons that made its birth and its permanence possible through the years in each locality, as a way to overcome the bureaucratic inertia that is installed in institutions already very consolidated.

In this rooting in well-defined territories, most of the problems are more linked to matters of reproduction of life (consumption, services, security, roads, defense of the territory, biodiversity, and even the need to cultivate spirituality). Increasingly, faced with the growth of social inequalities, unemployment, the deterioration of environmental conditions and the vulnerability of the population, there are struggles for the “sustainability of life”; that is, of the material and symbolic reproduction of collective life, which continue to be the central axis of community practices in most of the movement’s actions. In addition, in these struggles, women tend to be more active, exercising strong leadership due to their inclination to care for other people, the family, the environment and the educational center itself.



Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the gender perspective in these community practices that allows, on the one hand, being alert to any form of violence against women that limits their autonomy and freedom. On the other hand, to empower them by accompanying experiences that promote interdependence, mutual aid, solidarity in terms of personal autonomy and reciprocity, emphasizing an “ethic of care”. Likewise, it is time to learn and strengthen collective experiences that promote the production of common goods (access to water, food sovereignty, security and defense of life, territory, the environment, for example); this could lead to experiences of self-management as well as exercises in social and solidarity economy, seeking other ways of living together along the lines of “good living”. Furthermore, in these uncertain times, efforts will have to be made to accompany people to move forward, to develop resilience capacities, despite the adverse conditions in which they live.

This challenge implies being present in the community, knowing how to read the context in a critical way, both from the structural and the conjunctural point of view, always visualizing the possibilities of transformation of the conditions of injustice, promoting programs that link the educational centers with the surrounding communities. They are community animation programs, professional training, literacy, non-formal citizenship training and personal development aimed at the entire population that integrates reflection on politics with learning skills for decision-making, coordination and conflict resolution. In this route of educational expansion beyond the walls of educational centers, alliances with local and global social movements that fight for common principles and values acquire great importance.

## 2. Institutional sustainability at the service of the movement

Over the years, through permanent work on the field and in various territories, Fe y Alegría has built a complex institutional structure beyond the local, creating national, regional, and international support offices. However, it is at the local level where the sustainability of the movement is at stake, in the first instance when the community, where the movement has taken root, permanently collaborates in the growth of the programs and prevents enthusiasm from failing.

To do this, it is necessary to cultivate a sense of belonging to the institution, but also to strengthen spaces of autonomy so that the people involved feel that they are protagonists of educational proposals that try to improve and transform their own living conditions. This implies that the survival of educational programs are seen as everyone's business, which makes it possible to neutralize frequent demands for assistance among popular sectors.

The entire institutional structure, which has given rise to a set of political and administrative structures, should be traversed by the intention of Liberating Popular Education. There, too, these intentions lead us to promote critical analysis of contexts and proposals, dialogue of knowledge, democratic participation, as well as the implementation of mechanisms of economic and institutional sustainability in accordance with the principles of the movement. For example, how to reach agreements with private companies that try to fulfill their social responsibility by supporting the institution, and maintain a position of defense of the movement's own values, promoting fairer economic relations? The ethical and political option for social transformation thus becomes the parameter to delimit the negotiation spaces at the time of the search for funds to sustain projects, which forces us to take sides on some occasions and to know how to manage the manipulation for political or economic reasons.

It is at this stage that the dilemmas between the institution and the movement are experienced with greater intensity, between the demands of a more bureaucratic nature and the desire for greater flexibility to respond to immediate demands of the context. At this level, however, the global sustainability of the movement is at stake since these instances are responsible for ensuring the maintenance of institutional identity in the context of the diversity of projects and pro-

grams in the localities. Furthermore, these instances should promote that the local integrates also the global view of the movement, always from a critical reading of the contexts with the intention of transforming any situation that generates exclusion and injustice. It is at this level necessary to create networks, both internal and between countries, according to common interests (for example, in the face of migration problems) in order to strengthen themselves and respond to the multiple demands with interconnected proposals in the form of coordination nodes that respect horizontal decision-making.

### 3. Influence public space with political and ethical intent

On the other hand, given its massive presence in local spaces on different continents, little by little Fe y Alegría has seen the need to open up to macro-level tasks (the defense of quality public education, or of a comprehensive education with emphasis on values or the positioning of the youth problem). It is also necessary to reflect on how the seal of the intentions of Popular Education is printed in that work of public advocacy that has meant strengthening communication strategies and cultivating negotiation skills with state authorities, ecclesial and social movements.

The fact that the majority of Fe y Alegría programs are for school-based education implies a permanent and direct relationship with the political powers that organize official education in each country. Therefore, mobilizations in favor of the right to quality education for all are relevant. They can be both the occasion to demand the co-responsibility of the State in the search for a more just and equitable

society and to demand increased investment in education, as well as to express the need to offer a more contextualized education that responds to the challenges that society presents to youth today. Opening permanent dialogues with state authorities would allow us to work together on strategies that avoid the overlapping of educational resources, seeking, rather, the complementarity between the State and civil society for the fulfillment of a common educational agenda.

While we must ensure the internal network between programs, centers, localities, regions, countries and continents to deepen the sense of belonging, we must think about how to strengthen the external network, relationships with organizations and social movements. They have committed to a transformation of society in the key of liberating popular education, both with local and global agendas, participating in meeting spaces, debate and collective construction, from respect for diversity but with the desire to learn together and reach common horizons.

The historical accumulation of the movement in its multiplicity and heterogeneity should be made available to this external network and to society in general, which implies an effort to systematize and make visible, in a pedagogical way, the practices that have been carried out during the life of the movement. So that they serve as inspiration to other organizations and are, also cause for reflection and questioning. Let us not forget that we are capable of projecting ourselves towards the future because we have a past that sustains us; being aware that time in education is long lasting requires going slowly, delaying, permanently integrating the past with a look towards new horizons.



**INVITATION  
TO CONTINUE  
REFLECTION**



“One thing is true, and I have repeated it many times: that Fe y Alegría must always have a political intention, because high politics is the most dignified and most beautiful stratum to which an intelligent noble human being can aspire. The transcendental human aspiration is to participate in the achievement of the common good to whom high politics serves. It is also true that, as long as the knowledge and power of the presently oppressed classes is not superior to the knowledge and power of the privileged and oppressive classes, the balance will not tip in the direction of the great majorities. Fe y Alegría was born to prepare citizens who, by intervening in the improvement of the earthly city, will reach the immortal Jerusalem through these merits.”<sup>37</sup>

We wanted to close with these words from Fray José María Vélaz that, although they were written more than 40 years ago, they express the feeling of one of the fundamental pillars of Popular Education, which is the political one. We invite you to continue the reflection that we began in June 2019 always having as a horizon the achievement of the common good from the local educational environments in which we now operate with a global perspective. At the same time, we strengthen the option for the great vulnerable majorities, in favor of the improvement of our “earthly city” but with an eye on transcendence.

Reflecting on Popular Education with a diversity of people both external and internal to the movement has led us to return to the first intuitions of its founder, to the path that the Movement has traced throughout its International Congresses to refine and contextualize its way of understanding and specify what it means to be a comprehensive popular education movement. However, it has also forced us to locate our movement in the long history of Popular Education in the Latin American continent to make it enter into dialogue with the educational proposals that arise in other continents.

Furthermore, this deepening exercise allowed us to verify that the principles that have guided the Movement’s action in this global context in which social inequalities prevail and, consequently, the poverty of millions of people, are still in force more than ever. It now remains to continue with the demanding permanent task of reviewing and analyzing our daily educational practices in the light of these principles in order to see how they are generating changes in their environment that contribute to building a more just, democratic and equitable society.

(37) Fray José María Vélaz, Words of Fe y Alegría. Inspirational quotes from Fray José María Vélaz. International Federation of Fe y Alegría, Caracas, 2005





FEDERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL  
**Fe y Alegría**

Movimiento de Educación Popular Integral y Promoción Social

Federative  
Deployment  
**2018**  
**2020**