



RE-ENCHANTING THE SCHOOL... A FAR-FETCHED DREAM?

Can we hope to change the school and fulfill the dream of Pierre Rabhi who sees the future of humanity through the involvement of youth in life? Can we dream of a school that accompanies its learners in a holistic manner, while respecting the singularity of the learner and valuing his/her qualities? A school where educators experience the joy of teaching that cultivates happiness and renders meaningful learning. A school that considers every child has the potential to learn and blossom.

This is a cry to stop the hurtful words that creep into some academic meetings and teachers' lounges such as "He is like his sister... she was my student"; "we will try to help him but I don't think his academic achievement will get any better!". This preset determinism resonates with social and cultural stigma, or even worse, at the cognitive level, stereotypes surface to label learners: "He is not intelligent enough; he can't...; he has always been like this..."

These are the typecasts that a learner may encounter during his/her school years, and these are the same labels that prohibit the child from developing. Such perceptions have been contested by neuroscientists to prove them wrong thanks to the notion of plasticity (Dehaene, 2007), to certify that the mind has a fascinating plasticity that evolves throughout the human life. Cognitive neuroscientists scientifically confirm that every human can be educated, permeating hope in every person as an ever-progressing one. Believing that everyone could learn if they are properly accompanied should be part of our mission, and creating ways to unlock the potentials of our learners should be our obligation; the previous reaffirms what Philippe Meirieu said: "Nothing guarantees that an educator has tried all the possible methodologies, nothing assures that there will not remain a way unexplored that may succeed...". Promoting excellence and giving rebirth to human values is a shared responsibility among the various stakeholders in education. It is about allocating time for every student in the form of a supportive relationship between the educator and the student taking into consideration the unique capabilities of every learner.

However, the main obstacle towards one-to-one learning is time. Time is the precious jewel of education; knowing how to properly exploit it and lose it to prepare tomorrow's citizens is a highly valued virtue by Jean Jacques Rousseau, who dared to affirm that "the most important, and practical rule in education...is not about gaining time but rather about losing it".

Learners' success is not only about academic achievement, the holistic well-being of the learner is of equal importance. Cognitive neuroscientists have proven, one more time, that a learner's brain is highly affected by social relationships, and it will not flourish unless it is nurtured via positive relations with others, including teachers. Therefore, it is needless to emphasize the importance of an empathic and caring posture that aims at humanizing the learning process.

Patricia Rached
Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences
Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth