

The words of the Congress

RESEARCH

The key word is research. It is a dynamic word that refers to the action of seeking to find. The third session of the conference presents the first results of an exploratory research that was designed and carried out by an international team of 24 scholars belonging to some educational and formative institutions of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The group was coordinated by some teachers and researchers of the Auxilium Faculty. We ask Professor Enrica Ottone to describe some aspects of this research.

How was the research born and for what purpose?

In June 2021 with a team of researchers, scholars and formators Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from the five continents we began to sketch the project. The intent was clear right from the start: we wanted to explore what the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and lay educators think, what they do in educating young people within the works of the Institute of the FMA.

So the hypothesis immediately focused on three interconnected aspects. The vision, that is, what is thinking, educating the person and the aim of education, the dispositions that move educators and educators to act and the action itself, the action of educating by going to see precisely in particular what are the skills of the educator, then what convictions, what dispositions and what skills and strategies they put in place in educating.

How did you collect the research data?

By the end of 2021, thanks also to the great event of the General Chapter where it was possible to contact the heads of the Interprovincial Conferences, we have given the criteria to select 410 people to interview, about half FMA and half lay and lay people who work in the works of the FMA. for at least 10 years, therefore a significant presence of lay people who know the Salesian educational system well.

We chose to use the focus group tool and we used it to create focus groups online because we wanted to reach people from different countries as much as possible.

72 countries and five continents are represented in this sample. Certainly we have not reached a representative sample of the entire reference population, but certainly we have reached a group of people who have given us the opportunity to go and describe a cross-section of how the Salesian educational system is understood and lived and some aspects of it in our Institute.

Collected these answers, there are more than 3,000, 440,000 words, 120 are the hours of recording that we have transcribed, some of them being the focus groups in 10 languages we had to translate them, then we analyzed them in three languages: Italian, English and Spanish.

There were 6 coders, two for each language, and with a long alignment work, we created a system of codes that would allow us to classify and organize these answers.

These three areas emerged from this analysis, initially recalled in the hypothesis, that is, we went to see what these educators think and what they do.

You may anticipate some research findings?

The research and the first results will be presented during the conference but we anticipate some aspects.

Certainly one aspect is the experience of the focus groups: the participants valued sharing, they used verbs such as "it made me think", "it made me think", even "it made me understand", "listening made me come to mind... ", "it made me understand better ", but also "it gave me strength "to return to my environment with the encouragement also of having shared and having seen that I am within a community. Some have used the term community to refer to that group that was created in the two online meetings.

Among other aspects, the centrality of loving kindness certainly emerged, and this is not new, the centrality of the educational relationship between the educator and the young and young people, also the aspect of work with the individual and with the group.

Another category is presence with a double dimension: a presence that prevents but also a presence that promotes, that is there to educate.

Some challenges also emerged, in particular a challenge that we wanted to enclose in the term "competence in educating" is that of the centrality on the one hand of kindness and on the other hand of speaking little of some aspects such as the aspect of educational or planning intentionality. Certainly we did not ask questions on this aspect, therefore, this result is also normal but at the same time some questions have emerged that we ask ourselves precisely at the level of training.

Another interesting aspect is the proximity to children, to everyday life, even to contemporary challenges. We did not ask the question "what have you done in this time to face, for example, the global challenge of the pandemic" but there are many, 116 responses from these participants who go on to tell how they lived this challenge. The pandemic was experienced as a challenge that challenged us and to which we responded with creativity, commitment, tenacity, educating and educating.