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## Father Wasson's Principles of Productive Education

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The title of this book, *You Are My Brother*, is well chosen because based on my long acquaintance with Father Wasson and his work with orphan children, I believe it expresses a basic truth about Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos.

At the outset you might say of these children that they have three strikes against them: they are orphans; their background is one of extreme poverty and broken homes; and they live in an institution. I would say that was enough to make very maladjusted children out of them.

But, with rare exceptions, this is not so. The children at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos are responsible; they are happy; and they feel as secure and loved as those children who live in the best of family constellations.

Now this is something most remarkable.

I believe there are few places where this could have happened. I personally do not know of one. That is why Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos has impressed me tremendously. Something has happened here which is against all prognosis, all expectations of those who deal psychologically or sociologically with these types of children.

Now, the question is: Why does it happen? What are the conditions which make it possible?

In the first place, there is one basic condition--the sense of absolute security--which every child at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos has, namely, that he will not be dismissed for any reason whatsoever. This principle is really the principle of unconditional, motherly love. A mother loves her child unconditionally. If mothers loved their children only because they performed well or they did what the mothers liked, most infants would die.

Now this principle finds its other pole in the second principle, that of refusal to identify unconditional love with pampering which destroys the sense of responsibility and self-reliance in children. There is an atmosphere of realism, an atmosphere of expecting that they contribute, that they are responsible, that they do not indulge themselves in laziness or in passiveness, that they do something to help the community in



which they live and to help it in an active and responsible way. These children are taught not only in terms of ABC's but they are taught to participate increasingly and responsibly in the social life of the community.

I would say that this could be called the fatherly principle. The motherly principle says: *I love you whatever you do.* The fatherly principle says: *I expect you to make an effort to be responsible.*

In all very healthy groups and societies, the motherly and fatherly principles (that is to say, the principles of compassion and justice) are combined. When the two principles are not combined when they are torn apart then both deteriorate. Compassion without the fatherly principle without structure or justice is an indulgence which prevents the development of the child. And justice without compassion eventually becomes cruelty and an authoritarian system in which human feelings are completely subordinated to the idea of order, work, performance. But when these two principles are combined as they are at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, then compassion is never passive and sentimental, and justice is never inhuman or strict.

The third principle, and one which I think is very important, is the principle of self-management. Self-management really means that people are not simply objects. It means, just to cite one example, that at Father Wasson's home the older boys take care of their kitchen. They buy food, they make the menu, they cook, they rotate assignments and all with a minimum of supervision.

The fourth principle is stimulation. At Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos the children get courses in the native Mexican dances, in music, in singing, in art in many things which the average child, and not only those in this low economic class but in the middle class also, is deprived of. Theirs is not merely a life of work and order but a life in which the richness of culture and stimulation is present and to which they react.

In my view it is these four principles the principle of absolute security and at the same time of realistic responsibility; of self-management; and of stimulation -which have made it possible for this rather miraculous thing to happen at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos.

I want to add a word about the possibility of change. So often we in the Western world think if you change one bad factor or symptom which is the cause of certain evils, then you correct the evil. The fact is, if you change one symptom you usually change nothing because you deal in all social affairs with a system and this system is very closely knit. No factor in this system can change without other factors being changed.

Let me give you a very simple example: If you want to improve slums you tear down the old houses and build new ones. This will help. But if you only do that the new houses will again become slums in a few years. You would do better to tear down and replace the worst houses and spend the rest of the money for education, preparation for skilled work, health and cultural stimulation. In this way you would be trying to change the whole system rather than a single aspect of it. (Of course, a slum neighborhood is only a subrogation within the larger system of society. Without changing the whole system, not too much can be done for the small system.)

You see the same thing in individuals. If you try to change one symptom, then usually a person may suppress or repress that particular symptom, but it will come up



somewhere else. You can really change symptoms only if you change the psychical structure as a whole, and create a new structure. This is precisely what I think has happened at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos. With all of the principles I have mentioned, an entirely new structure has been created. None of them alone could have made this achievement possible.

I want to make it very clear that the important point here is that Father Wasson has not tried to change one factor but that he has brought together a number of principles which, in their conjunction, make it possible for this family of more than 1,000 children to react as it does.

Finally, I want to say a word about Father Wasson. What has happened at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos is only possible because he lives the principles which are expressed in his work. In other words, he is credible. Youngsters are suspicious and particularly those whose life experience is one of being deceived or brutally treated. It is quite clear that with all of these principles the system could not have succeeded at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos unless the children could believe in the principles because they saw their manifestation in Father Wasson.

I do not mean to imply that Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos is a unique experiment which could not exist elsewhere. I think if the system which is applied at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos were studied, then there might be other Father Wassons who could undertake the same kind of work he is doing which today they lack the courage to do because everyone says it is impossible. But one point must be clear: such work can be done only by people who do not work „bureaucratically.“ Father Wasson is a loving man, a man of extraordinary talent for organizing, a man of great concentration--but he is no bureaucrat. If he were, his work would not be what it is.

What he has shown is that one can organize and be efficient without bureaucratic spirit but with the spirit of humanism and reason. This was not rare in the distant past and perhaps it will become frequent again in the future. Father Wasson has demonstrated that it is possible. Those who believe in the non-bureaucratic way of human organization can learn a lot from his work; those who don't will not be able to imitate it.