

The subject of citizenship and education in responsibility

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When I completed my last term as President of the Generalitat I decided I would continue to serve my country outside the main political arena and do so in the field of what I call IVA, that is, ideas, values and attitudes. It was to this end that I set up the CEJP (Fundació Centre d'Estudis Jordi Pujol). I presented the Foundation's mission statement in [a talk I gave at ESADE](#) on 14 February 2005. The premise was and continues to be that a country cannot progress without clear ideas, solid values and positive attitudes. And these positive attitudes include a sense of both individual and collective responsibility.

I have transcribed part of my talk below:

“The ethic of disassociation, the inhibition and fear when faced with great problems, the ethic of not striving, insincerity, the refusal to consider the future, the discouragement faced with key challenges, all this has led to a crisis of both the personal and the collective sense of responsibility. There is also a deep crisis regarding the concept of the common good; there is a great difficulty, as I said, to address the crucial questions of the future. Only the present matters. There has been an unprecedented rise in demands for rights and a refusal to contribute to the public interest, a shunning of obligations. This places in jeopardy everything from the welfare state to the future of the subsequent generations to Europe's role in the world, because it must be noted that many of the problems that I address are not exclusively Catalan but affect many countries in Europe, sometimes even more than here in Catalonia”.

“What we need, therefore, is a pedagogy of responsibility. We need to drive home the ethic of responsibility and combat the ethic of disassociation –the sense of not belonging to anything, of having no commitments, and hence having no obligations towards anything, except to oneself”.

“A society with a weakened sense of the common good cannot succeed. Because this gives rise to a society in a perpetual state of protest, dissatisfied, even if when there exists a better safety net, more material elements and a better social positioning than ever before, and one that has decidedly positive merits. But neither the people nor society itself will exploit all these advantages”.

“So, the one objective worth pursuing is that of a responsible society. We speak of the welfare state, and that is positive. Of the society of progress. This is also positive. Of the leisure society. Positive, in the right measure. Of the opulent society. Also good, in the right measure. But what we really need is a responsible society. An education in responsibility with all its consequences must be a central objective for our society, from the school to the media, from the intellectual world to politics. And we are not achieving it”.

This objective –to reclaim pedagogy of the individual and the collective ethic– remains the CEJP’s most pressing goal. And I ask myself whether in recent times we have insisted enough. Hence I return to the question today. And also because this term schools are introducing citizenship as a subject, which is an important development.

There is clearly a debate on the advantages and drawbacks of such a subject. It is likely that there has been some or considerable manipulative intentions in the Government’s aim. But it does appear that in large part everything will depend on the subject matter and how the teachers employ it. To be honest, some of the texts that I have been able to read seem acceptable. But it will ultimately depend on how the teachers use it. And this will be the case in many points, including that of responsibility.

Over recent years we have heard much talk of rights and little of duties. And little has been done in the area of education regarding respect, or the ethic of endeavour. The general belief has been that the rules were either unnecessary or forcibly permissive. In short, few obligations, little respect, little effort, few rules have led to a crisis concerning the sense of responsibility. And the sense of the common good.

When we first raised this issue we asked ourselves: who should teach responsibility? Our conclusion was anyone with a teaching capacity, from parents to the media. And, obviously, teachers. Not merely through a subject, but also through all education and, as well, through human contact. But now the subject of citizenship offers a new instrument and requires more. Nonetheless, I repeat, everything is contingent on the educators’ attitude. From what I have seen, the textbooks –with a few exceptions– provide a largely positive presentation of the subject matter. In terms of responsibility, self-motivation, respect for things and for people. But this will require the teachers as a whole to abandon the undemanding and lax approach that has been, and, to some extent, still is the trend. It would be good if they did so, because this attitude smacks of weakness, a feeble people, society and country.

The new subject may represent an opportunity. It is time we began. We are lagging behind in Spain and in large part even more in Catalonia. In our obsession to be advanced, progressive spontaneous, etc. we will end up antiquated. It is fashionable neither in France nor in Germany or in the Scandinavian countries to go against the rules, against the respect for things and for people, against the ethic of endeavour, against the sense of responsibility and the common good.

Everything that the sociologist Marina calls the tribe – that is, above all parents, school and the social environment– has to be mobilised towards this goal. It will be good for the country and, above all, it will be good for the young.