

The right to be educated in generosity

At times a lot interesting things are, surprisingly, forgotten sort of generally, without anybody really being able to say why.

With the annual celebration on November 20 of Universal Children's Day, initiatives crop up aimed at remembering the articles of the convention approved on November 20 1989 by the United Nations. This convention improved, completed and transformed into articles what had been mere principles in the previous global text of reference, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959. But, in spite of the improvements, something was lost along the way...

Many years before, in 1923, the organisation Save The Children drew up the *Declaration of Geneva*¹ under the guidance of its founder Eglantyne Jebb. It was a document inspired by affirmations, clear and emphatic despite their small number, about the duty of the men and women of the world to protect girls and boys, providing them food, cures to illnesses, attention, and security.

Eglantyne Jebb's announcements were later broken down and enriched with the texts of 1959 and 1989. All of them except one, which remained inexplicably forgotten. It simply said:

The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of others.

A powerful and luminous idea that remained incomprehensibly buried. Yet it expresses the noblest concept of the participation: **Girls and boys have the right to contribute to the improvement of society, to making this world a more fraternal and more habitable place.**

We probably have not yet overcome – in spite of trying! – the protectionist view of the child, a necessary, indispensable view, but at the same time insufficient. Boys and girls are not society's future, they already are society. They are not future citizens, they already are citizens. They must be protected, because they are vulnerable and dependent, but it is also necessary to get them used to the idea of giving. This is more necessary than ever in a society where levels of well-being, despite pockets of poverty, are comparatively high.

In 2007 Unicef's Innocenti Research Centre published a report called *An overview of child well-being in rich countries*². According to this report, Spain occupies the fifth place in the child well-being index. Spanish children are satisfied with their lives and they view themselves in a very positive light. They are those who feel happiest, after Dutch children.

¹ http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/53/Eglantyne_Jebb.pdf

² <http://www.unicef.es/contenidos/595/informe.pdf> (English, http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf)

Confronted with this positive information, wouldn't it be reasonable to try to incorporate more altruism and generosity into this happiness, if we don't want to reduce it entirely to the egocentrism of the comfort-loving?

Fostering generosity means that, at some point during childhood or adolescence, it is necessary to lift your eyes from your navel and look around you to see who is suffering, who is far from being well, who is alone, and who is threatened.

But it also means doing something to improve it, because children and adolescents are perfectly capable of performing a play on a hospital ward, cleaning a dirty fountain during a school trip, and reading stories to the smaller children of the school...

There are countless possible actions that would make girls and boys open up to *otherness* and become better citizens.

An education in giving is also necessary for children who live in precarious situations, those that we tend to transform into permanent dependants, beneficiaries of the help of others, instead of considering them capable of giving and providing, of doing something good for others. As a girl from a very poor neighbourhood of Bariloche, Argentina, expressed with such clarity: *Nobody is ever so poor that they cannot offer something to others.*

To rescue from the oblivion the right that children have to be educated in generosity is, above all, a recognition of their dignity as citizens. It would be good to remember this each time we celebrate Universal Children's Rights Day.

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