

## Citizenship without certainties

## Ciudadanía sin certezas

## La citoyenneté sans certitudes

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### ABSTRACT

The notion of citizenship has traditionally been based on the quest for *something in common*, something which dominates and guides personal and social existence. This model loses validity with the progressive dissolution of the certainties established by the canons of truth and goodness. The gradual disappearance of guarantees can be understood as a liberation that forces us to seek pathways which lead to new, dignified ways of life. Acknowledging difference and a willingness to dialogue are useful dynamics in the reconstruction of what is *common* in a world without certainties. These are dynamics that can emerge in an exemplary manner in scientific work and deliberative politics. The article shifts this argument to show how similar school practices – project work and class assemblies – teach how to live without certainties. They achieve this when the mentoring process reinforces the values inherent in such practices. The authors conclude by asserting that the absence of certainties does not mean the lack of commitment, hope, and solidarity.

**Key Words:** citizenship; dialogue; deliberative politics; class assemblies; project work; guided participation; education for citizenship.

### RESUMEN

La idea de ciudadanía se ha basado en la búsqueda de algo en común, algo que se impone y

pauta la existencia personal y social. Este modelo pierde vigencia con la progresiva disolución de las certezas que dictaban los cánones de verdad y bondad. La progresiva desaparición de las seguridades es una liberación que nos obliga a buscar caminos para idear nuevas formas de vida digna. Reconocer la diferencia y la voluntad de diálogo son dinamismos oportunos en un mundo sin seguridades. Dinamismos que pueden manifestarse de modo ejemplar en el trabajo científico y en la política deliberativa. El artículo pone en cuestión este argumento para mostrar cómo las prácticas escolares similares – proyectos de trabajo y asambleas de clase – enseñan cómo vivir sin certezas. Y lo logran cuando el proceso de tutoría refuerza los valores inherentes a este tipo de prácticas. Los autores concluyen afirmando que la ausencia de certezas no significa la falta de compromiso, esperanza y solidaridad.

**Descriptores:** ciudadanía; diálogo; política deliberativa; asambleas de clase; trabajo por proyectos; participación guiada; educación para la ciudadanía.

## RÉSUMÉ

La notion de citoyenneté fut basée traditionnellement sur la quête de quelque chose en commun qui domine et guide l'existence personnelle et sociale. Ce modèle perd de sa validité avec la dissolution progressive des certitudes absolues établies par les canons de vérité et de bonté. La disparition graduelle de garanties peut être comprise comme une libération qui nous force à chercher des chemins qui conduisent à de nouvelles manières de vivre avec dignité. Reconnaître la différence et une volonté de dialoguer sont des dynamiques utiles en ce qui est commun dans un monde sans certitudes. Des dynamiques qui peuvent émerger de façon exemplaire dans le travail scientifique et la politique délibérante. Cet article déplace cet argument pour montrer combien des pratiques scolaires semblables – des projets et assemblées de classes – enseignent à vivre sans certitudes. Et elles y arrivent quand le processus de mentorat renforce les valeurs inhérentes à de telles pratiques. Les auteurs terminent en affirmant que l'absence de certitudes ne veut pas dire manque d'engagement, d'espérance et de solidarité.

**Mots clés:** citoyenneté; dialogue; politique délibérative; assemblées de classe; travail du projet; participation guidée; éducation à la citoyenneté.

WE FREQUENTLY REFLECT, from perspectives that on some occasions are complementary and others opposing, on the way in which we can approach the difficulties presented by life in common. This is a task which is begun again in earnest every time a new transformation significantly affects society. Industrialization modified the bases of civic coexistence in agrarian societies as energetically as technologies, consumerism, and migrations do today, to name just a few examples. These are challenges that invite us to think about what is happening and what should occur to ensure a life in common with dignity. Romulo F. Magsino has been committed to such reflection for many years, and continues to do so with great success. In his honour, we wish to defend the goodness of a citizenship freed from certainties and committed to a creative dialogue that embraces difference. And, above all, we want to translate this value horizon into school practices in citizenship education.

## *Difference and association*

“People come at life from different places, they understand the world in different ways, and they strive for different ends. This is a fact that has

proved amazingly hard to live with, and the reason is that as associated beings, we naturally seek to find our tastes, values, and hopes reflected in other people.”

(L. Menand, 2002, p. 383)

In the brief text that heads this section, Menand alludes to one of the most difficult issues to arise out of the current reflection on ethics and citizenship. This is an issue which may be defined on the basis of three elements which time and again are approached in such a way as to minimize the difficulty they inevitably cause. The first of these is the differences that always single out each individual human being. These differences can be appreciated in multiple settings, particularly those of culture, values, and ways of life, but also in the person's most private, personal aims and aspirations. The inescapably associated nature of human life constitutes the second element. We know only too well that a life in isolation is not possible. On the contrary, life needs relationships, interdependence, association, and community: only through life in common can we actually be. In third place, the author warns us that structuring difference and associated life entails certain difficulties. It is complicated because we expect to see our own behaviour reflected in others. We are different, and we need to live in common, but we are ill-equipped to accept, let alone appreciate, those features that separate others from our own way of life. It is precisely here where lies the problem that we repeatedly attempt to resolve, a problem in which moral and political philosophy may also play a part: how to structure difference and associated life, how to establish *something in common* that eases the frictions that will inevitably arise.

This difficulty appears, with different presentation but identical background, in the multiple levels of complexity of all things human. It does so, for instance, in the interpersonal relationship, in what Bauman (2004) calls the moral group of two. In this scenario, the other appears as a being whose difference questions and perhaps even threatens me, but at the same time is something I need close to me to live. We overcome this situation by highlighting the qualities we share, those that make us equals and fuel a common space for contact in which to be rational, reflect the divine, and possess universal values, among other possibilities. Something similar happens when the arrival of a third individual expands the group of two and creates society. And here, once again, difference and the need for association emerge. Groups with different values, interests, and ways of life have to coexist in a defined, shared space. This is a situation which once again requires the creation of something common to turn difficulties into possibilities of coexistence; in this case, democratic systems enrich society, seeking the comprehension and consensus of different points of view (Habermas, 1998; Kymlicka, 1996). Finally, each step along the road of globalization establishes contact between different and largely incommensurable cultures, which again reproduces the need to seek ways of structuring difference and association (Küng, 1991). No culture is self-sufficient or can live in isolation, but at the same time, the problems of understanding between cultures is difficult to avoid. Each culture is a different language and a different world, a circumstance which forces the

creation of ideas and spaces – such as those often proposed by intercultural policies – in which to find *something in common* beyond the differences, something which helps overcome any confrontations that might arise.

Thus, there are three manifestations of difference, the need for association and the efforts to structure these two aspects of reality to minimize conflict and facilitate comprehension. And, correspondingly, there are three areas open to reflection and socio-political action aimed at establishing *something in common* which makes the associated life of different singularities possible.

### **Truth and goodness**

“A poeticized, or post-metaphysical, culture is one in which the imperative that is common to religion and metaphysics – to find an ahistorical, transcultural matrix for one’s thinking, something into which everything can fit, independent of one’s time and place – has dried up and blown away. It would be a culture in which people thought of human beings as creating their own life-world, rather than as being responsible to God or “the nature of reality” which tells them what kind it is.”

(R. Rorty, 2005, p. 66)

Human beings have gone to great lengths to find *something in common*, something for everyone which allows them to harmonize difference and association. The history of this search, however, is one based on a deep-rooted conviction: that *something in common* has to cover the differences and achieve the association on the basis of a shared and unshakeable certainty – something which, being beyond the manifestations of difference and the need for association, could become their foundation and common horizon. It seemed possible that the search for an objective truth and absolute values could give us an indisputable point of certainty from which to firmly impose a way of life on multiple individual subjects and groups (Rorty, 1997, 2005) – a universal way of life, finished and eternal, to guarantee an associated life without the nuisance of differences. Certainty brings uniformity and offers security. With this horizon, life becomes a matter of adapting to the established code, of endeavouring to obscure differences and accommodate them to the uniformity of truth and goodness.

The history of this search for ultimate justification and certainty, as Nietzsche (1887/1973) observed, began when Plato raised truth and goodness to the world of transcendental, sacrosanct ideas, fundamentals which are transformed into a model to replicate worldly realities. Moreover, those who have been lucky enough to emerge from the cave and witness first-hand the eternal ideas that give shape to things have the responsibility to go back inside and guide, even forcefully, other humans toward the recognition of truth and goodness. Ideas are safe models imposed on us over and above differences, and add substance to associated life. Later, with Christianity, the world of ideas becomes the revelation of God to man and the way to follow without

doubts or hesitation. It is another finished model that defines a way of life in detail, a set of dictates whose transgression leads to punishment. Though Kant's placing of the principles of truth and goodness in the human mind was an enormous revolution which opened the doors to autonomy, he did so at the expense of enclosing that mind in a uniform formalism which was unable to assume singular differences or the world's materialism, nor could it ignite transforming creativity. If Kant locked certainty into the mind, Hegel and Marx confined it in history. The singular progression of societies unavoidably takes a path which, though perhaps previously untraveled, is certainly charted beforehand.

Finally, the positivism founded by Comte places all truth and goodness in that which we can confirm through an experimental methodology – an enormous, though maybe also brilliant, reduction in human beings' ways of producing knowledge. However, despite science and technology being entirely human products, they have gradually been separated from their producers, have escaped from their control, and today are imposed on their very creators as finished certainties. This is somewhat distanced from Kuhn's (1971) opinion, when he warned that science is nothing more than an agreement reached within a historical space, an interpretive agreement that works in a limited fashion and which will subsequently be replaced by a new agreement. Following this journey, there is now nothing left of an independent fountain that emanates truth and goodness. Absolute certainty has disappeared, and all that remains is the possibility of creatively producing revisable agreements that help us live in association and with respect for differences.

### ***Democracy and citizenship***

“The conclusion which I am attempting to reach is that the farewell to truth is the commencement and the very basis of democracy. If there were an “objective” truth to social and economic laws (economics is not a natural science), democracy would be an utterly irrational choice. It would be better to entrust the management of the State to the experts, to Plato's philosopher-kings or all the Nobel prize-winners in every category.”

(G. Vattimo, 2010, p. 18)

If we lose a safe model of truth and goodness intended to obscure differences and guarantee life in common, there are two things we can do: consider the loss a mistake and look for a way of recovering an outside source of certainty from which to obtain an alternative model, or accept the loss, perhaps understand it as a liberation, and from the new reality – of difference and association – seek a way to live with dignity. So, there are two possible options: look for a given guarantee, or launch ourselves without references into the comprehension and reconstruction of reality (Vattimo, 2010; Vattimo & Zabala, 2012).

If we adopt the second posture and acknowledge the weakness of untouchable truths, absolute values, and unchangeable foundations, various significant consequences are produced: we have to learn to live without certainties or guarantees, we have to be guided by the identification of *bad* – something easier to recognize than *good* (Bárcena & Mèlich, 2000), we have to take advantage of differences and the need for association for the good of all, and we have to create a democracy with greater participation which enables us to transform reality in a creative manner. Living without certainties is not having a ready-made answer, not knowing precisely what shape to give reality; it is recognizing that time inevitably modifies reality and its appreciation, accepting that we have to evaluate carefully the consequences of our actions, and that we cannot hide under a blanket of preconceived ideas. Living without certainties is not, however, living without values – it is knowing that they are not shared – nor does it allow us to define indisputable ways of life. And living without certainties does not mean living without frameworks; it is knowing that neither differences nor the need for association have a singular way of being resolved. Living without certainties is living with values and frameworks, but knowing that we have the task of comparing and contrasting them, reinventing them and applying them creatively to each situation and moment, in our effort to build what is common. It is this set of tasks which shape what could be a citizenship without certainties in an open, creative democracy.

How can we build what is common when we lack certainties? We can offset the loss of a sure foundation by seeking support precisely from the natural conditions of life: difference and association. Creating ways of life means taking advantage of both these realities and combining them: recognizing difference as something that enriches the resolution of life's difficulties, and activating the dynamics of association that enable us to build bridges on which these difficulties can move and negotiate the different positions. We understand the dynamics of association as the tools that will mediate between differences and help us find dignified ways of life. From among the many different dynamics,<sup>1</sup> here we will highlight that of *conversation* about different subjects, in the search for ways of life that will always remain unfinished and subject to critical evaluation.

If we acknowledge that differences and conversation are the tools with which to live a life without certainties or guarantees, the field of freedom and responsibility becomes wider. We gain freedom inasmuch as we gain a space of possibilities which opens up to individuals and communities. But uncertainty also increases, because it becomes impossible to support ourselves on anything that ensures success in the search for a life lived with dignity. Thus, with freedom comes increased responsibility. We must learn to propose which option to choose in a free, reflective, and responsible manner, with no chance whatsoever of placing our trust in anything or anyone.

These circumstances should not, however, be interpreted as a loss; on the contrary, they are the achievement of better conditions for democracy. When certainties are lacking, the possibility of different voices being heard arises, of points of view being exchanged and perhaps of proposals being accepted that would never have emerged in a situation of certainty. All voices come to the fore, and even the point of view

of the excluded must be acknowledged, because there is no certainty that can prevail absolutely over the different individuals and groups. Gains have therefore been made in democracy and in the real possibilities of exercising as citizens who actively participate (Vattimo & Zabala, 2012).

Finally, the lack of certainty allows for an increase in creative possibilities and the transformation of reality. The world is no longer given or finished, nor must it adapt to a certainty that has been imposed. There can be many forms of world; it depends entirely on what we manage to do. The horizon of civic creativity lies more in the capacity to innovate and exercise solidarity than in the adaptation to a certain model of truth or goodness (Joas, 1998). This is a creativity which, as we have pointed out, feeds off difference and is accomplished through the participation of all social voices in an inexhaustible conversation.

In short, and picking up some of the echoes of the modernity versus postmodernity controversy (Habermas, 1989; Lyotard, 1979), we have defended the lack of certainty as an absence of guarantees that lend foundation and substance in each singular situation of truth and goodness. However, this should not make us forget the impossibility of ignoring a world of values which inevitably affects all subjects, but does not authorize them to consider these values as absolute and, thus, aspiring to endure and impose. Faced with this situation of uncertainty – possession of values which fail to guarantee truth and goodness – we have the chance to use that upon which we will inevitably rely: the universality of differences as a source of richness, the universality of association expressed by the capacity of deliberation – although it could also appear in love and cooperation – and, finally, the universality of creativity which enables us to build identity and society as new and unexpected works. Taken this way, uncertainty is an opportunity to transform things in search of that which has yet to happen.

### ***Scientific debate and deliberative politics***

“Majority rule, just as majority rule, is as foolish as its critics charge it with being. But it is never *merely* majority rule. (...) The means by which a majority rule comes to be a majority is the more important thing: antecedent debate, modification of views to meet the opinions of minorities, the relative satisfaction given the latter by the fact that it has had a chance and that next time it may be successful in becoming a majority. (...) It is true that all valuable as well as new ideas begin with minorities, perhaps a minority of one. The important consideration is that opportunity be given to that idea to spread and to become the possession of the multitude (...) The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion.”

(J. Dewey, 2004, pp. 168-169)

To achieve a dignified life, a citizenship without certainties can be supported on the richness brought by differences and on the creative forces liberated by conversation. This is by no means a novelty. A good deal of best human effort has been directed at conceiving and introducing – on occasion, through struggle and sacrifice – social forms in which conversation prevails between divergent points of view. Though reassuring guarantees have often been sought, we have also conceived our own procedures to find solutions to life's unanswered questions. The position in which we now find ourselves may be summed up as follows: we have nothing that enables us to define a way of life with guarantees, we can only rely upon the acknowledgement of the richness brought by differences and the effort to create and establish forms of conversation in all areas of individual and social life. These are forms of conversation that seek better comprehension and a solution, always temporary, to the questions posed by life and coexistence.

Acknowledgement of differences and conversation can only be achieved through the institutionalization of social practices that give substance on a temporary basis to these value horizons, social practices that use differences as richness, and conversation as a creative method. Some of the best examples of these may be found in scientific activity and deliberative politics, two spaces based on conversation between different positions. Thanks to the critical exchange of views in laboratories and seminars, science has converted certainties into a lever for the constant pursuit of new knowledge. For its part, deliberative politics employs the formation of public opinion, social discussion, and transparency in parliamentary action to replace certainties and their imposition with deliberation and democratic formation of the political will.

Nothing is safe from authoritarian setbacks, however. Science and its paradigms can be turned into dogmas that smother more than they contribute to the progress of knowledge and the search for a life lived with dignity. Likewise, the formation of public opinion can be manipulated by any source of power, and parliamentary politics can become a simple arrangement that contributes nothing to the quest for better, fairer solutions. Existing deliberative institutions must therefore subject themselves to a constant critique to maintain their full effectiveness. It is also obvious that new problems and new possibilities must open the doors to original deliberative forms; social innovation must also embrace the same practices of deliberation.

But to build a citizenship without certainties it is not enough simply to maintain the social forms of deliberation in constant revision and remain open to new forms that broaden the combination of differences and deliberation; it is necessary for this attitude to be handed down from one generation to the next, and for the young to learn to take advantage of differences and to deliberate in different areas of life. And this, without doubt, is learning which is not inherited, nor is it achieved without effort. It requires immersion in a system of practices that invites learners to live and reflect repeatedly on their varied experiences of dialogue with those who hold different views. Only in this way will we bring up young people as citizens without certainties, but committed to the task of building a world with dignity.

## **Educational practices**

“By *practice* we are going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.”

(A. MacIntyre, 2009, p. 233)

What can educational institutions contribute to the construction of a world where it is possible to deliberate with those who think differently and together make an effort to come up with new solutions, taking advantage of the differences? It is well known that the most effective formative interventions are those that provide a significant experience, those that involve and interweave the activity with the learner's reasoning and feelings. Learning to acknowledge difference and to converse requires participating in practices in which these value horizons take strong shape.

Educational institutions cannot ignore these challenges. To become spaces of relevant and socially useful learning, the main resource at their disposal is the design of formative practices – in other words, those complex activities that determine a course of organized, routine, and educational actions that enhance the development of certain capabilities, processes, and values (Puig, 2003). Each educational practice is aimed at achieving an objective which gives meaning to the different phases into which that practice is structured and to the actions it demands. The regularity of its constituent steps and their repetition favour the acquisition of routines, an essential element in ensuring students achieve the intended learning outcomes. However, the practices are not limited to a sequence of phases; they are not explained solely on the basis of a procedure. Perhaps the most interesting aspect for us to highlight here is that they embody the values by which they are defined and which end up turning into behaviours. It is for this reason that we can say educational practices are a source for acquiring virtues.

If the design and application of practices is the resource available to educational institutions to teach how to live without certainties but with the will to dialogue, from this point on we will analyze two types of deliberative practices which may now be found in some schools and free-time organizations: assemblies and project work. We could have opted for others, such as school mediation, discussion of moral dilemmas, election of representatives, distribution of responsibilities in the classroom, or school councils, to name but a few. We have chosen assemblies and project work, however, on the basis of three criteria.

First is the huge relevance that dialogue between different points of view has in these activities. Second, these were chosen because they are analogous to the social practices presented in earlier sections: deliberative politics and scientific activity. And

third, both assemblies and project work can be adjusted at different ages and educational levels, though they have received a greater degree of acceptance in primary education than in secondary. In the non-formal sector, however, cooperative research or decision-making in assemblies has also been applied to groups of adolescents and children. The Scout movement is a good example of this. Finally, we would point out that the two proposals share the function of attempting to offer a response to the ideals of autonomy and democracy inherited from the best pedagogical tradition, seeking at all times to make the school a warm place where young people grow up in a framework of relationships based on respect, camaraderie, and mutual trust.

### ***The school assembly***

“...to acquire the sense of discipline, solidarity and responsibility, the “active” school has strived to place the child in such a position that he has to experience these spiritual realities directly and little by little discover the constituent laws. But given that the class forms a real society, an association that rests upon the work in common of its members, it is highly natural to entrust the organisation of this society to the children themselves.”

(J. Piaget, 1967, p. 35-36)

The aim of the school assembly is for group members to participate through use of the spoken word. It represents the institutional moment of dialogue: a regular meeting exclusively dedicated to conversations between students and educators about anything they feel might enhance their work and coexistence. It is a space for dialogue intended to foster understanding, improve organization, and resolve any conflicts that may arise.

The practice of holding school assemblies is based upon the assumption that students are capable of reflecting upon themselves, being aware of their group reality, and reaching agreements that enable them to resolve problems. There are no previously determined solutions in assemblies and the group is not subject to an outside authority or moral code which has to be followed. On the contrary, taking the different individual positions as their starting point and contrasting diverse points of view and interests, students must deliberate with a view to finding a fair solution to the situation with which they are presented. Dialogue skills are a key element in this activity. The process and results of the assembly are improved in the measure that students develop these competences. A poor ability in this area, however, does not invalidate the practice. Skills for dialogue are acquired through their continued exercise, and assemblies also fulfill this function.

In educational practice terms, the assembly proposes a sequence of phases, each of which demands certain behaviour from participants. The following sections present the protocol for this practice, which must be adapted to each particular context but

which in itself constitutes a guide toward value horizons and a predisposition to the acquisition of virtues (Puig, Martín, Escardíbul, & Novella, 1999).

The first step in an assembly is its *preparation*. The matters to be discussed are proposed by the group, and the students in charge of running the assembly, together with the tutor, establish the items to be included on the agenda. Coexistence and work are areas that involve the entire school community and it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure these areas function properly. Each member of the group is entitled to raise any topic that he or she considers relevant and to expect the others to take his or her proposals into consideration.

The *discussion* is the second moment in the assembly and constitutes the core element of this practice. It is here that the exchange of views and proposals on a subject occurs, aimed at finding a solution satisfactory for all. But the assembly should not seek hasty agreement. It is a space for speaking and listening with a view to reaching an understanding, prior to which the students should voice their own opinions, listen to different positions, make an effort to appreciate them, and be prepared to give way. As they practice the behaviours demanded by discussion, they acquire the virtues that support their conduct. Discussion is always an exercise in association which develops on the basis of the contrast between different starting points and interests that coexist within the group.

The aim of stage three of the assembly, *application*, is to enable agreements to be translated into the group's everyday routine. Discussion of the proposed issues in assembly predisposes and commits participants to honour what they agreed to. In this phase, students must apply the solutions they have formulated together to resolve their problems, knowing that these are not final solutions but rather agreements that can be revised and will be subjected to review in subsequent discussions, with modifications being introduced should the group consider it appropriate.

Repeated participation in this deliberative practice, the school assembly, strengthens recognition of the richness differences can bring and enables students to feel an active part of the group through the exercise of deliberation. Some secondary schools opt to implement school mediation as an alternative practice to the assembly, prioritizing student participation in matters related to coexistence in detriment to organizational and work-related issues.

### **Project work**

“Scientific investigation is not morally neutral. It requires sensitivity towards concrete situations, a fertile imagination, the will to test our hypotheses and to submit them to public processes of confirmation, as well as to reject or modify the hypothesis in the light of new experiences.”

(R. Bernstein, 2010, p.163)

While the previous section considered the assembly as an educational application of deliberative politics, here we present a practice in schools which fosters the type of creative exchange typically found in scientific investigation. Project work (Kilpatrick, 1918) is intended to guide students' acquisition of knowledge on the basis of intense research work. This is a practice aimed at enhancing significant learning which is not acquired by reproducing finished and safe knowledge, but rather is built through creativity and uncertainty. It recognizes the right to think freely and independently, as well as the predisposition to imagine new responses to scientific challenges. Speech and cooperation are the dynamics that mediate between participants in the research, in which they explore and investigate together, use knowledge which helps them understand the reality, and develop innovative solutions which must be tested and subjected to criteria of methodological rigor and social usefulness. The implementation of project work is easier when the school has an open curricular structure which facilitates the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. In situations where the curriculum appears excessively compartmentalized by subjects, the possibilities of research are fewer.

The aim of this practice is to help students acquire the skills used in scientific thinking which will enable them to work in common, increase creative results, and transform reality. As we saw with school assemblies, the protocol of project work guides a certain course of action whose execution, in this case, requires training and developing the skills, procedures, and values present in scientific activity. In the following section, we will present each of the steps in the project work protocol (Martín, 2006).

In the first phase, *choice of subject*, the group outlines the subjects that interest them. Curricular content is open to global issues that depend on more than one discipline. The diversity of proposals emerging from different viewpoints gives rise to a fruitful argumentative defense of each, until the subject is chosen by consensus or voting. The second phase consists in *formulating questions* that enable the subject to be opened up on the basis of various levels of knowledge and competences. Learning is not a matter of reproducing or imitating what is already known, but rather one of responding in a creative and associative manner to new challenges, which in this phase are materialized in hypotheses and questions that will guide the investigation. The *elaboration of information*, the third phase in this practice, requires intense work on different sources of data. Organization of the class into small groups facilitates greater participation in the discussion, as well as flexibility when it comes to compromising. The students relate and contrast material relevant to the subject, regarding which they must adopt a position through reasoning. In the fourth phase, *synthesis of the information*, the knowledge acquired is employed to respond to the initial hypotheses and questions arising during the investigation. This requires contrasting points of view, negotiating and reaching agreements, admitting mistakes, and taking advantage of each group member's skills and knowledge. The solution is not known beforehand; it is built in an associated manner on the basis of the spoken word and cooperation, dynamics that once again exercise a strong mediating role. The project ends with *communication and evaluation* of the knowledge the students have acquired. Like scientific activity, cooperative research makes most sense when it is made

known to the community. That is the moment when it ceases to be the property of a small group and is submitted to political debate and critique. Presenting the results entails widening the circle of interlocutors, sharing the knowledge and submitting it for discussion.

In the same way as occurs with school assemblies, project work is a deliberative practice aimed at forming citizens without certainties but involved in the construction of the common good. These are two practices whose content is marked by values and whose continued use invites students to ignore their own interests, question convictions, acknowledge others, and commit themselves to seeking truth and honesty, as well as to trust that it is possible to reach a fair agreement (Cortina, 1989).

### ***The art of mentoring***

“The metaphor of learning provides a model in the plane of community activity involving the presence of active individuals participating with others in a culturally organised activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation in the activity by the less experienced people.”

(B. Rogoff, 1997, p. 113)

We have emphasized the need for immersion in a system of value practices which, like assemblies and project work, leads us to live and to reflect on our lives with a view to developing as citizens without certainties but committed to building a world with dignity. Ensuring immersion in practices is not enough, however; it is also necessary to guarantee the conditions in which participants are mentored. Mentoring, as we understand it, is the action of accompanying the person or persons in their life project. Mentoring is an art, it is being the architect of an educational relationship aimed at facilitating experiences that enable the construction of a citizen identity in the midst of a world without certainties. Educational mentoring consists in remaining close to the student to offer the help necessary for him or her to develop specific competences with which to achieve autonomy. All educational practice is an exercise in mentoring, in joint action that weaves together elements which help meet shared objectives in a project built together, hand in hand.

The role of the educators in educational practices requires a significant cultural change; they have to revolutionize their guiding principles to update them and adapt them to the uncertain world that surrounds us. In the following paragraphs, we will examine some of the elements that make up adult mentoring and broaden the educational impact of the practices.

*Acknowledge the student and trust in his or her potential.* In practice, the educator must be able to weave the relationship with the student on the basis of a relational, affective, and emotional climate, founded in trust, security, and recognition. Only in

these conditions will the help prove fruitful. The practices designed and guided by the educator are experienced in proximity and in a model of emotions generated in situ, as well as from the representation each has of the other and of the relationship they form in its construction. According to Carl Rogers (1986), three conditions should be present in the relationship cultivated by the educator: the positive and unconditional acceptance he or she must display to the student, his or her authenticity or congruence, and confidence in the resources possessed by the student to resolve his or her own problems. Feeling acknowledged and appreciated enables the student to form a framework of guarantees that allow the predisposition and motivation to experiment to flourish.

*Establish bridges, adjust the help, and relinquish responsibilities.* Practices for conversation are enhanced by the processes and systems of mutual involvement between individuals who communicate as participants in a culturally meaningful activity. These processes need a device through which to reach an understanding and share a collective project. Moreover, becoming involved in activities means coordinating efforts on the basis of sharing an action plan that organizes and structures participation. In the course of the joint activity, it will be the educator who adjusts and adapts his or her interventions to the capabilities observed in the group and in each student as a participant. In short, the educator will build bridges as a strategy of organization and structuring of the participation (Rogoff, 1997). The initiative in the interaction will therefore be gradually surrendered, meaning that little by little the student will take over deciding how the activity is to proceed. This leads to a transfer of responsibility in parallel to the progress the student is making in his or her competences, which enables the shift of the activity from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal plane, and from joint regulation to self-regulation. Questioning is one of the strategies available to the educator to regulate the help he or she gives by facilitating a better defined idea of the impression the participants have of the situation they share. It also allows for students to become involved in looking for answers on the basis of their opinions, for action to be planned based on seeking and verifying the best option, and for students to question and be questioned as regards the joint activity.

*Being neutral and being belligerent.* We are still some distance from immutable truths and absolute values. The adult attitude to possible conflictive discussions is therefore situated between neutrality and commitment. Given his or her influence over the student, the educator will remain neutral in some conversations, while in others it will be necessary to intervene in defense of certain values considered appropriate in the training of citizens. In educational practices, we find that both situations with their respective arguments are acceptable and desirable; the key lies in defining on which occasions and in which circumstances to adopt one posture or the other. The main point is to decipher the values that are highly regarded and shared by all citizens, irrespective of their ways of life, beliefs, and ideologies. It is for these values that educators must show their commitment and defense, and they should do so seeking deliberative ways of mentoring the student in their construction. In the case of

values that revolve around differences, personal matters, and individual preferences, it would be more appropriate for the educator to express a neutral opinion (Trilla, 1992).

*Promote reflective dialogue.* In dialogical practices, reflection enables actions and behaviours of the class group or individual students to be dissected and transformed into something collective. The educator must empower students as active agents in the search for uncertain responses to the challenges posed by life and living with others. From this paradigm, reflective practices present an opportunity to encourage emergence of the reasons supporting the action and/or dialogue, by analyzing the practical development and ethical implications that permeate social relationships and personal actions. Thus, educators face the challenge of mentoring in the training of reflective competences in the action, over the action, and from the action (Perrenoud, 2004). Reflection enables us to constantly seek the sense in what we live and experience. Reflective practices must be used by the educator as a setting in which to address problems relating to the best way of living, which can be clarified through the exchange of rational arguments. He or she will therefore mentor the student in the formation of the set of competences needed to maintain a constructive dialogue based on reasons and guided by the desire to get on well with all the other people involved.

*Foster cooperation.* The need to associate in order to develop a better world leads us to combine forces to meet this collective challenge. It is something that can only be achieved if we stand together, and that is why educators will encourage students to bring their strengths together and creatively chart the course they will take to fulfill their objective. Educators must create the conditions in which participants attain a state of inter-subjectivity that enables them to share, through negotiation of meaning, a definition of the situation they will create. This shared definition will not coincide with any of those that the students had when the interaction began, but will be newly constructed in the course of the different actions in the practice. The educator will adjust his or her help to participants on the basis of the potential each of them shows and their differences with respect to the others; in this way, it will be possible to meet their shared challenges and fulfill their shared dreams. Civic creativity, together with unconditional cooperation and solidarity, leads to great advances in collective progress which – though it moves among uncertainties – is capable of weaving a certain assurance that offers support to democratic communities.

*Support awareness and self-awareness.* Our relationship with others accompanies our process of identification and individualization. The educator will foster the processes of introspection of the “I/we” from the perspective of self-reflection on that which is subject to questioning, in order to participate in a deliberative public forum which facilitates the generation of collective assent or dissent. We build our history, taking an active and committed part from which to explore a positioning which is constantly reconstructing our way of being, behaving, and feeling. The educator will attempt to ensure that this dynamic is permanently active and fueled by questioning of the “I/

we” in the world of values that makes the student confront and challenge that which supports what we want to be. The educator will also design practices that pose the moral challenge of learning to *be*, in such a way as to enable the student to conduct his or her own life in situations of high uncertainty. In some way, the educator will cause the student to enter into an endless search for who he or she is, and what he or she decides be like in the world. This is always a work in process that involves self-observation and constant discovery – both as individuals and as members of communities – but also anticipation of the future and the construction of ways of being loved and wanted.

### ***Uncertain citizenship with values***

We hope to have clearly demonstrated that a citizenship without certainties does not imply an absence of values. It means nothing more than a lack of substantial guarantees that are imposed upon us as undeniable knowledge and an indisputable way of life forever. In contrast, an absence of certainties obliges us to use the old values and to develop new ones, rather than do without them altogether. These values may be categorized into four blocks, which we will briefly review.

When we have no guarantees that impose a way of seeing and living in the world in a heteronomous manner, this necessarily opens up a space for the development of personal autonomy and the freedom to think for oneself and to confront the difficulties that immediate reality poses. On the other hand, acquiring greater autonomy also means being more responsible with respect to what we think and do. It becomes no longer possible to hide behind some truth that indicates the path to take; the path we choose depends on our sensibilities, intelligence, and willingness to take it.

We have no certainties, but we rely upon two forces which, despite forming part of some of our problems, are also basic elements in their solution. We refer to the differences that separate and enrich us, and to the need for association that grants us enormous power and creativity. Consequently, as we are unable to take refuge behind some substantial certainty, we have to recognize and develop the tools and values that crystallize differences and our desire to associate.

The third block of values is defined by commitment and hope. It is the commitment to work on the creation of those educational situations which will contribute to developing the aforementioned values among citizens. Put another way, it is an undertaking to design and apply the educational practices we consider most suitable. Along with commitment, we also need the hope that the intelligence of individuals and the community as a whole can lead us to the creative solution of problems that inevitably confront human beings. Among these solutions, we can also situate hope.

Finally, and in line with what we have set out above, we must be capable of determining in each particular situation precisely what we need to foster development of a life lived with dignity for all. In other words, we require common sense to adopt the valuable elements of tradition, creativity to conceive new solutions, and solidarity to

ensure everyone enjoys the goods that will enable them to live a dignified life.

## Notes

1. Though in this work we focus on the dynamic of dialogic conversation, we should also mention other components such as interpersonal bonds and the capacity to cooperate.

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