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Covid-19 pandemic in Catalonia

Don't open the schools for now...

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In recent days, a discourse favourable to the opening of schools has been building from the left. The slogan, formulated imperatively, is ambiguous. So much so that at the same time that although it is an immediate demand, what is proposed to achieve it is very long-lasting. From Roger PalÀ to Ada Colau, through Jordi MuÃ±oz, a series of ideas have been launched in this direction. Let's go through them bit by bit and see the possibilities and weaknesses of the proposal. It should be said in advance that despite the responsive tone of this text, the intention is to put on the table all those elements that have not been considered in terms of reopening schools. Basically, maintaining and enriching the dialogue started.

Bars, churches, shopping malls ... and not schools?

Right, not schools. In fact, they were the first physical locations to close. Following the logic of lockdown, they should be the last to reopen. In bars, churches and shopping malls, measures can be imposed to achieve a certain physical distance between people. In schools and institutes, no. Or rather, yes, but with chilling results. Just look at the example of France these days. Currently we are facing ratios in the classroom that exceed not only the acceptable pedagogical minimums, but also those that refer to optimal teaching activity. The schools have not been designed to have 30 students on average per classroom. And in "normality", this is where we are. Without considering the situation of ridiculous barracks and patios that some schools and institutes suffer. In a bar or a shopping centre, if you force them to have only 50% of their capacity, nothing happens. Obviously it is a detriment to the owner and the profits of the business, but at a social level the affectation is not collective, it is individual. Can we do the same with schools? Do we leave 50% of the students at home? The same Roger PalÀ who demands the opening of schools calls this measure "nonsense". I totally agree. So, do we open or not?

Enabling other spaces in the city so that all students can go to "school" is not a solution. At least, this would not be going back to school. One of the arguments in favour of openness is the equalizing and socializing role that the school plays. Would the 15 students in each classroom who, instead of joining their school or institute, do so in an enabled room in the civic centre of their neighbourhood, be equalizing and socializing in the same way as those "chosen" to return to the ordinary centre? I think not. To the infrastructures, we must add the social and emotional relationships between the students. How will we organise the groups, in list order? On the basis of friendship and mutual affinities? Will teachers be police officers from now on too? In fact, we already are. In the case of the institutes we are in charge of stopping smoking at yard time, for example. From now on, will we also be in charge of telling them not to kiss or hug each other? Is this socializing?

Why open schools?

Basically, the two big questions are why we want to open schools and when we can do it. Now, in order to give a more or less correct answer, far from the idealism that some reflections exude, it is necessary to start from the objective and subjective conditions of the problem. And the first thing that we must consider is that the "why" is a multi-directional and multi-directional question asked from different forms of reasoning. On the one hand, the need for the system to resume productive activity wherever it left off. Without school, capitalism does not work. The incorporation of millions of parents into their jobs requires having a place to leave children. If the school, beyond teaching and the transmission of concepts, is a tool for the socialization of the individual, it should be opened since it fulfils this function. No matter how many fine words are used, this involves passing a social responsibility to the

educational system that does not correspond to it. We are used to it. The role of 'nursery' or 'children's parking' is a classic of the perception that certain political and social sectors have. I am surprised that this logic now comes, consciously or not, from the left. Perhaps the problem is not that people are resuming their jobs too soon? Perhaps the problem is not that it is more complex to get companies involved in the well-being of their workers and, consequently, of society, than not finding a place to leave children to go to work full-time? As always, big capital will not shoulder, will not participate in the solution. In the short term, rather than looking towards the Autonomous Department and the Ministry of Education, it would be necessary to look towards those of Employment and the Economy.

On the other hand, the second reason to open schools is to respond to the most vulnerable families. They are highly dependent on the educational and healthcare system. However, once again, rather than looking at the schools, what we should do is look elsewhere. In this case, social services. In the coming weeks, it is more important to hire educators and social integrators than teachers. The academic year is over. But we must respond to all those families who have seen how this unilateral end has affected them in the most basic aspects. It is necessary for educators and integrators to visit these families and start a task of support, taking note of their needs and transferring to the corresponding political bodies the measures that would have to be taken so that no one is left behind. And that is not the job of a teacher. And it is urgent. The school can help with support or advice from the tutorials and the pedagogical teams, but it cannot become the tool that replaces the social services.

Finally, the argument that students should not lose contact with the school is just and necessary. From the tutorials we have been monitoring the students. From emails to phone calls, through video conference tutoring. It is neither the format nor the way of doing things in a "normal" situation. But we are not in a "normal" situation. Nor will we be for a while if we listen to what epidemiologists and health personnel say. Is coming back for just a few days, in small, separate groups in the classroom, monitored abnormally during recess, more psychologically beneficial for our children? Let me doubt it. Isn't it better that you keep in your individual and collective imagination the image of the school as it was while we make every effort to make it look as good as possible in September? I am a father and I do not see my son traumatized. Obviously, each family reality is a world. But, based on this, we return to one of the arguments that have been raised by the text on several occasions: we cannot pass the responsibility on to the school. And, in fact, I think that my son will be more affected by attending a school with half his classmates and friends, all wearing a mask and with enormous contact restrictions, than by making him understand that, little by little, we will finish the course and that in September we will try to get everything back to the way it was before. Without generating high expectations, obviously.

When can we open? Three plans in the short, medium and long term

Sincerely I don't know. My expectation is in September. It will be necessary to have a roadmap agreed between institutions and teachers that has the endorsement of the health authorities. And make it realistic. Talking about incorporating only 50% of students on and off without explaining how this type of teaching will be done, is surreal. There are no spaces in our schools to incorporate all the students in these conditions. Saying that we will have to do online teaching without the necessary training tools for teachers is not a good solution either. So far, we've only been covering the file in a hurry, throwing out vague ideas. This is logical, because the situation has taken us all by surprise. Asking to open schools now or before the end of the course does not help find the best solutions to the problems that confront us. On the contrary, it puts more pressure on us. What should we do and when?

I think a minimum of three plans should be designed. One in the short term, one in the medium and one in the long term. The short-term plan should focus on designing the end of the 19/20 course. Abandoning the idea of opening schools and ceasing to put pressure on the educational community is the first step. From the centres, we have been

modifying the end of course calendar for days, the way we will evaluate the students and the way we will find ourselves to close and design, with the information we have, the next course. In this context, opening schools in a crazy way is just adding one more problem to the complex management that teachers, professors and school leaders have had to do. It will neither help students to get back on their feet nor will it make it easier to imagine and project the next course. Let us finish what we have started.

The medium-term plan should focus on thinking and designing what the next course will be like. Thinking about it from the normality that the health authorities describe to us. And from this normality, thinking about the different variables. Throwing out one "trial balloon" after another does not help. It distorts, hinders the possibilities that the September horizon determines for us. In the framework of the design of the next course, it will be necessary to think about the school with all its students, reducing the ratios, analysing the reality of each municipality and the possibilities of dividing class groups, adapting spaces that were not intended for schooling, planning a staff of teachers and professors capable of covering this new demand, thinking about how the teaching will be done in the event of a new outbreak and lockdown, what tools we will have available to face the main problems detected during these weeks and so on.

In short, it will be necessary to think and design an educational model of transition between the world in which we lived and what seems to be beginning to emerge. And in this plan it will be important that, during this summer, teachers have at our disposal the necessary training in new pedagogical tools and techniques. Finally, the last plan must relate to the long term. That is, the time it takes to build a school. If as a society we are clear that education is, along with health, one of the two fundamental pillars, we must build more schools. In fact, the optimum would be to double the number we already have. And change the template. They have continued to be two of the great demands of education professionals for decades. Perhaps now we will be heard. The experiments of telematic education, of incorporating only 50% intermittently ... are precisely that, experiments. The situation has forced us to teach and educate with new tools during these months. However, these can only be one more support in the educational process and in no case the element that will serve to replace face-to-face education.

I have no doubt about the goodwill behind the demands to open schools now. I think, however, that they have been made without much thought about the consequences. The consequences of having them closed have been taken more into account than the consequences of opening them. If they are closed, it is not for pleasure or because we teachers like to be at home working more hours than we worked before. The epidemiological emergency situation that we have experienced has required exceptional measures. And more will have to be done. Of course, the school can never again be the institution where we deposit all those problems derived from political, economic and social incompetence and insufficiencies. If we believe in public education, we want it to be a little more.

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