

I WANT TO BE ONE OF THEM

The Fine Arts in secondary education

2024

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On my computer screen is the orchestra of the Hofkapelle Munchen with the children's choir of the Tölzer Knabenchor, conducted by Christian Fliegner, singing a truly beautiful version of Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

And with the benefits of technology, I can see the faces of all those German secondary school students, who make up that wonderful choir. The faces of the children singing is a veritable poem. You can see, you can tell, that they are completely devoted to the music, that they absolutely love it. I WANT TO BE ONE OF THEM. I, who am already over 75 years old, how I'd love to be one of those children singing Bach with such precision and enthusiasm!

And if asked to write about "The Fine Arts in secondary education and fostering intelligence", if I could, my answer would be for secondary school students to watch and enjoy that incredible video capable of convincing any of them to join in, to want to be one of them.

COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION (ESO in Spanish)

ESO, it sounds ghastly. In my view this term ESO, the Spanish acronym for Compulsory Secondary Education, from 12 to 16 years old, is horrible. Secondary and compulsory: that is how it is described in the Spanish State Bulletin, as if it were a punishment.

Teaching is a wondrous profession that I have been practicing for almost half a century and, not only that, I have been granted the gift of being able to continue for a little longer as emeritus professor under contract. Still teaching, which means still learning, still enjoying it.

Secondary, even the name sounds wrong. Secondary - when in truth it is extraordinary! The possibility of being able to continue learning during those precious when one has an added receptive ability to absorb everything with such enthusiasm. What a gift!

Compulsory, that sounds even worse, especially when being able to continue studying is such a wonderful gift.

LIGHTING THE FIRE

Montaigne said: "Teaching is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". And how right he was. A teacher has to know how to ignite the soul and mind of his students with knowledge. He must know how pass on to them the sacred fire of culture. And to keep that fire burning, the humanities are essential; they are the perfect fuel for that fire. Julián Marías used to say that the three qualities that a teacher should have are: knowing, knowing how to teach and wanting to teach. How true! And by the same token, the three

qualities of a student should be: knowing what they do not know, knowing how to learn and wanting to learn. What I would tell secondary school students is to know that they know nothing, to learn how to learn and to want to learn. And if Drawing and Music and Poetry and Philosophy and Dance and Gymnastics are included, then so much the better.

Can you remember the first poem you wrote as a child after being fascinated by reading the words of a poet like Garcilaso? Can you remember how your hand trembled when you showed your mother the first drawing you made after seeing Picasso's sketches? Can you recall that family gathering where everyone applauded when you played that well-known melody on the flute? Can you remember when you were only a child and you discovered philosophy and Socrates and you said to yourself "all I know is that I know nothing."

FINE ARTS AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

And I've been asked to write about the Fine Arts in secondary teaching, in the ESO, at that tender age. I would introduce (rather than make obligatory) Music, Drawing and Poetry and Philosophy. Four good legs for a stable table. And I'd add on dance and theater and gymnastics.

When I was a secondary school student, those of us who studied science also studied Latin - such a great idea! I must admit that as an architect and as a teacher, this has helped me in good stead so many times for so many things. In one of my projects, which involved the building of a large stone wall in front of the cathedral of Zamora, having first consulted with a clergyman in the cathedral who was a Latin scholar, I commissioned the engraving of a large corner stone: HIC LAPIS MAIO MMXII POSITO ANGULARIS. Then a good friend of mine, the great architect and professor Ignacio Vicens, before engraving it, made a slight correction to the Latin text. Latin has been useful to me for so many things. It has even helped me to speak Italian almost perfectly.

CULTURE. MR. ANTONIO AMOR

Antonio Amor, what a delightful name!, was an elderly retired school teacher, with a hat and cane like the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, whom my father, with his meager salary as a military surgeon in Cadiz, hired to teach us children during the summer months. We were attending secondary school, the ESO, and those were unforgettable general culture classes. Humanities at their very best.

The four of us used to sit and watch that venerable old man, a native of Granada, while he smoked the cigars that he carefully rolled in front of us and recounted all kinds of stories that kept us fascinated during those happy times. García Lorca and Machado, he shared their texts with us in his hoarse, cracked voice and beautiful Andalusian accent. Falla and Bach, Velázquez and El Greco, and Plato were also quoted. There was no ESO back then, so we were regaled with these marvelous offerings. And he would draw

something for us, and we would draw something, anything. And he would get us to write a poem after reciting to us the words of the Renaissance poet Garcilaso de la Vega: “If the sound of my lowly lyre, / were powerful enough to calm the ire”. And picking up a guitar that we had at home, he would play some music and we learned all kinds of parables and stories. And he introduced us to that “All I know is that I know nothing”, the words of his friend Socrates. Music, drawing, poetry and philosophy - four great legs for the table of life!

THINKING WITH ONE’S HANDS

When I was a child, my mother, herself the daughter of an architect, was always loud in her praise of my drawings, in her bid to encourage me into taking up architecture, and, boy, did she succeed! This is what I’ve always tried to do with my students too, so that, rather than discouraging them, I encourage them to do better. As everyone involved in teaching knows, the method is extremely effective.

And I drew a lot back then. But the limited amount of drawing required by the official curriculum, the so-called “line drawing”, had no greater impact than getting us to buy a drawing pen and a compass with a bottle of indelible black Pelikán ink, with which we would stain ourselves in a truly indelible way. The classes were given in San Felipe Neri in Cádiz by Mr. Juan Bermúdez, who besides being Fine Arts Professor of Drawing, was a magnificent painter. With him I had the good fortune to spend some summers drawing at the School of Fine Arts, in the Plaza de Mina in Cadiz. There, those of us who were going to study architecture, made charcoal sketches, in front of the immovable plaster statues. But artistic drawing was never an important subject on the secondary school curriculum. And it should have been.

MUSIC. MY STUDENTS

The first question I ask my students, at the beginning of my Projects course at the Madrid School of Architecture, is for those who play a musical instrument to raise their hands. Fortunately, in recent years, more than twenty have always put up their hands. Flutists, guitarists, pianists, even a cellist. At the end of the course, these students are usually among those who come out on top.

And you may wonder, what is the connection between knowing how to play a musical instrument and architecture? And I assure you that it has a lot to do with it.

A recent published article of mine is entitled: “The air is calm and dresses in beauty and unusable light” and in it I display the parallels between music and architecture. Air is to music as light is to architecture. Music would be impossible without air, and architecture impossible without light. I’ll tell you more about it another day. One of the masters of contemporary Spanish architecture, Alejandro de la Sota, is known to have played Bach on the piano first thing every morning. And in my view this is very noticeable in his *Bachian* architecture.

If music were part of the ESO curriculum, it would be a different story.

POETRY KOVALÉVSKAYA

“It is impossible to be a mathematician without being a poet in soul” according to the Russian mathematician Sofia Kovalévskaya. And I say it is impossible to be an architect without being a poet in soul.

Years ago in Spain, in order to study architecture, one had to have previously studied Mathematics for a few years. And there was logic in this because what does an architect do if not order, organize and establish the order of space? Mathematics and Poetry and Music and Drawing have a lot to do with one another. The Spanish essayist Maria Zambrano said that poetry was “the word agreeing with the number”.

The love of Poetry should be encouraged in ESO students. They are the ones who would understand it better than anyone else. Far better than those brainless individuals who create such senseless, pedestrian curricula.

AND PHILOSOPHY. MY ESO

For my ESO, I had the good fortune to attend the Marianist San Felipe Neri school in Cadiz, and finish my schooling at the Pilar de Castelló, another Marianist center, in Madrid. Wonderful people, quite out of the ordinary. I remember their names so well, all of them, so many that they wouldn't fit in this text.

In my first year of secondary school, I had a very young, very intelligent teacher, Enrique Torres Rojas, the son of a state lawyer from Madrid. One day he said in public that I was the one who “cut the cod” (meaning I was the one to call the shots). You can imagine how worried I was when I told them this at home. My mother, smiling from ear to ear, devoured me with kisses. That was ESO back then. We drew a little, sang a lot in the choir, we wrote and recited sublime poems, with an occasional bit of philosophy in there too!

AND DANCE. THE ROYAL BOX

In the summertime what were known as the Summer Festivals came to Cadiz, the most beautiful city in the world. These public events took place in the José María Pemán Theater, in the Genovés Park. Directly opposite, the rooftops of the barracks were open to us military families to see those wonderful shows. And there were so many children. There we saw Antonio's magnificent *Ballets* and *Swan Lake* performed by the *Ballet de France* under Janine Charrat, the best of the best in classical dance. And concerts in which Falla or Rodrigo were accompanied by maestro Cubiles, an exceptional pianist from Cadiz. One day he attacked the piano with so much verve that he sprained his hand and my father, an orthopedic surgeon, had to go to his dressing room to attend to him. Of course, led on by my mother, we children went along with him.

That summer I almost ran out of time to stage a puppet show at home featuring a piano concert in which the lead puppet appeared in full costume attacking a piano that I had

made out of black X-rays stolen from my father! Behind me, my sisters were turning a His Master's Voice gramophone. Those were indeed wonderful times.

KEATS AND THE ESO

One of my favorite poets, John Keats, must have done his ESO studies in Spain. In one of his best known poems in honor of George Chapman as the first to translate Homer into English in 1612, Keats attributes the sighting of the Darien to Cortés (he writes Cortez). In reality, it was Pizarro who first set his eyes on the Darien and not Cortez - the early ravages of the ESO!

Fortunately, his parents later decided to send him to ETON where he was properly schooled in the Fine Arts. So much so that he went on to write something as beautiful as the *Ode On A Grecian Urn*, which ends with a truly wonderful proposal:

*Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

There you have it: more Fine Arts, more Music, more Drawing, more Poetry and more Philosophy.

AN ESO CHILD AND A PIANO

I started out wanting to be one of the ESO children of the German choir, and now, to finish, I would encourage you to watch another video, that of the Children's Symphony Orchestra of Galicia, with an exceptional soloist, Luka Hauser, also at secondary school age. Born in La Corunna, in northwestern Spain, the son of musician parents, this young pianist trained with the Russian maestro Alexander Gold, in Santiago de Compostela. I am sure that Luka, has also got very good grades in everything. These young people all play with such dedication that, in the same way as I yearned to be a member of that Bach choir, now I could listen to this forever. How I'd love to play the piano like this young man! He even plays with his eyes closed, so immersed is he in the music.

CONCLUSION. I'M STILL LEARNING

As I come to the end of this text in defense of finally including the Fine Arts in education, once again I find myself still learning. Goya sums it up so well in that small pencil drawing that appeared in a recent exhibition at the Prado Museum with the words I'M STILL LEARNING written over a drawing of an old man with white hair and white beard, leaning on two staves. Well, with this reflection full of personal memories, I find myself, at my age still learning, learning a lot.

If I was a father and had a child of ESO age, the first thing I would do is to have him or her ask me to enroll them, somewhere, in Music, Drawing, Poetry, Philosophy. They would be happy and I would be even happier. And, both of us, we would be a lot freer.