

## Joan Mascaró, a great teacher

“My supreme teacher was Mallorca, with its sunshine, silence and beauty. My thoughts and yearnings were my university”

Joan Mascaró

A wise man was born in 1897 in the small Majorcan village of Santa Margalida. His name was Joan Mascaró i Fornés and he was an educator who taught at the School of Commerce in Palma, at Parameshvara College in Ceylon, at Cambridge University and at the University of Barcelona. He was a Master in the profound sense of the word: “someone who guides the growth of others: a person who teaches by being and doing”.

When he was very young, he read the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy verses that for Mascaró meant a rebirth – his own spiritual birth. This masterpiece left a deep impression within him and sealed his soul with the will to pursue personal growth and communion with all of creation. Also, this text awoke in him the vocation of becoming an orientalist, a poet and philologist, to the point of becoming the most prestigious translator, from Sanskrit into English, of sacred Indian texts such as the “Bhagavad Gita”, the “Dhammapada” and the “Upanishads”.

He was devoted to the pursuit of wisdom and of a harmonious relationship between humanity and the universe. Following the motto of 'unity in diversity', Mascaró pioneered an intercultural vision and insistently defended the need to establish dialogue between civilizations. His ideas about education still prevail (self-esteem, love, coexistence, cooperation, comprehensive education, spirituality...) in a world in conflict, and they are crucial to understanding why the Western world is constantly looking to Eastern spirituality in the search for the individual's fulfilment.

**The concept of education** for Joan Mascaró goes far beyond the walls of schools, colleges and universities, far beyond school age and far beyond the teacher-student relationship. It is the resource the human species needs to overcome its own ills: poverty, wars, injustice and lack of values. The following are the main traits of the pedagogy that this Majorcan teacher put forward:

- Aiming for the comprehensive development of the individual: developing his/her technical, ethical and spiritual potential
- Self-realization instead of comparison and competition

- A more fulfilling life: being, instead of having; living, instead of earning and spending
- Education is not about accumulating information, but instead involves awakening and discovering
- A deeper joy, the joy of creating a better world
- Social transformation: a better world thanks to Education
- Adapting educational ideals to the time and the place where they are applied
- Overcoming the dilemma of “education for the individual vs education for society”
- Giving importance to the humanist conception of culture and its effect within the classroom

Thus, Mascaró's concept of a teacher is much more than the person whose profession it is to teach in schools, colleges, academies...

“Teachers are the living link between culture and student, and their most important challenge is love. In the centre of their experience there needs to be a twofold love: a love for cultural values, that must be alive within their soul in order to pass them on, and a love for the individual who is being formed.”

“The mission of educators should never be to merely pass on knowledge, new information and techniques, but instead, with true love, both spoken aloud and in silence, in presence and in absence, they must awaken a sense of liberty in the students, walking alongside them so that they may enter the world and venture deeper into it as a place of peace and the home of joy, as a space of love and the land of hope. Passing on knowledge is very important, necessary and sacred, but first one needs to become a person, precisely to be able to do what humans do. First one needs to know about the world that sustains and supports us, before trying to transform it. One needs to be free, before trying to subdue the earth and society.”

“How many are there who, textbook in hand, base their teaching on a pre-fabricated culture, one that is programmed from on high, ignoring the daily reality of the school's surroundings and the problems of the local

community. How many are there who merely spend a few hours or a few days, no matter, passing on concepts, new information and skills in order to achieve a product. The task of teaching is more than a profession: it is a mission. Heart and soul must offer fundamental cornerstones so that freedoms can rest upon them, and spring up with joy into life.”<sup>1</sup>

These are some of the traits that Joan Mascaró appreciated in teachers:

- That they should have a knowledge and love of the history, culture, language, and surroundings of the place where they work, and that they also love the individuals they are educating.
- That they be aware of the fact that they are acting as role-models: teaching by being and doing.
- That they be free individuals, helping to free their students as well.
- That they be a fire that lights up hearts and thoughts.

Love is a constant feature in the work of Joan Mascaró. He envisioned the process of loving oneself as a requisite to loving others, in tandem with the process of loving others as a condition for happiness.

Self-knowledge and personal growth are also key aspects at the heart of Joan Mascaró's pedagogical work. Regarding the search for oneself, he refers repeatedly to resources like observation, inner calm, contemplation, meditation, self-fulfilment, the importance of the present moment, giving value to “being” as opposed to “having”, mindfulness, concentration and peace of mind.

Joan Mascaró's work is full of aphorisms, like pearls that encapsulate his timeless wisdom:

“Education is the essence of this vast universe. The process of evolution is a process of education.”

“The only authentic teaching is teaching others to wake up.”

“An exceptional mix of energies must be present in the classroom—thrilling, demanding and spontaneous”

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<sup>1</sup> From the book “La idea d’Educació en l’obra de Joan Mascaró i Fornés”, de by Margalida Munar. Ed. UIB

“A child is poetry and lives in a world of poetry.”

“A good teacher with an irrelevant method will do more than an irrelevant teacher with a good method. It is the personality of the teacher that counts, not the method.”

“The world needs a revolution, an inner revolution, a revolution that changes the hearts and minds of humankind. A new faith is necessary, a universal human faith.”

“Education should give us 'seed-ideas' so that they may flourish in future life.”

“Education is something that happens within, as flexible and vibrant as life itself; it is the spirit itself growing, and for everything that grows there has to be a seed.”

“A teacher is a poet and a creator. A free person who frees others.”

“What the teacher is, not what s/he knows, is what counts.”

“The quality of the teachers is what creates the quality of the education.”

“School should be a place of joy and leisure and life, within a community.”

“Work with the same joy as you play.”

“We can only truly preach with our own life and actions.”

“Point the way so that others may find it for themselves.”

“Those who hate need extra love so they can learn to love.”

“Love cannot be taught, but it can be given.”

“See the greatness in small things. See the world in a grain of sand.”

“Education should be based on joy, because life is based on joy.”

“The law of love solves all of man's social problems.”

“Loving your neighbour is the wisest way of being happy yourself.  
Cooperation is better than competition.”

“The light of our inner sun is covered by the clouds of our mind: as more clouds disappear, so we can begin to see the true reality of things.”

“The aim of education is a more fulfilling life. A teacher needs to have faith and offer this faith to students; but s/ he must also offer students the freedom to debate.”