

Education and Democracy

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The *Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat (A.M. Rosa Sensat)* is a non-profit, voluntary association inspired by the early 20th century pedagogical reform movement. It aims at promoting pedagogical quality and innovation through on-going training for teachers, educators and pedagogues, the maintenance of open spaces for reflection and by supporting projects of pedagogical innovation based on interdisciplinary work.

The *Escola de Mestres Rosa Sensat* (the School for Teachers Rosa Sensat) was founded in 1965 as an initiative of 7 teachers who were part of a teachers' and parents' collective that was starting to create schools as an alternative to both the official school of Franco's dictatorial regime and to the religious, private schools. The Association worked under secrecy to offer a democratic training space for these teachers (initially a group of around 15 people). It was named after Rosa Sensat to honour the teacher who, in the early years of the century, founded the *Escola de bosc (The Forest School)*. This was the first municipal outdoor school inspired by the principles of the new and active school, a tradition which those teachers tried to recover in the 50's and 60's. Since these parents' and teachers' schools started with early childhood and primary school (from 3 years on), the initial training activities focused on these stages of education and were based on the synthesis of practice and theory. In 1966, besides organizing the first *Escola d'Estiu* (The Summer School) for teachers after the Civil War, the first "escola bressol" ("nursery school" for children from 0 to 3 years) old was created, and in 1968 the training activities organised in the afternoons and in the summer of that same year already included activities, based on these first experiences, for early childhood teachers and educators.

Currently, in a democratic context, Rosa Sensat (transformed into an association) targets education professionals of all stages. It has 1.765 members in Catalonia, around 1.250 contributors and offers its services (training, guidance services, spaces for reflection and publications) to the whole of the education community, for which it receives public subsidies. In 2003 Rosa Sensat offered training to 3.970 teachers or educators, and its regular pedagogy journals (*Perspectiva Escolar*, *In-fan-cia* –with two different editions for Spain and Catalonia– and *Infancia en Europa* –in Spanish and in Catalan–) had 9.261 subscribers. Furthermore, it publishes several collections of books and CDs specialized in educational issues, such as early childcare. The Association has developed its own webpage, which includes spaces for debate and a specific site devoted to early childcare and education. The Summer School is the Association's oldest and most characteristic activity.

Rosa Sensat's commitment with a democratic education is visible in all of its activities since the foundation of the association. In fact, from its roots we can better understand that the Association is adamant to the idea of protecting and promoting freedom, democracy and the Catalan culture. For instance, 30 years ago, in 1975, while still under the dictatorship, the Rosa Sensat Summer School adopted a document entitled **For a New Public School System**. Its tenets were shared by all those who, in Catalonia and Spain, were struggling so that, in the framework of a future democratic political system, we could configure the changes that education and the schools required.

This commitment with democracy, and with an inclusive education open to all, was renewed in 2005 with the adoption of a new document, the declaration **For a New Public Education System**. According to this recent document, education in a democratic society is a shared

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experience, a process in the co-construction of identity, knowledge and values between democratic subjects who think for themselves, an education that aims for emancipation, an education that is based on ethical and political praxis.

From this perspective, education should be by everyone and for everyone, an education for and through freedom. It is conceived as a collective responsibility and task, and has consubstantial relationships with a democratic project in which citizens define the common good and write the laws for a true education of and through freedom. Education is, therefore, a social right of all citizens, from birth and throughout one's entire life, which the public authorities must guarantee by creating and maintaining the school for everyone, without discriminating in terms of age, gender, background, creed, ethnicity or capacities, and to compensate through equality the inequalities that subsist in our society. Schools cannot separate children for any reason. So all schools should be places to learn to know, respect and coexist, places of ethical and political praxis, spaces for democratic learning. And from this democratic view, which the Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat has fought for since its birth, schools must be inclusive, and difference and pluralism must become its essential values.

Education, too, recognises the diversity of families, their basic responsibility and their role in the education of the children they have given birth to or adopted, so that they can become persons and citizens of a democratic community. Children, moreover, who are active persons since birth, citizens with a place in society, subject-protagonists of law whom the society must respect and support. Public persons with a recognised place in society.

Both documents, the Declaration of 1975 and the Declaration of 2005, represent brilliant moments in the history of Rosa Sensat. In a sense, those documents prove that the educative and democratic commitment of the Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat is a continuous action which has been carried out for more than 40 years through different stages: in secrecy at the beginning under an authoritarian regime, contributing to the democratic transition later on, and currently as a non-governmental and independent association.



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