POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: SOME VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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Abstract: The political view that we consider more just is based on egalitarian liberalism – enhanced by some elements of republicanism, multiculturalism, and feminism. However, this political project depends on the development of certain virtues in the individuals like tolerance, integration with their fellow citizens, democratic deliberation, reflective thinking, sentiments of empathy and solidarity, and agreement to follow just rules. Admitted the need of cultivating such values, specifically here, we intend to report how they are currently taught in Brazilian schools. The method applied is a qualitative analysis based on observations of school environments and interviews with teachers and students.

Keywords: Egalitarian liberalism; citizenship education; practices in schools.

Introduction

This text presents some ideas on how specifically three schools in the South of Brazil – one private (Farroupilha) with upper class students, two state-run , one with students from different social classes (FTS), another with poor students (MLH) – *are putting into practice* their curriculum about citizenship education. Here, school actors' and my impressions on how citizenship education *actually happens* are scrutinized through analysing empirical data. (1) It starts identifying *syllabuses and subjects* related to citizenship *official curriculum* in these

schools. Following this and (2) trying to see citizenship *official curriculum in a wider way*, it is observed how *schools' official organizational structures* act to help (or to hinder) promoting such a curriculum. Later, (3) some *individual initiatives* achieved in such schools (*unofficial curriculum*) are also investigated. Finally, (4) some elements of the *hidden curriculum* in this direction, and against it, are problematized.

How official curriculum on citizenship is currently applied in schools

Official curriculum can be defined as "what is laid down in syllabuses, prospectuses and so on" (Kelly, 2004, p. 6). In this way, Brazil's Secondary Schools' official curriculum does not include a subject called "Citizenship Education". However, even if there is not a subject focused on developing these values, school communities believe that some of them are oriented to cultivate citizenship. In the schools observed, 18% of these three schools teachers consider that such a subject actually exists. Probably, this impression comes from their understanding that Philosophy and/or Sociology have such a purpose.

Analysing the most important and quoted document in Brazilian academic texts on school curricula, the 1998 National Curricula Parameters (PCNs), improved in 2013 by the National Curricula Guidelines (OCNs), the first indication is that citizenship has not to be developed in specific subjects, but in all of them through "transversal themes". However, it is understandable why school communities think that Philosophy and Sociology are *the* subjects oriented for developing these syllabuses. During the Dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), Philosophy and Sociology were banished from the curriculum, and "replaced" by a subject called "Moral and Civic Education", which was used for making Propaganda of that Regime. Then, in 1996, after Re-democratization, the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB) was promulgated. It says that "[t]he syllabuses, methodologies and assessments will be organized in such a way that at the end of secondary school the student demonstrate [...] domain of knowledge of Philosophy and Sociology necessary for the exercise of citizenship" (Art. 36th, §1st). Moreover, in 2008, such subjects became mandatory.

Observing teachers' and students' discourses, it is realized that, more broadly, all subjects labelled by the name of Humanities (Philosophy, Sociology, History and Geography) are considered by most as having such attribution. For example, a Physics teacher sees the importance of Humanities in this process:

> The interest of improving the society comes from the teachers, not from the top. […]
> It should be increased the number of hours of Humanities' subjects like Philosophy,
> Sociology, History, Geography, because they reflect much more.

Moreover, a History teacher links her subject with citizenship debates:

> If I don't discuss [gay rights] here, will it be up to the Physics teacher? Yes, he can
> discuss, but it is not from his syllabus, it's not his cup of tea. It is my cup of tea.

As I mentioned before, however, it is interesting to notice that, not only Humanities, but all other subjects should also help on cultivating civic values, at least based on the guidelines of the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs). Such Parameters defend that moral and civic values have to be cultivated by *transversal themes* developed in all subjects. In its words, "social issues are integrated in the very theoretical conception of the areas and their curricular components". (Brasil, 1997, p. 41). The 2013 National Curricular Guidelines (OCNs), an improvement of PCNs, says that certain subjects are mandatory and have to be "treated in transversal and integrated ways, permeating the curriculum, under the other curriculum components: (a) food and nutrition education [...], (b) the aging process, the respect and appreciation of the elderly, (c) Environmental Education [...] (d) the safe traffic education, [and] (e) education in human rights." (Brasil, 2013, p. 187) Following this, citizen education should be developed within each one of the subjects, and through interdisciplinary projects.

Nevertheless, it rarely happens in subjects like Mathematics, Languages or Natural Sciences. The syllabus developed in Mathematics classes is not seen by school communities as having any role in this way. For example, none mentions the importance of formal and informal logics for developing critical thinking (for the interviewees, Philosophy helps to think, whereas Mathematics does not). Languages, more or less in the same way, were mentioned only by a Portuguese teacher, who understands that moral values can be discussed in her text analyses classes. Natural Sciences, which were cited a little bit more as doing something in this way, mainly when environmental issues are discussed.

Observing the practices of each school, however, it is easy to identify the weakness of these projects. Teachers of the private school often talked about the pressure for developing specific syllabus demanded by universities admission exams. One of them, for example, says:

> The teacher's problem is almost always the same: we have a prison, which is the
> vestibular [the university admission test].

Teachers of state-run schools also develop only few interdisciplinary activities, but for different reasons. They receive low salaries, have to work a lot to compensate this situation, and, then, do not have extra time to develop new ideas.

But, worse than teachers not being prepared to run interdisciplinary activities, they are not prepared to work with citizenship education. Just 29% of teachers from the schools observed considered themselves well trained to discuss citizenship with their students. When such a point is explored carefully in the interviews, all the teachers and head teachers admit that they are not prepared at all to deal with this syllabus in their classes.

Finally, some activities already embodied in schools' institutional practices also help developing citizenship values. Even if not much of these activities were mentioned at the interviews, it can be highlighted at least two that are related with stimulating solidarity actions. In state-run schools, one calendar day is reserved for the Day of Volunteering. This is a Saturday on which special activities, as collecting clothes and raising funds for poor people, are organized by school communities. In the private school, students are encouraged to have a group to promote volunteering activities towards people with needs (orphans, elderly people). However, it is interesting to notice that those activities are seen as ineffective by lots of students. At Farroupilha, the criticism is a bit different. Students recognize the activities, but some of them call attention for a more promotional than real intention.

Influence of schools' organization on citizenship education – wide official citizenship curriculum

On how schools rules and syllabuses taught are defined, in the three schools observed, the participation of students in this process is minimal. In all interviews, it was questioned if they participate in the elaboration of the school rules, and in the determination of what they learn. About students' participation in the process of elaboration of school rules, nothing concrete is mentioned. About students' opportunities for deliberating on syllabus taught, Integrated Seminar, a state-run school subject already mentioned, is based on this attempt. About the students' participation in the decisions of syllabuses discussed by each subject, punctual situations were mentioned as well. In general, at least in the private school and in one of the state-run ones, a much higher pressure for preparing students for universities admission tests determines this.

Even if students' contribution on rules and curricula elaboration is reduced, the room for them to criticize the establishment seems to be higher, sometimes through Students' Union activities, sometimes through direct talks with managers.

Students from the private school complain a lot about the difficulty in establishing a dialogue with the head teacher. She, in turn, mentions a project called "Farroups Speaks", weekly meetings between her and groups of students. They, however, consider that these talks are not enough to give them proper voice. For this reason, the secondary school supervisor assumes an important role in this process. However, from the students' perspective, it is not enough for creating a more horizontal dialogue. On the other hand, or even because of this, in this private school, the Students' Union seems to be politically very active.

Analysing the two state-run schools, it can be said that their situations are completely distinct: the activism of their Student's Unions is narrower; whereas the communication among students and managers happens in a more direct way. FTS Students' Union was re-established only two years ago, and its activities are very limited. At MLH, some interviewed students have shown total distrust in their Student's Union. However, differently from the private schools, the head teachers and supervisors of the two state-run ones circulate through the students all the time, and their offices are always open. These attitudes facilitate the direct dialogue between students and managers. Moreover, and even more remarkable, it is the new policy of state-run schools, implemented by the Secretary of Education as part of the new Polytechnic Teaching, which stimulates students to participate in their quarterly evaluations. Through these Participatory Councils, students have the opportunity to evaluate themselves, their teachers, and their schools. As one student of FTS says:

> Now, all the class listens to the problems of the class, not just the representatives. And also all the class can opine, not only them.

In the other state-run school observed, where Participatory Council processes are less developed, students' criticisms are stronger. The following students' opinions summarize their ideas on this:

> X: [Teachers], when they conduct the Council, always ask us what we think that should be different in the subjects. But it never changes, we talk and it never changes.
> Y: I don't participate anymore. [...] Everybody skips. It is like a holiday.

The last reflection of this section is focused on the challenges of making students follow the school rules and accept its curriculum. In general, teachers and head teachers identify two main problems: the lack of reflection on the reasons behind the rules; and the lack of inspection over their enforcement.

About the first problem, in the private school, the importance of presenting reasons behind the rules is extensively mentioned by the teachers. It is justifiable, because, before the beginning of the academic year, they attended a lecture with Telma Vinha, Professor from one of the most reputed universities in Brazil (Unicamp), who approached exactly this subject. The head teacher, developing this point, presents a bad procedure of some school monitors in order to show what they are trying to change:

> What it is important is that they understand why such a rule exists. [...] [Students] like lying in the bleachers to catch the sun. They came to tell me that the monitors said that now they cannot because it is a rule. This empty rule is not sustainable. [...] Why can't they do this? "Because [...] it transmits a bad image." [...] Why is it a bad image?

However, if such self-reflection is strong in the private school, the same cannot be said if we look at the reality of the two state-run schools. Apart from one tangential mention, no other teacher from both of them presented any kind of comment in this direction. Besides, there is another problem in these schools related to the structural difficulty that they have to guide students to follow the rules. One of the state-run schools has to improvise a doorman, and the other one simply does not have such a person. This situation makes it easy for the students to arrive very late or skip their classes. Worse than this, the constant lack of teachers makes their time-table completely erratic, which develops in the students the idea that schedule does not have to be followed.

Finally, some changes on the way that state-run school evaluate their students made certain teachers believe that they are progressively given less attention to follow rules. In these teachers' views, some changes in Polytechnic Teaching evaluating policy are making students' approval at the end of the year much easier, which diminishes students' commitments with their duties. As a teacher says:

> In the past, when [the grading system was based on numbers], the student who delivered [his works] on the right day and time had integral grade. [...] Then, all students ran to deliver on day and time. With this new evaluation, the student knows that, if he didn't deliver today, he can deliver tomorrow, and so on.

Individual initiatives on citizenship education – unofficial citizenship curriculum

The impression that comes from the two first sections is that, in all of the three schools, official curricula are not dealing properly with citizenship education. Then, some

teachers' initiatives, labelled here as "unofficial curriculum"[1], try to fill in this gap. In the interviews, teachers describe two types of individual initiatives towards citizenship education: direct practices that help students to develop some virtues; adaptations on syllabus to talk about certain issues. The other type of initiative occurs during the classes. Some teachers adapt the syllabus of their subjects to talk about civic values. A Portuguese teacher from the private school, for example, says that she usually presents texts about controversial issues like adoption by same-sex couples.

These initiatives, however, are not frequently quoted by school actors. It is maybe due to inherent difficulties to put them into practice. Some initiatives depend on teachers' predisposition to dedicate part of their time to do this, which is not easy, given the amount of work they usually have. Moreover, there is another problem related to the lack of time and/or continuity of such initiatives. The Portuguese teacher mentioned in the first topic talks about these two problems:

> [Moral education] should be in the curriculum and systematized. Because we do this in our classes. But what if there was no time? [...] Teachers already do an individual work. But we don't have a homogeneous, organized work. For example, if I leave the school, it is not guaranteed that the teacher who will replace me will continue doing those kinds of things.

Influence of hidden curriculum on citizenship education (1000 words, now 2900)

The last dimension of schools' curricula that can help or hinder promoting citizenship is related with what some authors call "*hidden curriculum*". Kelly defines it as:

> those things which pupils learn at school because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organized, and through the materials provided, but which are not in themselves overtly included in the planning or even in the consciousness of those responsible for the school arrangements. (2004, p.5)

As the second section of this text presented, the processes of elaborating, criticizing and applying rules and curricula are connected with the development of students' civic values. The development of such values prepares students to participate actively in democratic societies. However, depending on how schools work, they can reproduce the status quo only or be agents of building a more just society.

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[1] Kelly opposes "official or planned curriculum" with "actual or received curriculum", which he defines as "the reality of the pupils' experience". (2004, p.6) However, this topic is talking about teachers' individual initiatives. And this is not exactly the same of what students receive, because they also receive the official one.

Some teachers demonstrate several concerns about how certain sectors of society, mainly media, cultivate in young people values that make them perpetuate unjust structures. Two examples of these concerns are presented below:

> X: The lack of interest in politics happens because people are politically illiterate. And this is a project [...] of the Capital. [...] [The capitalists] domain the major media, which makes people get into this individualistic fights.
> Y: State-run schools have been gradually depreciated, and this is fruit of a project, this is not occasional. It is increasingly a way to transform masses, to increasingly dumb them down, to make them increasingly stupid. The more stupid, the easier controlling.

However, these two teachers have slightly different interpretations on what has actually been the role of schools in societies that are strongly influenced by media. The former believes that such institutions fight against this *status quo*, while the latter understands them only as its by-product:

> X: State-run schools [...] stimulate collectivism, but this is a very difficult practice, because we have to combat our strong enemy, which is much stronger than us: the television.
> Y: There is certain hypocrisy of thinking that the school can change society. [...] It would be weird the school producing vanguard and inquiring. It was not for this that it was born. [...] It is a series production of minds.

The first opinion − which schools stimulate cooperation − is shared by most of teachers, while the second − which school is *only* an instrument that perpetuates structures of powers − has no other supporters in the group of 18 teachers interviewed. Most of teachers believe that schools already help students (even if it is not decisively) to understand, criticize, and finally change this situation.

In addition, it seems clear, behind school practices, the idea of developing students' awareness about treating equally people of different races, genders and sexual orientations. No teacher mentions any situation of racism or sexism, and most of them declared a strong development of respect towards homosexuals. However, it is worth saying that the development of toleration, acceptance and even integration is stronger in FTS, where the students are more heterogeneous than the in other two schools. Some students, even if they are in small number, still show prejudices against homosexuals.

Reflections on practices towards making students aware of the need of reducing wealth inequality will be developed in the next topic. Before this, the way that schools deal with prejudices experienced by students that do not follow the standards of beauty established

by the society also needs to be investigated. Actually, this problem is almost not cited, and it does not receive much space in discussions about reducing injustices. Nonetheless, at least one teacher had a strong claim related to this:

> Nowadays, we don't see jokes anymore with a guy who is homosexual, or who seems to be homosexual. […] [But], sorry, that who always suffers is the fat boy. Oh, the fat boy, he still suffers bullying. [...] The chubby girl, then, she is bombed. This is something from the society. The beauty standard is a strong reason for joking.

In the last 20 years, Brazil has considerably increased the number of students in primary and secondary schools. This democratization, however, did not represent significant changes in Brazilian socio-economic structure. One of the main reasons behind this fact is that there is a structural abysm between state-run and private schools. While the buildings conditions of the two state-run schools observed are very bad, and their teachers earn shameful salaries, all classrooms in the private school have multimedia projector, air conditioning, and the salaries of its teachers are four times what their colleagues from the state-run counterparts receive. Of course, these things impact directly on the quality of teaching.

The ways that school actors' discourses and procedures mould students' future aspirations are associated with the situation described above, and it is directly connected with the idea of hidden curriculum. Observations of two schools attitudes towards students help investigating this: how youth's dispositions for assuming places of leadership are developed; and how the senses of competition and collaboration are stimulated.

As a state-run school teacher says, the first point is intimately connected with the structural gap between the two types of Brazilian schools:

> Why is state-run schooling so precarious? Because it is not interesting that people think. [...] There is a private school oriented to prepare leaders, and a state-run school oriented to prepare subalterns. And this is not in the project, it is not in the curriculum, but it is evident at the practice.

This practice of preparing leaders is being institutionalized in the private school. Through a project called "Leader in Myself", it intends to develop in its students moral values linked with leadership. Apart from this, and related to the idea of hidden curriculum, it is interesting to highlight that half of the private school teachers interviewed expressly mention the vocation of the school to prepare leaders. As three of them say:

> X: [At Farroupilha, students] are extremely competitive and encouraged to compete, knowing that they will be the leaders that will give orders.
> Y: Because [students] have a very high purchasing power, they will fill in a role of taking decisions within society. [...] School has tried to promote a reflection [on moral values], not only with students, but with the school community in general.
> Z: When I talk [on issues linked with Geography], I'm thinking of the student that will be politician, [...] engineer or architect [...], lawyer [...], physician/practitioner.

In the first quote, it is possible to identify a strong influence of a certain type of capitalist behaviour behind this stimulus for developing leadership skills. Such influence cannot be perceived in the second one. On the contrary, the fact that students will probably be leaders makes that teacher realize that it is even more important to cultivate moral values on them. The third statement, even if it does not mention the idea of preparing leaders, shows the focus of this private school on preparing skilled workers. It is interesting to notice that the reality of the poorest school students is completely different. Students have even lower ambitions. Some, for example, think of not finishing their secondary school:

> It was not necessary to have [secondary school]. Because finishing [primary school] is enough. One is formed, one already knows the things, [...] already learned. Several people sometimes leave school because of this. Because they have to work.

It is also worth mentioning that, for some teachers, the state-run schools system of assessment seems to reinforce this gap. It is quite common to hear that a new state-run school system of evaluation, which reduces the declared differences among students' performances, makes them study less, because they do not have grades anymore to reward their effort:

> Today, [...] we don't give any priority for the student who studied, [...] the student who [used to score] top marks, who did everything, who should be appreciated.

In the private school, on the other hand, students are rewarded when they have a good "academic performance". As a talk between two of its students shows:

> X: There is a mention.
> Y: If you give your best, then you win.

Thus, it makes them have a better performance in university admission tests, which enlarges the gap between private and state-run schools. Moreover, if the cited state-run schools new system of assessment has the vice of not stimulating commitment and effort, it also doesn't have the virtue of stimulating cooperation. Actually, this seems to be one of the

main problems of assessment systems in all schools. They rarely reward with grades or prizes students who cooperate.

And this is reinforced by the fact that many teachers, who normally have progressive ideas, avoid defending them in classes. There is a huge debate in Brazil on whether teachers have to present their political positions for their students. The intention of this text, however, is only presenting some teachers' and head teachers' understandings and attitudes regarding this. Then, at first, it is interesting to observe how the private school head teacher treats this point:

> [At Farroupilha, the teacher] has to show the different sides of the story. One cannot frame an issue on ideological bias. [...] The teacher can only say what socialism is, but he or she cannot say that socialism is good or bad.

The head teacher's attitude is understandable, especially because some parents probably pressure the school in this direction. However, in the same school, another teacher presents a completely opposite idea about the importance of spaces for them to defend their political opinions and to promote political discussion:

> Can't [a teacher] discuss party politics? C'mon! Let's clarify this, we really have to discuss this! [...] It doesn't hurt. I have this position. I respect yours [students'], as you have to respect mine. I'm not candidate for anything.

In the two state-run schools, teachers seem to have much more chance to present their own opinions. First, since they are public servants, they have stability and are not afraid of any pressure from parents or managers. Moreover, their conditions of oppressed, as well as their students', encourage them to fight for more equality. In a short period of observations in the poorest state-run school, I could see some political actions led by some teachers. One of the more active of them, for example, has mobilized students for a demonstration against some austerity policies. Students tend to like such attitudes a lot, and usually quote this teacher as someone who is concerned with them:

> The teacher that I admire most here in the school is X. With him I learn as hell. [...] He tell *uis* that we have to fight for what we want, to fight for our rights.

After such pondering, some questions stay: (i) should only parents have the right to presenting political ideas to the young? (ii) when parents do not do this, should teachers replace them?

About the role of parents and schools on educating the youth for citizenship, almost all teachers believe that such process should be shared. However, most teachers identify that families are not doing their job properly. Many, normally teachers from state-run schools, perceive parents very distant from their children; others, generally teachers from the private school, understand that parents influence their children excessively. Basically, this idea can be summarized by this teacher's quote:

> The problem [of the lack of a proper moral development] is because of the family: when the guy has no family, and when family is too rigid, the extremes.

Because of this, teachers understand that they, somehow, have to act to balance it. Some of them believe that teachers have to provide affection, others that they have to stimulate students to think critically. Most of them understand that they have to provide both. The following claims symbolize, respectively, these three different views:

> X: Mainly affection, this is a fundamental factor. Because a person who does not receive enough affection ends up giving back little affection.
> Y: It is not that the affection is not important, but I think that we can be more effective about reflective questions. [...] Because, many times, it is not done in family, among friends. Then, I think that school is the most pertinent, most adequate forum.
> Z: With affection you can reach the strictest students. But reflexivity is also fundamental.

Many teachers even believe that they are strong examples for students. The head teachers of the private and one of the state-run schools, respectively, express exactly this understanding:

> X: There are teachers who have such an important role in the formation of certain adolescents that they are more important than the father or the mother talking at home.
> Y: The teacher is reference for everything. He teaches through what he is.

However, this impression seems not to be shared by the students. With rare exceptions, they point members of their families as their life examples. It can be perceived from state-run and private school students' perspectives, as the following claims, respectively, show:

> Z: I don't have any teacher as example. My example is my mother, always!
> W: It is basic for a person to have her parents as inspiration. [...]In school, yes, there were few teachers that I had affection in order to bring as example.

Thus, it is quite difficult to detail to what extent teachers influence new generations. However, this relationship actually exists. And it is not part of official or unofficial curricula, whereas it impacts on students attitudes. In this sense, such connection is also part of the hidden curriculum.

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