

Social education: preparation of students and teachers to exercise Public Management Oversight



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ABSTRACT

Given the current scenario of social uneasiness, this paper is targeted at introducing the project Social Education (*Educação Social*) by way of the speech entitled Routes to Citizenship (*Caminhos da Cidadania*). Focusing on the transition of public schools' students in the State of Ceará into Citizenship Agents. Note that the program's ideation revolves around the concept of control based on the assumption that it represents an activity which goes beyond the role played by internal and external control agencies of the government. Additionally, this effort, concocted by the Comptroller's and Complaints Office of the State of Ceará, by means of the Coordination for Furtherance of the Social Control (*Coordenação de Fomento ao Controle Social*), disseminates a powerful knowledge of public management, not mentioned in school syllabi, and makes the advocacy media developed available to schools. On account of that, the objective of this study is to expose how the project attempts to universalize the role of the complaints offices, the transparency portal, and public policy committees, as well as the development and unveiling of concepts that are not usually addressed in classrooms, such as, without limitation, the Multiannual Plan, the Budget Guideline Law (LDO) and the Budget Law. The underlying principle is to raise the interest of students



and teachers about the government issues and social advocacy tools as a route to be active in building up an exemplary society in the coming future.

Keywords: Citizenship. Education. Social Control. Students. Teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The effort to introduce to public school students the debate about Social Control, summoning them to play an active role in controlling the government affairs, may not be understood taking for granted the development of the social and legal environment entailed by the 1988's Constitution of the Republic and added up by the legal instruments arising out after its enactment. Let us briefly review these years of profound changes.

When outlining the cornerstones of Democratic State Ruled by the Law, the Constitution established, in Article 1, that citizenship was one of its founding principles. In the following paragraph of the same article, it has averred that all power emanates from the people and will be exercised directly or through their representatives. At least from the perspective of the legal system, this has set the stage for a new moment when the patrimonialist view of management gave way to a new essentially-democratic administration modality. There is no

other reason why our Great Charter is often referred to as the Citizen-bound Constitution.

Needless to say, speaking of democracy without the people's participation would sound unreasonable. Also, in a Democratic State Ruled by the Law, the participation in the government affairs is not merely embodied by the legal instruments required for this intervention. Heedful of these requirements, the member of the original constitutional convention outlined the lines of legislative performance which would be in practice later on. Some legal frameworks which properly portray the lawmaking work are worth mentioning. Firstly, the Fiscal Responsibility Law (Supplementary Law 101/2000) has established more stringent rules for the fiscal management responsibility; subsequently, it was demanded that detailed information on budget and financial execution by the Federal Government, the States, the Federal District and the Cities be made available (Supplementary Law 131/2009); lastly, it has been established a legal environment favorable to the company's participation through the Information Access Law (Law 12527/11), providing for the access of users to administrative records and information about governmental acts, thus regulating the constitutional provisions in Item XXXIII of Article 5 and Item II of paragraph 3 of Article 37 of the Federal Constitution.

Given the legislator's work, the government was charged with the responsibility to put constitutional orders into practice, bridging the distance between the legal and the real world realms. In this sense, complaints offices have been structured throughout the years, designed for playing a mediating role between citizens and the government; thus standing as virtual forums for disclosing and providing access to information. In addition to this, debate forums have proliferated, in an attempt to unshroud concepts which were a privilege only of professionals in the accounting, financial and legal areas by that time. Now and then, a government instance innovates in information disclosure, coming up with a more didactic form. In practice, the background of all of these efforts was to raise the citizens' awareness on the relevance of taking on an active stance in public management choices.

In this path, difficulties have been posed on the government to develop innovative efforts. The following may be pointed out forthwith: finding adequate means to broaden the level of understanding of a society which have long been uninvited to participate in government decisions; developing Information Technology environments compatible with the emerging demands; applying a language which is fitting for communication with regular citizens, principally youngsters; and furthering an administrative environment that deals appropriately with social demands. The government, attentive to these issues, may not take for granted other matters which may derive from the widespread participation.

Developing methodologies to include the society as a whole, considering that its transitions make rapid strides, resulting in a difficult task. Not to mention the centuries of people's alienation from a government long committed to a patrimonialist management praxis where managers openly misappropriated public resources as things without owners.

In the specific case of the State of Ceará, the closeness between the activities of the Complaints Office and those of the Internal Control, which has led to the inception of the current Comptroller's and Complaints Office of the State of Ceará should undoubtedly be characterizes as a prolific effort, insofar as it bridges the distance between "the voice of social control" and the internal control's efforts. Additionally, the concerted work of the Coordination for Furtherance of the Social Control — responsible

for activities which were previously performed by the General Complaints Office — and the Complaints Offices of several state offices, in a smart and systemic configuration, perhaps stands as the sole idea which has most significantly drawn near the government affairs and the public at large.

There is no doubt that the Constitution of the Republic of 1988 introduced a Democratic State Ruled by the Law. Nonetheless, this assertion is as safe as the assumption that the substantiation of this government calls for a change of mentality, not only by managers, but the people as a whole. People may not refer to public property as something distant, of an undefined owner, barely ownerless. The public property belongs to the society and no one can control it better than the citizens themselves. In this sense, the choice of the school environment to develop the project and associated speech Routes to Citizenship may be seen as strategic. The Citizenship Agents, as the participants are referred to, are educated in these schools. Therefore they are of paramount importance as one of the main outlets of social transform, even nowadays.

The term Social Education epitomizes the expectations of full development of students to exercise citizenship. This preparation motivate young students and teachers to be acquainted with the government efforts, whereas stands as the means of facilitating advocacy on the State for an effective social control.

2. THE PROGRAM'S CONCEPTION AND PERSPECTIVES

Everyone who is engaged in education conveys knowledge through information. This simple assertion allows us understand that the choice on what to teach may somehow foretell what society we are designing for the future. When selecting the information to be passed on the students, there is no question about the current disapproval of a pedagogy which maintains the conveyance of a merely individualist knowledge, not taking into consideration the possibility to impact the society as a whole. Information should relay knowledge which raises not only good professionals, but, over and above, active citizens.

Targeting at this goal, the Social Education project has managed to shed light on a gap of the educational system, and envisioned the opportunity

to develop and engage a great number of participants in the huge task of controlling government efforts. In point of fact, this is not about an intervention in school syllabi, adding one subject or another connected to public finances, but, instead, to disseminate information about the government affairs, resorting to an accessible language, which is consistent with the mission of educators. In a nutshell, we could affirm that the control agencies have a “knowledge background” in public interest and the best outlet to convey it to schools. This does not signify that schools are seen monastically and autonomously in their task to include socially and quelling poverty or, as depicted by Mario Sergio Cortella (2013, p.110), they are not seen with “a naive optimism.” Apart from it, the objective of this paper is to contribute, under the competencies of the control agencies, to the mission of schools as institutions responsible for educating citizens, albeit they are not the only ones.

Several players, from various state offices, in a concerted effort spearheaded by the Comptroller’s and Complaints Office of the State of Ceará, seeks to impact the public state teaching network. For this effort, the support of the Elementary Education Office, having more than seven hundred and three (703) schools, has been a significant aid for success. Education opens doors for a new pedagogical experience and new information with only one underlying foundation: to form citizens.

An internal control agency advocating the task to disseminate the social control culture, for students and teachers to turn into participants in the government decisions, may sound as a groundbreaking step. However, from the point of view of educators, a citizen-bound education is not seen as a foreign element. For instance, the assertion of educator Maria Lúcia Arruda Aranha, demonstrating the concern to convey values and the resort to different media beyond the traditional ones to mold citizenship:

Needless to say we are not proposing a syllabus consisting of several subjects administered through the traditional method of isolated classes. The questions about the conveyance of cultural values and the discussion about them may “cross” all of the other subjects: the formation of citizens is one of the objectives of every teacher. Besides this, schools may find

creative — and not academic — means to discuss cultural heritage, commonly disseminated externally by the disclosure pipelines of the society itself. This is the very reason for the several pedagogs who have been warning about the need to overcome the teaching of subjects by introducing projects which mold a more active educational practice. (ARANHA, 2013, p. 364)

In fact, ombudsmen of several government areas, in concert with educators, deal with a common idea: the widespread participation is prone to develop a fairer and more efficient and democratic government. This is the motto preached in speeches.

As averred, the contact with public happens through speeches, addressing subjects which further the social control and inviting participants into the debate. Through this methodology, it is not a one-way approach, where students are the center of the entire work, both from the point of view of providing information and from the acceptance of demands. In this sense, the widespread participation ultimately yields an immediate outcome, namely the possibility to improve the very program.

After the phase of project preparation, speeches have begun on September 24, 2013 with a little hiatus due to ENEM — the National High School Examination. Until November 8, 2013, seventy four (74) events have already been held, totaling six thousand, five hundred and fifty one (6551) students reached.

By the end of the speeches, facilitators hand out the leaflet Routes to Citizenship (*Caminhos da Cidadania*), establishing, in an objective and illustrated language, information about citizenship, social control, ethics, information access law, combat against bribery, Transparency Portal, Complaints Office, public policy committees, electoral process, in addition to informing which the internal and external control agencies of the government area.

The future is to spread the program beyond the metropolitan area of the city of Fortaleza, in the State of Ceará, and, subsequently, cover city schools and private schools. Other public entities may join the effort throughout its development, such as municipalities, the Judiciary and Legislative Branches and the Prosecutor’s Office.

Although it has already achieved outcomes, the program is still in the pilot stage. In every step, the outcomes are assessed and adjustments are made

to contents, language and players involved. The outcomes achieved are the theme of the topic below.

3. CONSEQUENTIAL AND IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES

The immediacy of outcomes may not be the focus of a program for educational purposes. Nowhere in the world will education keep up with the “give-and-take” rule. Outcomes are certain, but not tangible in their real dimension or nature, without some time to develop. It should be underscored that only time will tell the true quality of its “fruits”. As a matter of fact, not one society investing in knowledge impart has failed to obtain good results on average-sized or long runs; and there is no evidence that any nation which has bet on the people’s participation in the government affairs and achieved unfavorable results. There are the consequential results of the program, which are not seemingly accurately measurable.

Notwithstanding the above, some parameters may and should be checked to somehow guide future efforts and facilitate, from time to time, the required changes for the program’s success. This way, variables such as the number of demands in SOU (State’s Complaints Office System), the receptiveness of students, the degree of popularity of some of the tools used, such as the Transparency Portal, Facebook and telephone lines, may be a hint of the level of impact caused. In this vein, over the performance of the events, to have a feedback of participants, students are questioned the following: “Have you ever heard of Social Control?”; “Which service do you know in the State’s government?”. Lastly: “Did you enjoy the speech Routes to Citizenship?”. Afterwards, students are free to make any suggestions.

In a first interview with one thousand, eight hundred and nine (1,809) students, overall one thousand, one hundred and thirty-three (1133) of them pointed out the Complaints Office and the most known communication channel with the State Government. The Telephone Service of the State’s Complaints Office ranked two, posting 283 nominations, by means of telephone number 155 and, in the third place, the Transparency Portal, with 263 votes. Speech Routes to Citizenship achieved an approval of 88% among students interviewed. All of these surveys were carried out by the Social Control Coordination.

An immediate outcome, spotted after the program’s deployment, lies with the significant increase in the number of demands to the Complaints Office System. For instance, telephone calls in October 2013 posted a total of 2668 cases vis-à-vis 1554, in the same period of 2012. This represented an increase of 71.68% in the month when speeches were held. Considering the same comparison period and all of the media of advocacy on the government, notably the 0800 *Disque Acessibilidade*, email, Facebook, presential and phone service, the increase of cases reached 42.37%¹.

These outcomes are a clear display that the project points to an abounding path, which does not entail the idea that the government may take for granted new demands. As important as motivating people to be engaged in the so-called Social Control is to be prepared to give citizens responses consistent with their participation. Furthermore, the intention — which may stand as an actor catalyst of social transform —, is a substantial social control, not only a formal one. In other words: it is not enough to give citizens their right of way but allow actual possibility to influence decisions. Insofar as people realize their participation is significant to the field of political and administrative decisions, they certainly will resort to less conventional media other than institutions, which may not necessarily be the most effective ones.

4. CONCLUSION

History of mankind shows that peoples alienation from the government’s decisions has never achieved sound results. It is no wonder that democracy is questioned here and there, as its status of exemplary way to exercise power, but, notwithstanding the indirect and direct people’s participation in the public interest affairs is advocated. This participation winds up raising the collective awareness that they belong into a group, into society. In this sense, there should be no reasons as to the government’s duty to provide the necessary media for citizens, aware of their rights and duties, exercise citizenship to its fullest extent. This knowledge, in addition to facilitation social coexistence, empowers people to act consciously and responsibly toward public property.

Imparting knowledge on public management to students caters for two emerging needs at once: on one side, an education model which develops

citizenship — as provided for in the very law of education guidelines and foundations (Act 9394/96) —; on the other hand, the drawing of a great number of participants, enthusiasts of an ideal of democracy, to improve social control.

The Social Education project, insofar as building up Citizenship Agents, contributes to concoct a new public management paradigm, furthering the popularization of media of advocacy on the government. Particularly, the school environment showed to be concerned about the government decisions as it evidenced a great closeness to the main channels of communication and the government.

According to surveys, students pointed out the Complaints Office, the Telephone Service of the State's Complaints Office and the Transparency Portal as the main media of advocacy used.

It is believed that the program as a whole will definitely contribute to build a more participative society, committed to the government decisions. It may be asserted, based on history, that a certain degree of certainty applies to the refutability of the idea of an efficient, fair and democratic government making decisions far from the people, without an actual social control. This is the expectation of the Routes to Citizenship.

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NOTE

- 1 The outcomes of these surveys and others are ascertained and disclosed at the website <http://www.cge.ce.gov.br/index.php/noticias>. Accessed on November 13, 2013.