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Citizenship Education and Social Participation in an Unequal Society: The Case of Brazil

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Introduction

Learning to be a citizen is, among other things, learning to act with respect, solidarity, responsibility, justice and non-violence; learning to use dialogue in many different situations; and committing to what happens in the collective life of the community and the country (Araujo 2015). Such skills require students to assume ethical principles that are exercised in a formative process where two factors are essential:

- that the principles are expressed in real situations, in which students can have experiences and live with their practice;
- that there is a development of the individual's capacity for autonomy – that is, the capacity of students to analyze and choose values for themselves, consciously and freely.

Students and teachers play an active role in this process. The construction of democratic values must come from meaningful questions from the ethical point of view and provide conditions for students to develop their capacity for dialogue, become aware of their feelings and emotions – and those of others, and develop the autonomous capacity to make decisions in conflicting situ-

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ations from an ethical/moral point of view (Puig 2000; Sastre and Moreno 2002; Araujo et al. 2007).

In this perspective, we understand that such characteristics are essential for the construction of moral personalities who possess ethical virtues and contribute actively in the struggles for social justice, using human rights as a reference.

In this chapter, we will open a discussion of these principles and how we have worked since 1992 on their implementation in the complex, multicultural and unequal Brazilian society, in the most diverse conditions, while having education for citizenship and social participation as a support axis by means of school forums.

The Brazilian Social Justice Context: An Overview

Brazil is a republic federation, ranking fifth in land area and fifth among the world's most populated countries. It has approximately 204 million inhabitants, the majority – 86 % – in urban areas (Brazil 2015), and is a young democracy having had 25 years of free elections after the last military dictatorship (1964–1986).

Brazilian cultural diversity has a considerable impact in our society. The country's culture is very rich and complex, with characteristics of miscegenation and diversity, due to being a huge melting pot of races with its roots, including native Amerindians, descendants of African slaves and the offspring of European and Asian immigrants. In terms of religion, around 75 % of Brazilians declare themselves Roman Catholic and, of the other 25 %, some declare either that they have no religious affiliation (7 %), or that they are affiliated to Protestant denominations or Afro-Brazilian and Asiatic religions.

Brazil has been improving its economic and social indicators (Brazil's GDP is the seventh in the 2014 World Bank ranking), and experienced a decade of economic and social progress from 2003–2013 in which over 26 million people were lifted out of poverty and inequality was reduced significantly (World Bank 2015). The Gini Coefficient, which measures the inequality of the distribution of wealth (UNDP 2008), had fallen 6 % in 2013. But, Brazil still has high rates of poverty and inequality. According to the World Bank, in 2007 the richest 10 % of the population accounted for 43.2 % of Brazil's income. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Brazil in 2013 was 0.744, which gives the country a rank of 79th out of 187 countries; by contrast, it ranks 9th out of 126 among the most unequal nations, in accordance with the Gini

Index. For this UN index, the closer to 100 a country is the more unequal it is. Brazil's Index is 52.7 while that of Denmark is 27, Uganda 45, Mexico 48 and Uruguay 41.

As we have pointed out previously (Araujo and Arantes 2009), violence, corruption and social exclusion are major concerns for Brazilian society. Brazil has in place all the national action plans and social educational policies suggested by the World Health Organization to prevent violence. These include provisions such as incentives for high-risk youth to complete schooling, housing policies to de-concentrate poverty, plans to prevent youth violence, laws to regulate civilian access to firearms, and so on. But, in spite of all these policies, a study by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice on violent deaths (homicides, suicides and traffic accidents) found a rate of 49.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, which ranks Brazil as the 8th most violent country in the world. As regards violent deaths among young people (15–24 years old), the country comes 4th, with 79.6 per 100,000 inhabitants (Brazil 2008: 110), preceded by three other Latin-American countries: El Salvador, Colombia and Venezuela.

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) developed by the organization Transparency International, ranks Brazil in 69th place out of 175 countries in its 2014 report (Transparency International 2014: 4). Recent corruption scandals involving the Brazilian Petroleum State Company (PETROBRAS) – in which investigations suggest that something around US\$10 billion have been diverted from PETROBRAS to bribes since 2004 – are changing the whole country's perception about how to face what is being called 'corruption epidemics' and this situation is leading to improve the social control of the State.

In an atlas of social exclusion, Brazilian economists Pochman and Amorim (2003) – using the UN's HDI and adding data on violence, inequality, youth schooling and employment in Brazil – found that 21 % of the Brazilian population live in a situation of social exclusion and only 200 cities (out of over 5000) have a good quality of life.

In terms of education, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2014), Brazil's public education expenditure rose from 3.5 % of GDP in 2000 to 6.1 % in 2011, the sharpest rise of all OECD and G20 partner countries with available data for that period. Public expenditure on education represented 6.1 % of GDP, which is again above the OECD average (5.6 %), as well as above that of other Latin American countries such as Chile (4.5 %), Mexico (5.2 %), Colombia (4.5 %) and, even, the UK (5.9). Again, due to complex reasons, the increase in expenditure has not resulted in a substantial improvement in terms of education quality. The 2013 National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) (Brazil 2013) from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) shows

that the school enrolment of the population aged 5–14 years reached 98 %. But little more than half of Brazilian youth continues in high school up to the age of 19, and 71 % continue in middle school education up to the age of 16. In high school, only 295 % of the students are taking the standard school year courses for their age. Another aspect of Brazilian reality is that 8.5 % of the country's population over the age of 15 is illiterate.

These socio-economic categories represent real challenges for Brazilian society and the government and civil society are impelled to establish a socio-political agenda to deal with the situation. Themes such as ethics, human rights, social inclusion, and peaceful and democratic co-existence – understood as the reverse side of the social problems mentioned – have been placed at the centre of social and educational concerns. Since the mid-2000s, such themes have had a growing presence in national debates, inspiring initiatives of moral and citizenship education, supported by government policies and implemented in public and private schools, aimed at the construction of a society based on democracy, justice and social solidarity. Some examples of public policies that address this issue are the inclusion of ethics as a cross-curricular theme in the National Curriculum Parameters approved by the Brazilian Congress in 1996; the launching of the Ethics and Citizenship Program by the Ministry of Education in 2004; and the creation of the National Plan for Human Rights Education in 2007, to foster human rights principles from kindergarten through to higher education.

The reality described above, together with considerably more data that we were not able to bring to this chapter, shows that Brazil is improving in terms of social and economic development, but still has a complex and long way to go to achieve social justice. Education, at all levels, has an important role in the construction of social equity; this is a consensus in our country.

Democracy and Citizenship Education to Develop Social Justice

The starting point for discussing the role of education in the struggle for social justice requires understanding the relationships between the role of the school in contemporary society and the construction of citizenship.

In its traditional sense, citizenship expresses a set of rights and duties that allows citizens the right to participate in political and public life, to be able to vote and be elected, actively to participate in making laws and exercising public functions. However, citizenship, in the sense that we currently understand it, presupposes more than just the fulfilment of political and social needs to

ensure basic material resources to provide a decent life for people. To configure and enable real participation in the political and public life of society, it is necessary for every human being to develop the physical, psychological, cognitive, ideological and cultural conditions indispensable for achieving a dignified and healthy life.

On those grounds, we can understand that education for citizenship, as an essential element to democracy, presupposes the training and instruction of people, aimed at their achieving the capacity for motivated and competent participation in the political and public life of society. At the same time, we understand that this training should aim at the development of skills for dealing with diversity and the conflict of ideas, with the influences of culture, and with the feelings and emotions present in the relationship of the subject with themselves and the world around them. Therefore, such an educational model understands that the school can act in the sense of promoting the ethical, political and psychological training of its members.

Therefore, it is argued that the school, as a public institution created by societies for educating future generations, should also be concerned with the construction of citizenship, as we currently understand it. If current citizenship assumptions seek to ensure a decent life and participation in the political and public life for all human beings, and not just a small proportion of the population, schooling must be democratic, inclusive and of high quality, and it must promote – in theory and in practice – the minimum conditions for these objectives to be achieved in society. Education for citizenship and for life in a democratic society requires work aimed at the construction of moral personalities; the construction of autonomous citizens, who consciously and virtuously, seek happiness and personal and collective good (Puig 2000; Araujo et al. 2007). This means acting intentionally to contribute to future generations so that each individual may grow by incorporating – in the central core of his personality and in the centre of his identity – autonomous rationality based on equality, equity, justice, self-respect and respect for nature (in its global sense) and all other human beings.

However, in general, children and teenagers go to school to learn sciences, language, mathematics, history, physics, geography, arts – and only that. Although the goal of an ethical and moral training is written as a mission of most schools, we do not see concrete actions in most current school practices (at least, in Brazil) and in curricula consistent with these principles.

Educational proposals consistent with these principles must create educational environments where students can have daily contact with ethical values and instruments that facilitate inter-personal relations guided by values linked to democracy, citizenship and human rights. In this way, we

depart from a model of education in values based solely on religious, moral or ethical education classes, and we understand that the construction of moral values occurs every moment, inside and outside the school. If the school and society provide constant and significant opportunities to live with ethical issues, we will have a greater likelihood that such values will be constructed by individuals.

This model of creating a school ethical environment, or climate, assumes the active role of the student, who participates in the classes in an intense and reflective manner. It presupposes students who build their intelligence, identity and values through the dialogue established with peers, teachers, family and culture, in the everyday reality of the world in which they live. Therefore, in this model, students are authors of the knowledge and protagonists of their own lives, and not mere reproducers of what society decides they should learn. Essentially, this is an educational proposal that promotes intellectual adventure and, accordingly, the constructivist conception is the most appropriate to achieve these objectives.

Constructivism as an adventure of knowledge presupposes giving voice to students, promotes dialogue, incites their curiosity, leads them to question everyday life and scientific knowledge and, above all, provides them with the conditions to find the answers to their own questions, both from the individual and the collective point of view (Araujo et al. 2007). Specifically, constructivism – by recognizing the active and authorial role of students in the construction and constitution of their identities, knowledge and values – places students at the centre of the educational process.

One way of working in schools to achieve the goals discussed here is through educational proposals based on the resolution of conflicts and everyday problems, with school learning and social participation as a central objective (Puig 2000; Sastre and Moreno 2002; Araujo et al. 2007). Educational and social democracy, protagonism and social participation, moral and ethical values, the understanding of how conflict resolution strategies can contribute to the ethical and mental training of people, and the transformation of interpersonal relationships in schools are the raw material of school forums and school democracy.

So, the perspective adopted in this chapter aims to empower the school community to fight for social justice as a way to foster an active citizenship. Bringing human rights, equity and themes related to injustice as a core subject of the school curriculum and cross-curricular projects – through the mobilization of students, staff, families and school partners in different types of school forums – is a way to develop moral personalities that will help to change societal values and contribute to the development of a more just society. This

is the focus of the procedures that will be described in this chapter to demonstrate how different types of school forum can contribute to school learning and social participation, with the aim of constructing social justice and active citizenship.

School Forums and Their Implications for Education and Citizenship

Most progressive education movements worldwide adopt, in one way or another, democratic student participation processes for making school decisions at different levels. My reference for works in Brazil from this perspective, since 1996, has been the Spanish author Josep Puig and the Grup de Recerca de Educació Moral (GREM) research group at the University of Barcelona, which has extensive experience in these types of educational activities in schools in Catalonia, with an approach based on real situations in the everyday lives of students.

What are school forums? According to Puig (2000), school forums are the institutional moment of speech and dialogue; the moment when the collective comes together to reflect, become aware of itself and transform all that its members consider appropriate. It is an organized moment for students and teachers to talk about the issues they deem relevant to the improvement of school work and life.

In addition to being a space for the constant preparation and re-working of the rules governing school co-existence, forums provide time for dialogue, negotiation and the implementation of solutions to everyday conflicts. In this way, they contribute to building psycho-moral capabilities that are essential to the process of constructing values and ethical attitudes through learning social participation.

The model for the forums is that of participatory democracy, which intends to bring to the collective space reflection on everyday facts, encouraging the protagonism of people and the co-participation of the group in the search for solutions to the topics addressed, respecting and normalizing the differences inherent to the values, beliefs and desires of all of the members who participate in them. Thus, the goal is not always to achieve consensus and agreement but, rather, to explain the differences, defend often opposing positions and ideas and, nevertheless, enable people to live together in the same collective space.

Among other things, this way of working out conflicts is intended to recognize and articulate the principles of equality and fairness in inter-personal

relations in the spaces of human co-existence, which brings us to the construction of democracy and justice.

Introducing the work with forums in a school is a complex process which requires political and personal will of considerable scale, because of the changes it causes in all ambits of daily school life, particularly with regard to the multiple instances of power relations established in educational institutions. Therefore, those involved in this process should be aware of its possible meanings and consequences, attentive to the movements that occur in the context of inter-personal relationships, and firm in their principles and goals.

In this sense, a sound base of theoretical knowledge about the assumptions of school forums, conflict resolution and knowledge of methodological aspects that help in building fair and democratic practices can help those comprising the school community to be involved in this experience. This is important because there is no single way to operationalize school forums. Conversely, since the 1920's, many experiences have been developed all over the world, which means that this proposal is not a novelty that engenders expectations of revolutionizing educational paths.

For those interested in learning about different ways of working forums in schools, it is worth reading the works of A.S. Neil about the Summerhill School, which was created by Neil in England during the 1920s and is still functioning to this day. It is also worth reading the books of Célestin Freinet and knowing about the experience of numerous Freinetian schools around the world, or the reports on the Escola da Ponte in Portugal and the principles of democratic education defended by the Brazilian Paulo Freire.

What we have shown is that the work with forums fits into the perspective of life of those who struggle to build more just, democratic and happy societies; who therefore run counter to powerful social, personal, ideological and cultural interests, which are defended by authoritarian systems of power in social and inter-personal relationships. Thus, the 'novelty' of what we will present in this chapter is more in the way we saw the construction of a practice of forums that was consistent with the reality of the Brazilian educational system than the principles it assumes.

Understanding the daily needs of the democratization of school relations – and the role of forums in educational work – the forums were organised into four distinct levels, referred to in the plural as 'school forums': class forums, forum of the school, teacher forums and school forums of ethics and citizenship.

For the latter, Brazilian schools have considerable experience in using this pedagogical and communitarian tool to promote active morality. It was a central element of the Ethics and Citizenship Program, which was a moral education programme developed by the Brazilian government to promote

education in ethics and citizenship in Brazilian elementary, middle and high schools. The Program was implemented by the Ministry of Education in over 2000 schools throughout the country between 2003 and 2009 (Brazil 2004, 2007; Araújo and Arantes 2009). As a special consultant of the Ministry of Education for this programme, and being responsible for creating textbooks and the teacher's training to set up the Program, the author of this chapter has closely followed several schools in the implementation of the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship – many of these schools being in vulnerable communities – and thus can attest to its potential for creating moral awareness in youth (Araujo 2012, 2015; Araújo and Arantes 2009).

Next, we will briefly examine the principles of the different types of forums.

Class Forums

Class forums deal with topics involving the specific space of each classroom. They involve a teacher and all of the students of a class. Their goal is to rule and regulate co-existence and inter-personal relationships within each class; with weekly meetings lasting one hour, they act as a space for dialogue in resolving everyday conflicts.

Depending on the school grade of the class forum, there are nuances that must be considered. In the early years of elementary school, in which there is generally the figure of the multi-purpose teacher, the teacher assumes the role of coordinator and sets the time at which the forums should occur during the week.

In the second phase of elementary school and in high school, the process is slightly more complicated because the timetable is multi-faceted, with the presence of specialist teachers of various disciplines. The first thing to determine is when and where the meetings will occur; for example, that every Wednesday at 8 a.m. there will be forums in class X. In the experiences developed in Brazil so far, two models arise for the organization of these forums:

- (a) A class teacher assumes the role of coordinator, receiving the specific remuneration for that hour of class, and works as a link between the class and the other teachers; and
- (b) In schools that have some type of educational counselling service, the counsellor assumes the role of coordinator of the forums. In these schools, this work enables redirecting the function of educational counselling, which is no longer the space in which to solve discipline problems and now has a more educational role in the school.

In all cases, forums can count on the occasional presence of other professionals of the school, who, by including a theme or having a topic of interest quoted on the agenda, can participate in it.

Forum of the School

The responsibility of the forum of the school is to rule and regulate interpersonal relationships and co-existence in the context of collective spaces. With the participation of representatives of all segments of the school community, this forum intends to discuss issues relating to schedules (arrival, departure and recess), physical space (cleaning, organization), nutrition, and inter-personal relationships. Its agenda must include those matters that go beyond the scope of each specific class.

Representatives of the several segments (e.g. two students from each class, four teachers and four employees) are chosen following a rotating system so that, over time, all members will be able participate in the collective decision-making process during an academic year. The forum of the school should be held monthly and should be coordinated by a member of the school administration.

Because it is not a good idea to have forums with a very high number of participants, and because of the schedule commitments of professionals working in schools, my suggestion is that the forum of the school should be conducted for each shift (morning, afternoon and evening).

Teacher Forums

The responsibility of the teacher forums is to rule and regulate topics related to co-existence between teachers, and between them and the administration, with the political-pedagogical intentions of the institution and matters involving the functional and administrative life of the school. These forums involve the entire teaching staff, the school administration and, where possible, a representative of the Board of Education or the supporting institution.

School Forums of Ethics and Citizenship

The essential role of this type of forum is to articulate the various segments of the school community who are willing to work in the development of mobilizing action around the themes of citizenship in school life.

Its composition is as open as possible because of the very characteristics of a forum. As a minimum basis of organization, however, we suggest that it includes representatives of teachers, students, employees and families of the community. According to the circumstances of the school, community leaders and other representatives, such as local traders and residents, may be invited.

If it is not possible to begin this work involving the entire school, the forum may occur in a simpler way, depending on the circumstances of smaller schools or in the event that few professionals are interested in the implementation of the forum. Thus, a small group of teachers and students can come together and start developing projects and activities involving the external community, thus beginning the work of achieving the accession of other colleagues and other segments of the school community over the course of time.

Among the possible duties of the group of teachers and/or students who lead the establishment of the forum of ethics and citizenship, based on personal experience implementing this practice throughout the Brazil and systematized in a recent book (Araujo 2015), the following principles and norms by which to develop school forums are highlighted:

- Definition of its general policy of operation, organization and mobilization of the various segments of the school community;
- Preparation of the material resources for the development of actions;
- Formulation of a local schedule for the development of actions.

In addition, the forum should create conditions that allow for quality actions and the involvement of the largest possible number of teachers and students in their development. In this sense:

- it can act together with the school administration to ensure the space and time required for the development of projects involving school and community;
- it should seek to ensure resources that allow the purchase of bibliographical and video-graphic materials, and payment of subscriptions to newspapers and magazines;
- it should interact with education experts/researchers who can contribute to the better development of the planned actions;
- it should articulate partnerships with other agencies and governmental and non-governmental institutions (NGOs) that may support the activities of the project and the creation of proposals that promote its enrichment.

As in any democratic organization, one of the basic prerequisites for the proper functioning of the forum is the systematization of its rules. Essential to the smooth progress of this project is the establishment of clear and transparent standards and rules that will regulate the operation of the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship in every school, which should be built democratically through dialogue and cooperation.

As a suggestion, we present below some aspects that we believe could be observed in each school community for the proper functioning of the meetings and activities of the forum:

- The establishment of a fixed calendar of meetings for the entire school year; our suggestion is that they should take place on a monthly basis;
- The choice of a coordinator for the forum or a management committee that will be responsible for organizing meetings and communication with the secretariat of the Ethics and Citizenship Program;
- The early establishment of the meeting agendas, which will be built on the suggestions of any of the members, and the wide dissemination of those agendas for regular participants and other community members who may perhaps be interested in participating;
- The recording of all meetings in minutes, even simple ones, is essential to ensure the history and accurate recall of the meetings, and to record the decisions taken and the established rules;
- Openness to dialogue and to the ongoing discussion of the rules of co-existence and participation in the meetings;
- Constant maintenance of reviews on the development of projects and meetings of the forum;
- Guaranteeing the right of free expression, maintaining the principles of respect between people, and encouraging the in-person and oral participation of the students.

The forum's main goal is to define transversal ethical themes that will be developed in the classroom and in the neighbourhood through cross-curricular projects. Although the teachers are not obliged to participate, it is a culmination of a discussion process that mobilizes the school agents in the months leading up to the definition of a general theme that will mobilize the school and the surrounding community in the months ahead.

In the Forum of Ethics and Citizenship meeting, which can last for two or three hours, someone would initially present general ideas about specific community issues in the locale. This would be followed by debates aimed at narrowing down the theme to fit the school's and the community's needs, and

set up some guidelines for the next term's cross-curricular projects. Each participating teacher, or the collective responsible for each class/grade, would be responsible for creating the specific projects inspired by the forum's decision and for the development of those projects during the next term.

As an example, topics may refer to environmental issues in the neighbourhood, situations of prejudice and discrimination, unemployment, improvement of public spaces, volunteer work, and so on. They are the basis for the development of actions and projects that, inter-related, have a twofold direction: to the 'inside' and to 'outside' the school.

Regarding 'outside' the school, there are the actions that promote the relationship between the school and the learning spaces of its surroundings. Thus, from the interdisciplinary and cross-curricular projects initiated in the classroom, the school may approach the external community, using its facilities and space as a source of learning. In experiments in which we participate, the development of trails, maps and itineraries is promoted, in which teachers and students are encouraged to take the school 'outside' its walls, with actions in squares, streets, public facilities, streams, and so on. By incorporating in such actions the people living in the environment – such as family members, professionals working in public facilities and traders and workers in the neighbourhood – a significant step can be taken towards the construction of ethical environments that go beyond the school and involve the community of its close surroundings. For example, with paper, pen, mobile phones, a camcorder, a digital camera and a voice recorder, teachers and students organize 'tours' through the streets in the school area, questioning, observing and recording the local reality. These observations, however, are not free but are guided by the studies and contents of ethics and citizenship being worked on in the projects in the classroom and that, in turn, were defined by the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship.

Regarding 'inside' the school, guided by the project pedagogy and incorporating principles of cross-curricular and inter-disciplinarity, and promoting systematic reflections on what has been questioned, observed and recorded in the spaces external to the school, matters related to the surroundings are incorporated into lessons of specific disciplines and into other moments of a transdisciplinary nature. In this conception, the specific disciplines come to be seen as tools for the study and understanding of issues related to community life and interests.

Thus, if the forum chooses neighbourhood environmental issues as its semester theme in a degraded area in an urban city, a variety of topics can be explored in the communities participating in the project. Examples of environmental issues to study could be the lack of a sewage system in the neigh-

bourhood's homes; the regular floods that affect the district; air pollution; and soil and water contamination due to former and existing chemical industries in the urban area. Reflecting and acting through cross-curricular projects related to these topics, which clearly have ethical components because of their aim of improving peoples' lives and community life and well-being, might foster the development of ethical and environmental awareness in the school and community participants.

Principles Guiding the School Forums

A rule inherent to any type of forum is that people should be able to 'see' and 'hear' one another while discussion takes place: we should never think of organizing a forum in which people speak to the back of their colleagues' heads. Therefore, the first point to be considered in running a forum is the physical layout of the seats in the classroom or elsewhere; these should be arranged in a circle or semicircle, to allow everyone to talk face-to-face.

The forum begins, then, with the responsible team presenting and explaining the definitive agenda of that day. This can be done with a slide show, by writing on the blackboard, or with separate boards to be displayed to the attendees. This is the moment when the criteria of hierarchy and grouping of the topics on the agenda are explained and the opportunity is offered for everyone who suggested topics to manifest and feel represented in the proposed organization. After coming to an agreement, the coordinator begins the forum with the discussion of the first subject.

Dialoguing About the Topic

The first step is approaching and clarifying the topic. It begins with the coordinator asking whether the person who placed a particular topic on the agenda would like to reveal themselves. This is important because people are not required to give their opinion in public, or to expose themselves in front of the group. Only after the author of the proposal has been revealed or remains silent, does the coordinator of the forum open the discussion to the other participants.

This requires that the participation in a meeting is not a free moment, in which everyone talks about whatever they want and for as long as they feel necessary. Part of learning citizenship is learning how to speak at the right time, without repeating what others have already said and in a respectful manner towards other participants. The coordinator plays the role of ensuring that these objectives are achieved and respected.

This can be conducted by establishing various regulation mechanisms prior to the first forums, so that a functional regulation of the space is built to assist in the direction of the event, making it more efficient and democratic. For example, the length of time for the discussion of each item on the agenda can be defined – which should be flexible, depending on the complexity of the topic; the way in which the turn to speak is organized (on the blackboard, on paper, and so on); and creating criteria so that the dialogue is not focused only on those more extrovert or talkative people, inhibiting the participation of the shyer ones, or those who have difficulty with public speaking. This is another important function of the coordinator.

This last point, incidentally, is of paramount importance. While the ideal is to ensure the right of people to express themselves only when they want, this right cannot be an excuse for some never to expose themselves in front of colleagues. It is necessary to create mechanisms (that are not authoritarian) to encourage the participation of shyer individuals and for them to learn to argue their views in public. For example, the coordinator may, in at least one topic on the agenda, make a round in which he asks individually whether each person would like to speak on the topic. If any participant says that they prefer not make comment, the wish must be respected, moving to the next person; but the shy individual will realize that the space to speak is guaranteed and that they will not be overwhelmed by the speech of the more extrovert participants.

This first moment of the forum, therefore, is of dialogue, speaking and listening to colleagues. That is where the differences appear, the values that each one has built for themselves in their life story emerge but, above all, when there is a confrontation of views and ideas. Such confrontation, in this organized and systematized collective space, can be worked on in a democratic manner, avoiding the violent ways in which they are generally dealt with daily in schools. Hence, it is important to organize the direction of the forum, so that the discussion is coordinated in an organized and respectful manner, ensuring the space for dissent and possible consensus.

Constructing Rules of Co-existence

The agenda of the forums arise from the routine conflicts that mark the daily life of the classroom, of the school and the relationships between its professionals. Such conflicts are expressed in topics that, through words and dialogue, are democratically discussed by the interested persons.

We understand that one of the primary functions of the forums consists of the construction of rules and regulations governing co-existence and inter-

personal relationships to allow the differences of values and opinions to be manifested democratically and non-violently in school spaces.

In a democratic school that adopts school forums as an action tool, the rules governing co-existence and inter-personal relations are no longer defined solely by the constituted authorities. They are constructed collectively, through the dialogue about everyday conflicts, and have the explicit function of regulating school operations.

From an operational point of view, once the discussion of each topic on the agenda is finished, when appropriate, the group must collectively construct the rule that will govern the situations inherent to the topic. Thus, the coordinator of the forum opens the space for the participants to suggest rules for the involved collective and is responsible for the appropriate wording of the rule.

A rule cannot be too specific and deal with isolated cases; otherwise, before long, we would have a plethora of existing rules which no one would remember, which would cause more confusion than regulation. Rules should have a clear statement, yet be comprehensive, so that one rule of co-existence can be invoked on several different topics. This will mean that, after a few meetings, it is not necessary to go through this second stage in all subjects, or with all the necessary procedures. There will already be rules constructed on similar topics and that should only be reapplied, remembered or reconstructed and improved by the group. Thus, it becomes easier to comply with the objective of keeping the forum within the time scheduled in the school timetable, and the group will realize the dynamic role of collective construction and reconstruction of the rules over time.

Finally, after the proposition of the rules by the participants of the forum and its collective writing, for the differences in the group's views to be incorporated in its wording, each new rule or change of an existing one should be put to a vote, ensuring its adoption by a majority of the members.

Conflict Resolution and Suggestions to Comply with the Decisions

The third moment is dedicated to the very people affected by the topics under discussion – as in the case of aggressive behaviour, organization of space, or actions of colleagues or people from the community who cause them harm – to engage in seeking non-punitive and non-violent solutions. The group itself, at that time, creates and develops options that often act to curtail inappropriate behaviour, or seek constructive ways to make people aware of the importance of certain attitudes in the public space.

Therefore, after constructing the rules, the forum coordinator asks people to submit proposals for a solution, so that the problem does not happen again, or to help the group and colleagues be aware of the consequences and to comply with the agreed rules, and so on. The procedure in this case is similar to the previous ones in which people have a right to present themselves freely, and solutions are voted on and approved by the majority.

Ending the Forum

A final procedure should be guaranteed before ending the forum: the organization of the actions to be taken to implement the decisions. Thus, whether a committee will be assembled to perform a certain study, or whether a group will produce posters or begin working on the topics covered in the classroom, the entire procedure must be agreed on collectively and properly recorded in the minutes.

Final Remarks

Training a competent ethical individual to fight for social justice, act in society and participate in political and public life does not occur only by working on rights and duties, as proposed by many authors dealing with this subject. Education in values, as is currently said, cannot be limited to the educational work of building rules, studying rights and duties, and thinking about what is right and what is wrong for people to do.

Within broader concepts, for the person actually to practice citizenship, they must have certain competencies that go beyond knowledge and compliance with laws and rules of social institutions. We must aim at the formation and construction of what we call *moral personalities* and people who seek happiness and personal and collective *good* through virtues, not haphazardly. The array of such ideas is central to Aristotelian ethics, understood as the *virtuous pursuit of happiness, of the good*. These individuals must construct their moral character and ethical excellence from certain values and ethical virtues desired by the culture in which they live. This principle brings a new way of conceiving moral training and education in school.

The work with the various types of forums in the everyday settings of the school is part of this perspective of ethical training of future generations, which aims at the construction of democracy in our society.

Teachers must understand that, in daily encounters with others and their differences, when an impasse arises, dialogical ways must be sought because, otherwise, there will be violence and its various forms of manifestation. It is hoped that this report encourages many education professionals to embrace the cause of democracy and to realize that they can act proactively in the sense of transforming authoritarian values that are culturally entrenched in the minds of the members of our society into democratic values.

More importantly, teachers, researchers and school managers should deepen their understanding of how school forums can foster the struggle for social justice. Critical observation, reflection and research projects that study the forums practice, its application, and the possible results and impact in the surrounding community, might lead to an improvement of this ethical-pedagogical method. So, it would be valuable for studies to be undertaken about how to incorporate the forums discussions into the curriculum; about how to make NGOs and other social and community institutions participate in a school's ethical efforts; and, mainly, how to increase the involvement of teachers and staff in the daily organization and development of the various forums.

These, and many other themes, are open windows of research that deserve more attention and care from educators in the academy and in the school. Assuming that, today, schools have a central role in coming generations' development as moral, just and active citizens, educators cannot skimp on their responsibility.

It is hoped that those who believe in the utopia of a more just and less unequal and authoritarian world find inspiration in these pages to continue in the pursuit of social justice through education.

There are several paths open in the educational spaces that converge in that direction, and the perspective of working forums in schools having everyday conflicts and themes of social injustice as a reference is one of them. The invitation is for those audacious educators who keep alive in their practice eagerness for change and the construction of ethics in human relations: may the dialogue and the democratic values present in school forums be their tools.

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