

Betting for essential learnings in exercising our citizenship fully

Citizen education is a possibility to redirect education to purposes that respond to present challenges. It is urgent to redefine basic purposes for school and recuperate the dimension of education for a democratic citizenship by giving participation a bigger role. This article proposes to work around relevant social, cultural and environmental problems in our country and the world in accordance to the integrated curriculum.

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In December 2011, I wrote an article in this magazine about the urgent need that we Peruvians learn to exercise our citizenship. Today I share with you the Learning Paths the Ministry of Education (MINE-DU) has prepared to promote this fundamental learning.

BEGINNING WITH THE DIAGNOSIS

If we stop and think in Peru's century XXI, in the people that live in it, we can agree that there is still much to do in terms of coexistence: we sometimes do not treat each other well, ignore each other, attack each other, we do not recognize ourselves as equals; we do not always respect the differences between us - differences that are part of our inalienable condition of being free and autonomous – nor we assume the collective differences emerging from our condition as human beings with history with cultural roots.



That is to say that we have not learned how to live combining concepts such as unity, cohesion individual freedom with cultural characteristics of the different human communities. Principles such as equity, justice, equality, freedom, redistribution and intercultural matters are mentioned daily, but are not lived or advocated day to day. Our recent history has led us see conflicts as something negative and associate them to violence; it is difficult for us to understand that conflicts are inherent to the human condition and coexistence and that learning to solve them in a peaceful and constructive way would take us to grow as individuals and as a community.

We do not assume the standards and laws as the agreements that allow us to coexist in society based on our condition of human rights holders and on basic principles, we even try to "cheat the law ". On the other hand, not all of us Peruvians know our rights, and when we know them, we do not always exercise them; the unconditional respect of human rights has not become a collective goal yet, although the statement was approved in Peru by Legislative Resolution in December of 1959.

Peruvians have not consolidated a real commitment to our duties and responsibilities as members of a community; we have not developed a historical awareness that allows us to understand each other and, at the same

time, to understand that we are building our future day by day. Likewise, we are not willing to participate in public decisions that affect us in our present and future, nor we are used to discuss reasonably on proposals and issues related to public affairs.

We usually confuse opinions with facts, rely on preconceived ideas and not on reflections and serious studies, and we do not handle concepts of basic economics that allow us to understand the different economic policies and their implications in depth. Our relationship with the environment is not the most adequate. We do not have capabilities to analyse the territory to different scales in order to understand its use and occupation. We are not environmentally conscious not only for us to live but also for the future generations can enjoy a healthy place that can provide them with what they need.

Our schools do not escape of this diagnosis. In many of the regional education projects, the adult culture affects our children for it does not recognize them as subjects to rights, or as people able of contribute to the change and the development of their community. Coexistence is affected not only and mainly by the violence between children and young, but also by the abuse (including physical) from teachers and school staff to boys, girls and adolescents. On the other hand, students want

their teachers to be more tolerant, that accept their comments and ideas and, to be honest and accountable. Thus, we should leave the idea of managing discipline prioritizing order, silence, immobility and compliance. We still lack much to do to realize a true intercultural dialogue in our schools, a dialogue in which the other is a valid interlocutor in his own culture, from his own experiences.

The proposal¹

That is why this learning arises as a commitment of the State and of all those that believe in change through education. Citizenship is a fundamental learning that guarantees human beings to live a life to the full in coexistence with others and it contributes to the construction of the common good through deliberation and participation in collective actions and individual initiatives. This learning requires transforming the school in a space in which, boys girls and adolescents learn to exercise their citizenship since the first years of their schooling and to consolidate that exercise along primary and secondary levels and even to their adult life.

What kind of citizenship we bet for? We believe in a citizenship as a process of permanent construction that goes beyond the legal framework of rights and responsibilities that the State grants. We believe in a citizenship that settles in a sense of membership to a political community in which rights are shared, participation is free and, critical reflections and intervention in issues that concern us all is exercised. This requires, at the same time, a democracy seen not as a political system but especially as a way of life that is built daily with respect of the dignity of the human and of equitable relations, as well as other differences (gender, culture, interests, life options, etc.), and along with intercultural relations based not only in the value, respect or tolerance of other cultures but also in the predisposition to empathy and openness to the enrichment of other cultures.

Learning to exercise citizenship contributes to it if it becomes a fundamental learning in all of the school activities, because it is from schools that it is possible to educate men and women that promote and contribute to a more democratic, supportive, inclusive

and tolerant society, that commit itself to a culture of peace, sustained by our cultural and linguistic diversity and by the unrestricted respect of the human rights. This could only be achieved if schools educate “participatory, advocate, proactive citizens with capacity of leadership and innovation” (National Education Project).

This commitment leads us to propose three purposes that must guide schools to form citizens that exercise their citizenship fully. The first purpose is *to create a democratic culture*, by which schools become a real experience of daily democracy, i.e., where everyone is recognized as subject of rights and treat each other with respect, without age or sex limitations, our position in the school, etc. The second is *to generate a community of dynamic agents* where all educational actors (principals, school staff, teachers, families and students) are involved in the construction and transformation of our environment (for example, through assemblies). The third purpose is that students develop *three citizenship abilities*:

- To live democratically in any context or circumstance and, with all persons without distinctions
- To participate democratically in public spaces to promote the common good
- To deliberate on public affairs using reasoned arguments that stimulate the formulation of positions in favour of the common good

The learning of these abilities means working on a number of dimensions: the *political dimension*, for citizenship involves our performance in public spaces and implies analysing and assessing relations of power set in each society; the *ethical dimension*, because it supposes the development of an autonomous reflection of our actions and decisions as well as the concern for others and the environment; the *socio-emotional dimension*, because it implies strengthening capabilities to work on our own prejudices and stereotypes towards others and to learn to give them equal treatment, to overcome our fears of acting as citizens and empower ourselves and confront situations that violate human rights (this means strengthening basic social skills such as empathy, assertiveness, solidarity); and the *intellectual dimension* for it involves the mobilization of concepts and cognitive skills.

We began stating that citizenship this is an exercise, a practice and an experience. We learn in the action not

¹ At this moment, this curricular proposal is under deliberation with the MINEDU. Moreover, meetings in different spaces will be initiated soon in order to include all the voices in a learning that requires along lasting education policy.

studying about it. It implies showing students that they can act in the world and that their school can be open to the big problems of societies that they are living as students. It means emphasising the importance of the school knowledge in understanding everyday problems. Also, this citizenship learning believes in the strengthening of our political system, the alternation in power, the autonomous and balanced exercise of power, and the existence of mechanisms of control and transparency. Thus we should encourage, in our schools, the knowledge and the understanding of our Constitution and the construction and assessment of standards and laws in order to achieve the strengthening of the rule of law.

This is also a commitment to a democratic culture that fosters the recognition and protection of human dignity and equity, protects the right of individuals to equitable access to opportunities for personal realization and fosters a constant reflection for a plurality of ideas on how to live better. It seeks to reflect on a democratic citizenship that, under the principle of self-foundation, understands that societies build and make decisions to regulate themselves and maintain an order that combines and represents the interests of the common good and protects the dignity of all people.

In a country like ours, rich in diverse cultures, citizenship must be also based on the principles of multiculturalism. These principles mean that it is not enough to know and understand others or respect their culture but to advocate for rights and standards enriched by the contributions of the experiences and eyes of all cultures. They pose overcoming mere coexistence by the positive valuation of socio-cultural diversity and take it as a starting point that not any group have to lose their culture or identity, but accept the invitation to risk complications of living together. The principles also involve losing the fear of difference and the fear of being threatened by it, and

by taking an interest in the other adopting a balance position. In contexts such as Peru, and as a result of our own history, we cannot stop watching the relations of power between cultures and inequalities that reinforce these relations critically.

Citizenship exercise also implies acquiring capabilities linked to the management of the environment. Making environmental citizenship visible supposes a level of consciousness of our rights and responsibilities, specially the need of building a harmonic link with the environment and its resources, and the need of taking care of it. It implies accepting that as citizens we are central actors in sustainable development and risk reduction. It involves renewing and valuing the content of the social, political and economic relationship between individuals and groups, in the perspective of building a new social pact in which the environment is a basic factor to preserve and, with it, ensure survival of society itself and the satisfaction of our needs.

Also, citizenship requires abilities in social sciences that help citizens reflect and act on their reality. History, geography and economics contribute, with a questioning and dynamic perspective, to read and investigate reality, to understand human actions and interpret reality critically and thus, to be able to have an attitude of transformation and raise alternatives. Active citizenship gets stronger with historical awareness, understanding space as a social construction and learning economic relations in different societies.

THE COMMITMENT

Making the school a real and significant citizenship experience involves starting to develop practices and forms of organization and teaching with which living democracy in the school is a possibility and a close and daily experience. 