Education, Youth, and Civic Awareness

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18/05/001

I. Educating for Duplicity

Socialization is usually defined as the process by which the social being is added, by coercion, into the biological or individual being (Durkheim). It implies developing children's physical, mental, and emotional abilities. Because, from a psychological viewpoint, socialization is rather a process of "construction" where the child interacts, cooperates, and then develops (Piaget). In the Lebanese case, however, the adults lean to dictate ready- made answers on children, neglecting their abilities to construct their own and abusing their faith in adults. This occurs in the family, but more importantly, it is systematically occurring at schools.

Some Examples:

- A nine-year-old pupil opened his Arabic textbook to do his homework. The question asked was the following: "What do you see in the picture?" The pupil wrote: "When Mona went to the city she looked at the stores. She liked candy, etc". The pupil's mother interrupted him saying: "There is no Mona in the picture, nor candy ... only cars and stores". The child replied: "Our teacher asked us to give this answer". The mother warned him but gives him the freedom to choose the answer he preferred. The other day she realized that the teacher considered the Mona story the right answer to the question.

(Personal experience)

- As a writing exercise, the teacher asked fifth-graders to write a text on a poor person. The majority wrote that they like poor people, that they once hosted a poor person at their homes for a day and gave him clothes, food, and money.

(Common story)

- The classroom was mobilized to welcome the inspector's visit. The teacher approached a student and helped her make a duck out of wool. The teacher dictated on the student what she should tell the inspector mainly that she did the duck by herself in such and such a way. And she asked her to repeat the false story many times. The Inspector and the principal arrived, and the student did what she was asked to do. They didn't hear her until the end, but one said "good". She felt sad only because she couldn't finish the memorized false story.
(Our Schools in Accusation, 2000, with 90 stories of this type)

The dictation of false answers is not accidental in our schools. The above examples show that this is enhanced by educational authorities and the Arabic language:

- Each level of the educational administration pressures the level below it to rephrase that lower level's discourse so as to please the level above it, and this rephrasing occurs in a systematic process whose function is to conceal the malfunction of the system. The learner comes at the bottom of the ladder.

- Dictation seems to occur mostly by instructors and users of the Arabic language maybe because it is the language of the political society and the cultural vehicle. Studies have shown significant differences in content and approaches, in this respect, between Arabic and foreign language textbooks.

First Conclusion:

School socialization in our country shows a pattern of imposing arbitrary false answers by old generations on new generations, a fact that goes against children's rights for free expression. This practice accustoms individuals to duplicity and to behavior discordance between domestic and public spaces.

Possible Consequences:

- If it were true that duplicity was more prevalent in Arabic than in foreign languages, then it would be true that Lebanese society is civicly segmented, according to cultural milieus.

- Where duplicity practice is systematic, the mental skills are negatively affected since thinking occurs via language. In this case, more "educated" individuals become like "mouth piece of their superiors", and less educated individuals become victims of false slogans.

- Where duplicity is the prevailing pattern of a given political system, forbidden discourse is forced to remain underground and to become a source of violence.

All these possible consequences are factors conducive to the destruction of civic awareness.

II- Moralization of Social Knowledge,

Socialization leading to duplicity is never intended as a lie. On the contrary, it is motivated by high moral standards. The mechanism seems to take place as follows: the school curriculum avoids dealing with real social issues, past as well as present ones. This avoidance is enhanced by the drawbacks of social sciences as a reference that may offer information and methods of analysis. Filling in the gap is the function of morality; that is, by approaching social facts from moral and idealistic perspectives where the referential pattern is religious, political, and humanistic.

Some Examples:

- Titles from an Arabic Textbooks:

- The personalities in this textbook have no cultural identity from a given region, religion, or social class:

. Basic personalities are: students, teachers, fathers, mothers, and grandmothers. The students should be good; otherwise, they will be punished. In front of them, the others are ranked on a moral scale of respect at the end of which are leaders, nation and finally God.

- Privileged spaces are the rural areas and nature while the city is portrayed as a noisy place.

(Identité Piégée)

- Neglected issues: the Lebanese war appears once in one paragraph of a textbook in the third grade of the secondary cycle. This applies to sectarianism as well.

(Secondary textbooks of sociology and economy)

- In a Philosophy textbook it is said that: "The moral conscience is implanted by God in the hearts of men." And that: "The family is very important to lead the individual towards God."

(Third secondary year philosophy textbook, pp 180, 191)

Second Conclusion:

Civic issues are approached from religious, nationalistic, and humanistic perspectives (moral standard). This school discourse is what the learner has to perform in humanities in general and in Arabic language in particular. It is coupled with ignorance of real social facts. To deal with those, students have to refer to ready-made answers from their primordial environment (domestic standard).

Possible Consequences:

If it is true that "educated" people use a double standard, it is then possible to imagine that the idealized discourse is used to justify domestic behavior. Hence, a concept like freedom, taken from moral standard, would be used against the State and against the rival social community and thus implies

the coercion of individuals within the community. This applies to another concept like nationalism within the rival community. The meaning of coexistence, hence, comes to mean "living within the primordial spheres".

If the above is true, then education in Lebanon would be a citizenship-constraining system.

III- Domestic Logic Overriding the Educational Context

Education is usually conceived as a public institution that promotes public interests. But students in public schools know that teachers are not selected on the basis of their qualifications. Teachers know that principals are not chosen on the basis of merit. Principals know that educational administrators operate on the basis of domestic pressures; i.e. the "assabiyya" or clan solidarity—geographical and confessional—to serve political purposes. Educational administrators know that politicians make decisions on the basis of private interests, including decisions on educational planning. All of the above mentioned role players know that the public discourse of each is assigned the functions of hiding the malfunction of the system and perpetuating the domestic logic prevailing over the administration of the educational system.

Some Examples:

- School map: It was designed in the early seventies, but only few schools have been constructed so far. The main reason is not the lack of funding but rather the conflicting pressures of private interests. Moreover, the vocational and technical school map was financed by the World Bank five years ago. However, because of the conflict of interests among politicians the government has failed to design a final map till now.
- Teachers: Since the eighties, thousands of teachers were hired by public schools on the basis of ad hoc pressures and at the expense of well-known conditions.
- Legislation: Most of the decisions of the Parliamentary Committee of Education are based on political domestic pressures.
- Reforms: The "Taef" agreement stated that the educational administration and the Lebanese University should be reformed. Public interests advocates are still waiting.
- The Lebanese University: The university council is supposed to ensure collegiality in managing the university. However, the council minutes' analysis shows that council members use their position to serve each other.
- Politicians: One Minister of education once claimed that there is corruption in the Lebanese University. For this reason, he suspended some prerogatives of the president and the deans. After a while, nobody was accused but 350 persons were assigned as clerks in the university without any kind of competition.

Third Conclusion:

Pedagogical relations within the school are framed by the administrative context, which is overridden by domestic interests. In this situation, teachers and principals, as adults and role models, cannot embody the basic civic values, such as rights and obligations, merit, public interest, equity, dialogue, etc… To overcome this paradoxical situation, teachers lean, on one end of the spectrum, to dictate an idealistic discourse and, on another end, to propagate accidentally sarcastic comments on State and public interests.

Possible Consequences:

- If it is true that teachers face the dilemma of technical versus domestic logic, impersonal versus personal pressures, public versus private interests, etc… then they can't definitely play the role of civic educators.

-If it is true that the paradoxical situation of the educators leads to mutual understanding among teachers and students on actual behavior and rhetorical discourse. Then one may assume that education in Lebanon is organized in such a way to raise people who consider civic issues a play in which they take the role of actors.

IV- Youth as Adults, Youth against Youth

Youth are defined as the population that completed the stage of childhood but have not yet become adults in terms of social roles and responsibilities. For this reason youth, including university students, are assumed to be open to new alternatives, and considered as agents of social change. In the Lebanese case, however, many indicators show that University youth tend to shift directly to adulthood and be against other youth.

- Higher education institutions are created, managed and organized in such a manner as to forbid academic mobility between universities, cross-universities network, unions and clubs, and to restrain dialogue and joint activities nation-wide. University students are contained by "home schooling" system. In addition, social mobility is ascribed to community solidarity rather then to nation wide system of financial aid or to the State University. As a result, the opportunities of social integration, as an aspect of citizenship, are very weak.

- Higher Education institutions are teaching-oriented, depriving students form university life, exchanging and debating ideas. As a result, duplicity at this level appears in using two separate ready-made discourses: one pertaining to academia, and the other pertaining to political categories, both generated by adults. Students seem to be only "speakers" and "audience" rather than willful producers of or experimenters with alternatives.

Some Examples

- It is easy to predict students' political attitudes based on the university or University-Section to which they belong. This link is stronger than ever before (the sixties, seventies, and eighties) because of the regression of traditional political parties (left and right) and because of the prevailing sectarianism (at the Lebanese University's Divisions I and II, 96% of students belong to one religion).
- Christian and Muslim students, regardless of their social backgrounds, are sharply divided on national identity, political leaders, political regime, the State's ally, and the State's enemy.
- At the Lebanese University, the new by-laws of the Students' Union are set-up so as to reproduce existing primordial divisions rather than promote common interests pertaining to faculties of universities.
- Only 12% of university students are members of voluntary students' associations, and 26% participate in associations outside the university. Most of these associations have religious or local affiliations.

Fourth Conclusion

University youth, as typical products of the educational system, and potential members of the social elite, display low civic awareness when the following indicators are examined: tolerance, acceptance of others, coexistence, social integration, the creation and adoption of new alternatives, dialogue, referring to democratic patterns, considering freedom as individual right, avoiding segregation on the basis of religion etc. Instead they are showing duplicity, excessive moralization, social ignorance, domestic logic. They are "subjects" of adults' suggestions of their institutions against each other.

Possible Consequences

If youth behave as adults and embody their struggles regarding domestic logic, then one may conclude that unified "civic education" in school is simply a subject matter, a discourse to be learned and memorized for school and exams, and later on for public discourse.

V. Promising Initiatives

When some private schools do not teach the new unified civic textbook considering it a "waste of time", there are still other schools that go beyond the textbooks organizing civic activities (such as community services and voting procedures) and trusting students' abilities.

Although most of the higher education institutions or university sections are local community institutions, some mix students from different communities, offer an infrastructure for extracurricular activities, provide

financial aid on the basis of merit and social needs, offer opportunities for dialogue, and support democratic traditions.

Although most associations have religious and local affiliation there exist some that focus on human rights, environment, and social help and do express the concerns of youth.

And although political slogans are mobilizing youth as "subjects" of adult manipulation, youth in limited circles, mainly within high social strata, are creating occasions to express themselves as youth, as leisure-seekers, and as advocates of civic awareness.