Deliberative democracy and social participation in Mexican secondary schools

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Purpose

• To discuss some preliminary findings of an ongoing project concerning democracy and social participation in secondary schools (12-14 years old).

  – Can deliberative democracy in schools be possible in Mexico?

  – To what extent are Mexicans sufficiently democratic to promote social participation at schools?
Content

• Framing the issue

• Statement of the problem

• Research design

• Some findings (preliminary)

• Discussion
Framing the issue: The National Education System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>25,666,451</td>
<td>1,175,535</td>
<td>226,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>4,187,528</td>
<td>278,269</td>
<td>15,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>2,981,313</td>
<td>315,179</td>
<td>6,289</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non formal education</td>
<td>3,999,353</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34,384,992</td>
<td>1,808,911</td>
<td>253,661</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- The National Education System was built by a corporativist regime
- Highly centralised system despite the reforms in the 1990s.
Framing the issue: Political regime

• One-party regime (1920-1997)

• The State as a “philanthropic ogre” (Paz)
  – Political and civil liberties restrained
  – Weak citizenship
  – Democracy arrived in 1997

• Do we like democracy?
Framing the issue: “What political regime do you prefer?”

Source: Latinobarómetro 2011.
Statement of the problem

• In Mexico, 8 out of 10 schools have established a SP board (SPB), but their duties are still unclear.

  – What is a SPB for?

“Andrea for our beauty queen”!
Statement of the problem

• As the activities of the SPB become more complex, fewer boards are involved (SEP 2012).

  – Only 0.3% of the total of SPB (187,898) has written an accountability report (SEP, 2012).
Statement of the problem

• Social participation at schools in Mexico has failed (SEP 2012)
  – Members of the SPB are appointed rather than elected (Latapí)
  – Not clear what a SPB does (Veloz, Bracho et al)
  – There is no trust between headmasters, parents and teachers (Santizo)
  – Lack of democratic culture (Latapí)

• Most analyses regarding the failures of SP policy have focused on the “supply” side
Research design

• What is the role played by the school participantes in the failure of the SP policy?

• 30 secondary schools as case-studies, distributed in 3 states (Chiapas, Mexico City & Durango).
Research design

• Three different contexts
  – Mexico City (highly urbanised)
  – Chiapas (indigenous groups)
  – Durango (Northern state)

• Mixed approach
  – Documentary analysis
  – Pilot study
  – Survey to headmasters and some parents
  – Focus groups with teachers, parents and students.
Some findings (preliminary)

• According to some teachers, students do not respect “authorities” anymore (Durango).
  – What is the relationship between discipline, schooling and democracy?
  – Are teachers understanding young people?

• At a secondary school in Mexico City, students participated enthusiastically during the focus group and they stressed points that disagree with teachers.
Some findings (preliminary)

• Parents expressed some *fears* of taking part in school life (Durango, Mexico City).

  – In a secondary school of a relatively poor area, parents chose to create a committee to take parenting lessons ("*escuela para padres*”)

Teachers blamed parents for students´ poor academic performance and viceversa (Durango, México City).

  “No one takes responsibility”
Some findings (preliminary)

- The capacity to lead changes within schools was not recognised by some teachers.
  - Socioeconomic milieu shapes students’ lives invariably.

- In some cases, SPB operated regularly so there was no simulation; but...
  - Boards worked under a bureaucratic model of operation
  - SP is still being seen only as a way of improving infrastructure.
“Triggers” for discussion (1)

• “Public reasoning” (Sen), disagreement and problems resolution seemed to be absent.

• Students showed some attitudes that differ diametrically from those expressed by teachers and parents.

• It was taken for granted that parents were able to participate democratically.
“Triggers” for discussion (2)

- Are democratic competences not taught efficiently in secondary schools?

- Do we have opportunities to become democratic?

- Will it be possible to change the burocratic *habitus* (Bourdieu) with SP policy or is it just being reinforced?

- Who is responsible for cultivating deliberative democracy?
  
  - The State? From the *Philanthropic Ogre* (Paz) to the Democratic Pedagogue?
Comments are welcome

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