

In defense of the freedom of expression within the classroom

Article 205. Education, which is the right of all and duty of the State and of the family, shall be promoted and fostered with the cooperation of society, with a view to the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work

The democratic education is under attack. One of the main threats is the “Party-free Education” Program, which the Bill nº867/2015 intends to include in the Brazilian Guidelines and Basis of National Education Law. That bill summarises the proposals of the movement “Party-free Education”, defending that teachers should not educate, but only instruct, being restricted to transmit the “themes specific to the school subjects” without discussing values nor the reality of students. According to those who defend the proposition, the education system would be usurping an attribution of the family. Our Federal Constitution is clear when it establishes that the duty to educate is one of the State and of the family, with the collaboration of society - therefore, not an exclusive task, but a shared one. The same movement insists that “educate citizens” is “an expression that actually translates, as everybody knows, as influencing someone’s ideology” and that teachers who appoint that task as one of the main missions of teaching are delivering evidence of the “political and ideological indoctrinations in classrooms”. Our Constitution is also crystal clear in determining the goals of the education system, and the “preparation for the practice of citizenship” is one of them. With that in mind, when a teacher says that one of the main missions of teaching is to educate citizens, she or he is just reaffirming aspects of our Constitution. Teachers teach the themes of the school subjects expecting to achieve the three goals mentioned in our Constitution and not just the qualification for work. But how achieve the full development of the individual without discussing values? How to prepare for the practice of citizenship without dialoguing with the student’s reality? That’s why we are against the “Party-free Education” Program.

The “Party-free Education” Program creators insist that the bill just ensures constitutional rights already established and its only innovation would be the affixation of posters with the “Teacher’s Duties” in classrooms of all Brazilian schools. This argument presents two grave misconceptions. First, the poster should be called “Teacher’s Prohibitions”, because it lists the activities that teachers should not practice in classrooms. They are described in a biased manner, in a way to delegitimize regular teaching activities and associating them with damnable practices. For example: “Teachers will not do partizan propaganda in classrooms, nor will incite their students to take part in public demonstrations or walking protests”. Teachers mustn’t do partizan propaganda in classrooms indeed, which is not the same as saying that it is not appropriate to discuss political and contemporary themes in classrooms - on the contrary! Teachers shouldn’t refrain from talking about subjects relevant for the understanding of the reality of which students are part of. The second aspect of the prohibition is stated in a particularly biased way, disqualifying a healthy teaching practice. “Teachers will not (...) incite their students to take part in public demonstrations or walking protests”. Teachers should stimulate their students to express themselves in every democratic way possible in public places! Taking part in democratic demonstrations is a sign that students feel like they can change the world of which they are part of - an essential ability for their preparation to actively exercise their citizenship.

The Bill nº867/2015, as all equivalent propositions in states and municipalities, is not restricted to reassure constitutional rights already established, it tries to set a misleading interpretation for our constitution, intentionally ignoring ideas protected by the constitution based on an absolutely misguided conception of what is the schooling process. The bill in question intends to define the guidelines that should conduct the national education, omitting the fact that those are already defined in our Federal Constitution and reassured

in the Guidelines and Basis of National Education Law. Comparing the guidelines proposed by the bill with those established in our Constitution, we realize that the proposition maliciously cuts off constitutional principles: “pluralism of pedagogic ideas and conceptions” (Art. 206, III) is reduced to “pluralism of ideas in Academia” (Art. 2, II) and “freedom to learn, teach, research and express thought, art and knowledge” (Art. 206, II) is reduced to “freedom to learn, as a specific ramification, in the educational field, of freedom of conscience” (Art. 2, III). We can notice that all elements excluded refer to teachers: pluralism of pedagogic conceptions and freedom to teach. However, it does not stop there, going to the extreme by claiming in its justification that “there is no freedom to expression in the teaching practice”.

We strongly oppose that attempt to exclude all the constitutional principles that ensure teachers’ attributions in classrooms and, more than that, take away from professors their constitutional rights to freedom of expression in the making of their professional activities. No Brazilian citizen in any situation should be deprived of his or her freedom of expression! All must respect, at any time, the limits imposed by the law to their freedom of speech without giving it away. Teachers obviously have a syllabus to stick to, but how they do that - resorting to any valid pedagogic conception and connecting subjects with themes considered relevant - only depends on their professional lore. We should trust in teachers’s professional knowledge, teachers educated in courses accredited by the Ministry of Education to perform their work as teachers and educators. Thus defending the freedom of expression of teachers to practice their professional activities, we say no to the “Party-free Education” Program.

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