



“Action” is Important in Social Participation

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Take the First Step

To perceive the definition of social participation from a personal standpoint, whether you belong to the types of “Discuss with Concern” or “Put into Action”, whether the social affair which you participate in is public welfare in nature, such as voluntary job, fund raising flag day and donation, as well as concerning about social affair; or political in nature, such as voting, voter registration, political discussion or election etc., all these are social affairs. When you participate, it represents that you are concerned about the society. I recalled that since my youth, I have been involved in many different social affairs. I remembered that after my graduation from university and at the beginning of my career, I was a young man full of ambition and full of expectation from society. I was especially interested in participating in different social affairs. At the beginning, most of the activities which I participated in were friendship-strengthening in nature, such as youth basketball team. At first I was a trainee. Very soon, I was middle-aged; I was still one of the members but only that I became a trainer and not a trainee. In the course of my participation in social affairs, I gained different life experiences and that enriched my life.

In the year 2001, I had a chance to teach in my Alma Mater. As a young teacher, I was nominated by the school to participate in the Education and Scientific Research Team of the China Education Association to explore educational and social problems together with many experienced teachers in Macao’s educational sector. As a young teacher, it was a valuable opportunity for me to share rich educational experiences with senior educational workers. In the year 2002, I even had the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the “Outline of the Non-tertiary Education System” during the consultation phase. It was valuable that as an educator, I participated in the discussion work of such an education code and applied my teaching professionalism in the development of Macao education industry. After I attended the consulting work of “Outline of the Non-tertiary Education System”, I understood better that the amendments of laws had significant meaning and profound impact on the development of the society as a whole. As a novice in the educational sector, my knowledge in the education and legal areas was very limited. It was fortunate that

school arranged me to teach the educational subject - civic education and I had the opportunity to participate in the education-related research work of the educational community. I grasped the data information, development history and present situation relevant to Macao’s education to complement my knowledge in this area and allow me to have a better understanding on what “Law” was. In a civilized and progressive society, law was the foundation and the basis of all policies started from the formulation of law. My participation in social affairs enriched my knowledge, broadened my social knowledge to society and most of all my participation could affect the government policy and had contribution on the future educational development of society. Therefore, I suggest that Young people participate more in social affairs; it is helpful to their personal and professional growth.

Participation in social affairs is the responsibility of the citizens

As educators, we should be responsible for the civic education of students. We should cultivate young people to master the ability to “Use knowledge to analyse social things and pursue righteousness”. To understand their own self and their own society is very important for the growth of young people. Only through continuous participation in social affairs can they start from the beginning social cognitive level to learn and understand the social situation the society while training their logical thinking and critique ability. Ultimately when you care about your society and have the ability to think critically, you will recognize what kind of society you are living in. Then you can make recommendations for social policy. For a citizen, this is a kind of responsibility.

The good news is that education level of Macao youth is relatively high. From the standpoint of a civic society, they have certain level of knowledge and ability to distinguish the right from the wrong. Macao youth who do not follow others blindly can exert the social responsibility of a knowledgeable people; be active to participate in social affairs and provide opinion on social and government policy.

“The two sides of a coin” on young people’s participating in social affairs

However, Macao youth participating in social affairs actually show two extremes. Many young people start to participate in voluntary work to increase their knowledge, expand their social circle and in the meantime take up their social responsibility. Regardless of their participation in religious or political group and social services activities, all these are beneficial for them to establish their social role and values and are beneficial to the future development of Macao. By contrast, some young people still hold indifferent attitude towards the participation in society. There are two main reasons: Firstly, busy in homework, busy in overtime job, they spend all of their time in different kinds of on or off school learning and even work for part-time job to earn their living. So they have no time to participate in social affairs. Secondly, there is the group of “Given up” young people who are accustomed to a “Gloomy” society. Some of them are cynical and some even do not know what values are, would they care about other things? These young people



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might have been hurt, by the family, in learning or by the society. The former is better because they still have the target of “Struggling”. If by the latter, it would be very hard to mobilize their enthusiasm. But we still have to encourage them to participate in society. Only by that they might see the bright side and then there was hope to change their mentality.

How to cultivate the attitude of young people

Macao youth with high academic levels need a good environment and atmosphere and opportunity to participate in social affairs to develop their potential. We need to care whether the family and school are providing sufficient conditions for the young people to give voice and practice.

Parents’ view on social values usually affects children’s degree of concern on society. Young people who grow up in a traditional family are living in “mono channel” and undemocratic environment. Their parents hold the ideological attitude that what happens in the society has nothing to do with them. How can their children care about society? In the year 2008, I carried out a survey and found that students having civic consciousness came from families with democratic atmosphere and shared decision making on chores. Children’s degree of social participation depends on the attitude of their parents. Therefore, regardless of the age of children, parents should adopt an open attitude to provide the opportunity for children to give voice and not deaden the voice of youth; let the children and their families together to establish a democratic atmosphere and have the courage to express their views.

As an educator, it is our responsibility to help and encourage young people to participate in social affairs. The established atmosphere does help the young people to change their way of thinking; adjust their mentality and remove the labels of after 80s or 90s so as to re-build confidence in society through social affairs. Schools should strengthen important promotion and cultivation works; to build the speaking platform for students to have opportunity to give voice and participate in social affairs. For example, the recent “Voice of the Tree” approach is one of the good ways for young people to express their views. Sometimes we do not need to care about the effectiveness of the activities, but it is important that we should consider whether there are adequate channels for the young people to give voice.

Debate competition held at the school is the best way. It is so said “The more truth is debated, the clearer it becomes”. When students do not discuss about current events, they would discuss about pop culture. Why don’t they make good use of time and energy to care about the society? It can teach students to collect, analyze and organize information to make their case in debate while training them to learn listening as well. Just like on the launch of Wealth Partaking Scheme, there were different voices from social public. I immediately discussed this topic with the students. At the end of the discussion, the students really had different views. But, whether to support the Government, believing that it was right to support the disadvantaged group, or to question and disapprove Government’s policy in the use of resources as the right remedy, they all were students with thinking and analytical skills. In order to educate young people to participate in social affairs actively, firstly we must provide opportunity for them to give voice, to inspire their logical thinking and teach them to analyse things from multi-angles. When they can tell the purpose of government’s policy and understand the policy practices, it shows that they can apply their learning knowledge and skills. These young people will surely benefit all mankind in future.

In addition, if teachers can show their enthusiasm to the society, it will build up an example for students. I have seen an enthusiastic teacher spontaneously putting up some current news and articles in newspaper in “Online Reading” for students to read on internet. Besides he organized small lecture sessions for students at noon to discuss “Macao Issues”. In this short session, students spoke freely. The applause or encouragement and catcalls given to students’ performance by parents and students present made the campus a democratic atmosphere.

Teacher’s training also plays a role in students’ participation in society. Schools can hold “Concern on current affairs” workshop for teachers. Moreover there are student union’s functions such as the establishment and amendment of organizational charter and election for “cabinet”. All these can help students to build up an active attitude towards participation in society.

The best way to encourage students to actively participate in society is through school education. Parents’ education is the crucial issue for development. To establish system for students and to provide support resources for teachers’ training are beneficial to school-led development in the trainings for parents, teachers and students, and even for the organization to participate in social affairs activities.

Non-governmental organization is another effective way. The current youth organizations and political groups in Macao which received resources supports from Government should develop more social services and activities to provide more opportunity for young people to participate in social affairs.

Conclusion

Parents and schools should adopt an open attitude towards encouraging young people to care about the society and provide the opportunity for students to care about the society. If we can cultivate a knowledgeable next generation with whether legal knowledge, social knowledge or living knowledge, we can upgrade them and elevate the future average quality of Macao people. We also expect the Macao young people to possess the spirit of the rule of law in order to take over our works and make contributions to society.

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