

# ADVOCATING FOR HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY. ANTICORRUPTION EDUCATION INITIATIVES IN LITHUANIA

Case study

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*Corruption has three main components that are controllable and one that is not. The three controllable ones are: Opportunity, Incentive and Risk. The uncontrollable one is Personal Honesty (US Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice 1978)*

The case study introduces a brief analysis and reflections on anti-corruption educational activities carried out in Lithuania by the Modern Didactics Center, an educational NGO, in cooperation with national and international partners during the period of 2002-2008. Those initiatives appeared in accordance with the National Anti-Corruption Programme and general EU policy on transparency and accountability for democratic and sustainable societies. The case study presents a short overview of the in-countries context, educational environment, projects activities and their outcomes with its main focus on ethical, moral, values based approaches, attitudes, behaviors, promoted, taught and learned by teachers and students from secondary and higher education sectors. The author of this case reflects upon successes and failures, shares her insights on how anticorruption education could be supported in a current social life full of contradictions and uncertainty.

**Key words:** anticorruption education, values, ethics, programme, partnership

## **Pre - history and context of the initiative**

Anticorruption education has been initiated by the Modern Didactics Center (further- MDC), a non-governmental organization, quite “accidentally.” The visit of Special Investigation Service specialists (further – STT) to MDC in early March, 2002 has initiated long-term anticorruption actions in the formal education system of Lithuania and beyond.

The Head of the STT Corruption Prevention Department, Mr. KęstutisZaborskas, senior specialists Mr. ArtūrasPaliušis and Mrs. Aida Martinkėnienė, approached MDC with a request to contribute to the National Corruption Prevention program. It has been adopted by Lithuania’s Seimas (Parliament) in January, 2002. One of its objectives was as follows: “to develop and apply anticorruption curricula in comprehensive schools and higher education colleges. Special anticorruption curricula should be carried out at universities and colleges that offer specialities most prone to corruption. Anticorruption education should become an inseparable part of the public education system” (National Fight with corruption program, 2002, p. 12). At that time nobody had any understanding what it is, what it should look like, and what it means - there were no ready made examples, no similar practices. In spite of the adopted nation wide program and the further adopted Law of Corruption Prevention (May, 2002), the initiative had political will without financial support, and aspirations without an action plan.

In making the decision to become involved or not in a misty “affair” the deterrent factors were the following: 1) importance and scope of the initiative – national level; 2) interesting challenge and professional ambitions – to develop a program that has no analogues; 3) the possibility for unique partnership – to work with professionals from institutions outside of the

education sector. Also, we saw the opportunity as a contribution to the state's application to enter the "EU club" with the obligation to reduce the percentage of corruption and use different means to fight corruption. As well, we also saw the opportunity as a way of contributing to civil society's democratization by giving more knowledge and understanding, strengthening values, developing attitudes.

MDC started developing a project idea and proposal for the Open Society fund-Lithuania (further- OSF - Lithuania) while with looking for strong partnerships in this endeavor. The partnership was established during March – May, 2002. Initial partnership consisted of STT specialists (main consultants on topic/issue), representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science (a channel to spread information to all schools), Transparency International - Lithuania chapter (access to research and international data) and PLS Rambøll Management experts from Denmark (foreign expertise). A visit to Poland to become acquainted with local anticorruption education initiatives was organized in April, in-country consultations with educational experts – programs and textbooks authors, teachers-experts – in May-June, 2002. A proposal was submitted to OSF- Lithuania in June, as well as to the Danish Embassy in Lithuania. Project activities started in September, 2002 and ended in December, 2003.

### **Project activities and outcomes**

The project aimed to develop an integrated anticorruption education program for comprehensive schools and recommendations for teachers, as well as to prepare teachers-multipliers of the developed program. The project started from the announcement of a competition for school teams to participate in the project activities. Competition requirements were the following: 1) Applications had to be submitted by school teams, consisting from different subject teachers 2) Teams had to take on responsibility to participate in all project activities, to cooperate with each other, to contribute to the development of program and to test it during lessons, and to insure continuation of program implementation and its dissemination after the project end; 3) Teachers had to present motivation letters; 4) Teachers had to have experience in program development and participation in projects.

149 teachers and 52 school teams applied to take part in the project. MDC selected 11 teams, and 32 teachers to participate. It was quite difficult to decide which teams to select. Our selection committee was trying to read between the lines and find true, intrinsic motivation, desire and commitment. It was not an easy task, but we believe that we succeeded finding participants who would continue the implementation of the program. The teachers' motivation had a very high value based approach. They wrote: *"we want to learn and understand democracy as the harmony of individual and societal interests"*, *"we have to teach pupils to follow principles of democracy in private and public life, to notice the mismatch between democratic values and personal behavior"*; *"I think, that in a state ruled by law there is no place for any citizen, any civil servant, whose will is above law"*; *"Only conscience and public opinion are in power to follow rules of law. We have to teach pupils to teach that"*; *"Change in approach, values partially depends on who is transmitter of information. I want to be a transmitter, who feels knowledgeable, confident"*; *"the topic has existential dimension. It is about making responsible decisions, so why it is important"*.

The whole project was designed in such a way that learning, teaching and materials development activities were parallel. Teachers were learning about concept of corruption and its prevention, while at the same time applying elements of workshop materials in practice, and developing lesson plans. The program and recommendations were developed in one year, and preparation for the multiplication of the program took one more year. In 2004, 22 out of

the group of 32 became teachers of other teachers and started offering training for school teams.

### **Follow –up activities**

The same year MDC started developing a program for colleges and universities. This “expansion” to higher education was inspired by the success of the school program. But in this case there was less enthusiasm and more skepticism, even clearly demonstrated resistance towards introducing the program into the higher education curricula. The publication “Corruption Studies in Higher Education Schools” was published in 2005. It contained theoretical materials, examples of course modules, and optional course examples.

The main lesson learned from four years of these projects was that education can’t be left alone “in the battle” of corruption prevention. Schools needed support from the local environment, and the local environment had to know how schools can support local initiatives in transparent governance, accountability and justice. In 2006 MDC initiated a project that brought together schools, municipalities and different state organizations working at the local level for the international project “Youth for Transparency” and later, in 2008 – “Open local governance.” The initiative was implemented in parallel with Poland with the “Centre for Citizenship Education.” The project’s uniqueness was need based activities in the regions. Municipalities needed their activities to be more clear and understandable for citizens. Pupils wanted to know better how decisions are made and get a sense of belonging to a community; citizens wanted appropriate information written in “the people language.” Each municipality implemented local projects that had value for them and got funding from the international project. The final project results were published in the “Youth for Transparency or 7 Steps towards Effective Communication” (2006) and “Teaching for Transparency” (2008). Ten municipalities and 29 teams participated in both projects. In total – 179 pupils, 80 teachers, 29 municipal servants directly participated.

Professional development course of 36 hours was developed by MDC in 2004 and accredited by the Ministry in 2009. During an eight year period (2004 – 2011) 564 teachers were trained to apply anticorruption education strategies in formal and non-formal curriculum. The number can be considered low if one considers all teachers working at schools. The number can be considered quite sufficient having in mind the duration and the form of the training. The program included three days of contact work at schools, and two days of practical work during lessons and their observations by MDC experts.

### **Main characteristics of the anticorruption programs: openness, integrity, participation**

From the very beginning it was clear that educational programs have to fulfill the educational mission to educate knowledgeable and responsible future citizens by providing necessary information about corruption phenomena and developing a negative attitude towards it, enabling individuals to live according to the moral standards of democratic societies. It was decided to better focus on ethical norms and values rather than on corruption theory, research data and numbers, investigation cases, etc.

We had a good start. Selected teachers expressed very strong value based approaches in their motivational letters. But we had to step further and ask inconvenient questions: *What is my personal attitude towards phenomena? What is my personal practice? How do I think, feel and act? How will it affect my dignity and self-esteem? How will it affect my relationships with others?* It was not easy task, as it called for openness, honesty and truth. We were not asking those questions directly, but lead this program in such a way that those questions

manifested themselves, became “naked,” “visible,” and impossible to escape. Confusion and tension were broken by program experts who served as model examples, sharing their personal stories on how they and their family members experienced corruption accidents, how they felt at that moment and how they feel now. Tough debates and “hot” discussions were present during this time (“cons” and “pro” corruption), but they were possible due to the open standpoint that the program took on. Without it no further steps could be taken. How do you teach others fairness and honesty when you lie yourself? Maya Gainer in her case “*Shaping Values for a New Generation: Anticorruption education in Lithuania, 2002-2006*” (2015) writes that “*the biggest challenge fell to the teachers—in the form of developing lesson plans that would bring up corruption naturally, capture students’ interest, and leave a lasting impression without preaching*” (p.5), but the essential challenge was to be honest with oneself. When teachers said: “Yes, I have been in corrupt situations because I had no other choice, and it had to do with health, security, the property of my family, and I do not know if I will not participate in a similar situation in the face of personal danger.” That was when the real work of the program started. Then we started analyzing all the possible “benefits” and “losses” of corruption on personal, institutional, local, national and international levels. We examined different stories and examples. We learned from theory and research, from others and ourselves. Only with an open attitude could we start working on school curriculum, lesson plans, and out of school activities.

Teachers felt confident in teams, and with relief could work on the values framework. They started from what is familiar for pupils: their personal and familial experiences, their observations of their environment, and their honest approaches. Teachers clearly indicated that personal choice is always possible and it depends on one’s values and the ethical norms of the community. Such an approach allowed them to nurture an independent and responsible attitude – to become “healthy skeptical” about public opinions, information; to question common practices, like giving bribes and seeking personal good in spite of the harm to others. It also encouraged taking on concrete actions at school and in the local community – to research, to investigate, to observe. In some schools there were cases when pupils came into light conflicts with their family members because they were asking inconvenient questions. Teachers had to explain to parents what they were doing during lessons and why. They also could get into an undesirable situation if the school had not agreed to take part in the project. And they were not left alone. Such situations were discussed among partnerships and solutions were found in each case.

A challenge was to find right place in existing curriculum to present the anticorruption topic. It had to be such a place that new content, a new approach could organically flow into a subject, theme, and existing school program. Another challenge was to do it in a way that immediately captured the pupils’ attention, involving them and not leaving them indifferent. The first challenge was successfully met by a group of MDC experts, who had experience in developing school curriculum, subject programs and textbooks. The second challenge was met by critical thinking skills development methodology owned by MDC.

If openness, integrity and participation worked in the case of general education, it didn’t work in the case of higher education, having in mind the entire program. We were able to find dedicated and professional teachers who took on responsibility for the program. But we were not able to implement it on a full scope due to the resistance of administration and some teachers, who were invited to participate, but dropped out. Our openness sometimes was received as innocence, naivety (fighting with windmills), or arrogance (as if we were better than others). Our initiative sometimes was considered as “digging under base” – “what are you getting at?” Looking back in retrospect it seems as though this initiative was introduced too early and maybe too rapidly, without a sufficient “incubation” period. Anyway, those,

who contributed to the methodical material “Corruption Studies in Higher Education Schools”, practiced the same approach as the school teachers. They were honest and open in discussions with students.

### **Lessons learned**

At that time “corruption” was a new concept and a big word, freshly presented in legal documents and public discourse. Despite the fact that during the soviet period corruption used to be a regular practice, nobody knew of such a world. People were involved in “affairs,” but not in “corruption”; they were “smart, “but not “corrupted.” This concept arrived with independence as new rhetoric. People started to think: “Is it really such an evil? If yes, who am I? Bad or good? What should I do?”.

The teachers and program developers faced a challenge: How to teach concept that it is not fully understood, but experienced? How to demonstrate a personal position, when it is not clear to you either? Together we all had to go through the processes of personal “identification”: revision of beliefs and values, misunderstandings and failures, formation of a new approach towards the phenomena of corruption. Only then were we able to stand in front of classrooms of pupils and students, teachers and other adults, and look into eyes of people and talk, explain, discuss. Pupils’ response to anticorruption education lessons was deep, sensitive and authentic: *“Corruption has to be fought LOUDLY – everybody has to see, hear and know that law breakers will not escape punishment. People must change. Corruption will decrease, if honesty, not money will be valued. I am sure – our country would look like paradise if all Lithuania’s people follow the 10 Commandments of God”; “I think, that corruption makes damage for our state - blocks its development and makes us unequal. All people by nature have rights and are equal”; Corruption is an evil. There is no place for intelligent and educated people in a corrupted society. Corrupted society – it is a society for rich ones, small group of people that vote for government to become even richer. That’s how justice is understood in a corrupted state. I think that corrupted civil servants, lowers spend sleepless nights”.*

We have understood that anticorruption work needs an open and sensitive approach. Mentioning for thousand times that “corruption is evil and has to be fought” in many cases has the opposite effect – people tend to hide, stop talking and resist. This was due to many reasons: personal practice, injustices experienced, the disappointment of being left alone in some situations, seeing a mismatch between words and works. Successful anticorruption education includes: a) well prepared and qualitative information on the topic; b) well selected strategies and means of information delivery; c) professional “delivers” – teachers, trainers, scientists, civil servants who serve as model examples; d) partnership - work in cross-sectional, cross institutional teams, getting as much as possible support from outside.

### **Anticorruption education now**

Society’s sensitivity to corruption phenomena in some cases is high, in some – not. There is no need to explain the term itself - everybody understands what you are talking about; people can recognize simple forms of corruption and are sensitive to manifestations of phenomena. But such forms as nepotism, misuse of confidential information, trading in influence for personal benefits, in some cases are hardly recognized, in other cases they are accepted as the norm. “Selective justice” is alive in public procurement and other fields of social life. And it makes our work more complicated.

Anticorruption education cannot be left to schools and teachers. They do their job well in the classrooms. Anticorruption education has to be directed to a society as a whole. Teachers voice how they have learned to practice honesty, openness and integrity has to be heard. This has to be heartfelt by other adults as inspiration to think about their standpoints.

*We need* true, not simply declared, political will to implement program, commitment and accountability to the society; *we lack* success examples – models to be followed; *we have* to build strong partnerships in our anticorruption attempts; *we have* to demonstrate belief in people and promote culture of trust; *we need* deep, comprehensive evaluation of all previous measures and negotiate and agree on concrete program priorities.

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