



# Intercambio

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Organo de Difusión de la Red de Investigación de la RED SEPA



*Campaign for a democratic,  
formative and participatory  
evaluation*

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# PRESENTATION

This edition of "INTERCAMBIO" is inscribed within the IDEA Network campaign against standardized testing as a form of exclusion and control of students and professors. The campaign also has the parallel objective to construct evaluation alternatives that foster an integral, humanistic, and democratic education.

This issue also aims to continue follow-up to the work of the International Seminar on standardized evaluation and teacher performance organized by the IDEA Network in February 2009 in Mexico City. A digital memoir of the Seminar is available in CD form or through this web page.

The central focus is on the struggles against standardized and teacher-performance evaluation and the promotion and articulation of ongoing processes to construct alternatives, developed through the education workers and their unions, and the social organizations of parents and students who defend public education as social right.

Readers will learn about the experiences developed by the BCTF of Canada following the agreement to not apply standardized tests determined to be detrimental to education. The professors affiliated to the Federation opposed application of these tests, the results of which were used by a private corporation to classify schools and students. Following a judicial resolution obligating the teachers to apply the exams, they redirected their campaign toward parents to help them understand the negative impacts of the exams on the education of their children and on society in general. The positive response of this sector provides important lessons.

From the United States, one professor tells the story of how his reluctance to apply standardized tests to his students became the catalyst to unite him with other teachers and parents who also rejected the tests due to their damaging effects on children and youth, and how this group of parents and teachers banded together to form the Coalition for Better Education.

From Ecuador, we learn about the struggle of the National Union of Educators (UNE) in opposition to standardized testing and to an inquisitorial teacher evaluation that the government of President Correa attempted to impose. The UNE called a strike to obligate the government to negotiate the terms of a different evaluation, amidst a struggle yet to be concluded.

Given that Mexico has converted into a laboratory of aggressive policies in standardized and teacher-performance

evaluation, we include an article on the struggles of university students against these policies and another that offers an overview of the experience of thousands of democratic teachers in Mexico who have mobilized and in some cases gone on strike to oppose these instruments of control and exclusion. In Mexico, the defense of the right to education also necessarily involves the long-standing struggle for democratization of this country's corporative union, the SNTE. The article refers to the forms through which the teachers' movement attempts to break with this particular brand of unionism and build alternative education projects.

We also publish a presentation from a seminar-workshop in the BCTF, which includes a critique of standardized tests. Some alternative experiences underway in Mexico in both basic and upper-level education are also presented, proposing a few guidelines to offer distinct evaluation options.

Given that one of the primary tasks of the IDEA Network is to maintain solidarity with the struggles of the teachers and peoples of the continent in defense of their rights, we also include an interview with a group of educators from Honduras. They offer important testimony regarding the action of the Honduran people against the overthrow of that country's President, the repression they have lived, their courage and valor in defense of their rights, and the challenges they face in the defense of their country. We include news regarding the international support provided by the IDEA Network to our Honduran colleagues through a brigade of representatives from IDEA-member organizations.

As you will notice, there are a number of changes in this edition, and we look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions to help us continue to improve. We are also interested to hear whether the material we incorporate is useful for the different organizations and participants in the IDEA Network and our readers from other social spaces, and whether the material is applied in any specific work you are developing.

Fraternally yours, The Editorial Committee  
María de la Luz Arriaga (Mexico),  
María Trejos (Costa Rica),  
José Ramos (Peru) ,  
Larry Kuehn (Canada),  
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Steve Stewart (Canada).

## Our objectives

The challenge to build a magazine was posed out of the need for instruments that foster the dissemination of critical thought that questions neoliberal dogmas and that contributes with arguments to the movements in defense of public education in the Americas.

This challenge was assumed by the Researchers Network of the Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA Network), establishing a four-monthly calendar and an electronic format for easy international distribution. The participative spirit, open to debate and to the contributions of IDEA Network colleagues and others, is reflected in the name of this effort: "Intercambio" (EXCHANGE). The selection of this title also intends to ratify the importance of mutual knowledge of what is happening in our countries, as an opportunity to learn from our struggles and to call on one another for solidarity.

The "Intercambio" magazine will aim to address themes linked to the following: the right to education and the neoliberal threat; the public school of our times; educational quality; responsibilities and rights of teachers, other education workers, and students; the education-society relationship, and democratic initiatives and proposals for the transformation of the school.

We believe that this set of themes -broad but clearly oriented- will be an incentive for professors and researchers in the production of materials elaborated out of and for the continental social movement in defense of public education. Our hope is that the magazine will become a gathering space -an open and diverse reference of analysis and proposals- for all the social organizations participating in the IDEA Network and many more who share the objective to preserve education as a social right. We also hope that teachers, other education workers, mothers and fathers, students, and social activists, will make it their own as well.

We encourage each of you our readers to send your comments and to collaborate with articles to continually improve and open permanent EXCHANGE (Intercambio) committed to the educational cause of our peoples.

*Editorial Committee*

Red SEPA

<http://www.idea-network.ca>



## Heeding Humble Voices

Don Perf



In the fall of 2000, I was faced with the prospect of preparing my eighth grade students for high stakes standardized testing. The more I studied the concept of high stakes testing, the more abhorrent it became to me, and the more I saw it as a violation of my egalitarian principles as an educator. Indeed, one of the requirements for a teaching license in Colorado states: “The educator is knowledgeable about child development as applicable to learning and is able to recognize and display respect for family, culture and societal influences that affect student learning.” I was teaching in an inner city junior high school in Greeley, Colorado, which in 2000 - 2001 had been converted into a middle school. About half of my students spoke Spanish as their first language, and since English wasn’t their home language, they were at a disadvantage in this testing regimen.

I was also one of only a few bilingual teachers at our school and was often called to translate conversations between administrators and parents. I saw parents, wanting the best for their children, struggling to understand a foreign system. I remembered the phrase “in loco parentis” that I had heard often as an aspiring teacher. We don’t want any harm to come to our children. This testing mania was harmful to them - it pitted them against each other. Thus, after much deliberation, reflection, and study, I decided that I could not in good conscience administer the test. And so I committed an act of civil disobedience by refusing to administer Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) tests.

\* The Coalition for Better Education, Inc. [www.thebbe.org](http://www.thebbe.org)

On January 18 2001, I composed and sent letters to policy makers, legislators, the local and state school board and the governor’s office:

“The more I have researched the issue of high stakes standardized testing, the more I have come to the realization that these tests are antithetical to 1) the egalitarian premise of public schools and 2) undermine the dignity of the teaching profession.

Generally students who fare well are those who are from Western European professional or middle class families. Thus, the tests further polarize our already polarized community. Minority students, students whose language is other than English are disadvantaged from the start.

In terms of undermining the teaching profession - there seems to be an underlying concept that all teachers need is a manual to follow and all will go well in the classroom. Teaching is an art, a science, and a calling, all of which defy a lock-step manual. No test can teach citizenship, co-operation, and compassion. The professional in the classroom strives to develop thoughtful and meaningful assessments which connect curricula with individual learning styles. For us to subject children to this one dimensional high stakes testing regimen is nothing short of educational malpractice. Therefore, I must respectfully decline to administer the test.”

With that refusal, the seeds of our Coalition for Better Education were planted. I was suspended for two weeks without pay during the administration of CSAP tests. However,

when I returned, the atmosphere at school was so negatively charged that I decided to make that year my last. I landed a teaching position at our local university in the department of Hispanic Studies, and my new colleagues encouraged me to keep speaking out against the injustices of standardized testing. I developed a brochure consolidating these injustices, in both English and Spanish, and put up booths at an annual educational fiesta, and at the celebration of Mexican Independence Day in September.

At the Independence Day Celebration in September 2003, a colleague suggested that we try to get the elimination of CSAP on the ballot for the November 2004 election. That brief conversation inspired me to investigate the possibilities of having a ballot initiative approved for that fall's election. After various phone calls and a statement of intent to the Office of the Secretary of State, I learned that I would have to develop my own legislation and bring it to the Legislative Council for review. I would need two more colleagues to support my measure.

What followed was the rather tedious process of researching school law, drafting legislative language to counter the current legislation which used CSAP results to determine which schools would receive additional funding, and which were eligible for assistance. I met with the Legislative Council on three different occasions in the winter of 2004 to refine the language of our ballot initiative so that

it used, not CSAP results, but local assessments by professional educators as well as the federal eligibility formula for free or reduced lunches.

Early in March of 2004, the Office of the Secretary of State invited me to meet with a panel to discuss the proposed ballot initiative. After confirming that this was exactly the wording we would like to see, the three panelists conferred for a few moments and then informed me that the ballot initiative had been approved. All signed petitions would have to be submitted to their office on or before August 2 of that year.

The next questions were how to pay for the printing of all those petitions, and who would collect the signatures? We needed approximately 67,000 signatures, so we would need about 1,340 petitions, each with space for fifty signatures. As the petitions also had to carry the applicable legal language, each one would consist of eleven pages. The task and price seemed overwhelming. However, when I discussed the issue with the local manager of Kinko's, he liked the project and offered to print all the petitions we wanted for the flat fee of \$850.

Now, the signatures. I assumed that our professional educators would be the first to sign. How wrong I was! I contacted the leadership of the Colorado Education Association. Their newsletter has always had an article stridently criticizing the "one size fits all" formula of CSAP testing.





Over the telephone I told the vice-president that we now had a ballot initiative seeking the elimination of CSAP and that if they encouraged all members of the association to sign, we could get it on the ballot. Total silence on the other end. Finally I was told that they couldn't support the initiative. They would put a notice in the newsletter along with other pending legislation. Now it was my turn to be silent. Then I asked: "How can you rage against CSAP in your conversations and newsletter and not support this initiative?" "It's politics, Don. Good luck."

However, we did get some media coverage and some parents called to say that they would like to help. State law requires signatures be solicited in person, so I developed what I now call "revolutionary headquarters" in my house and sent out petitions to people asking that they get as many signatures as they could and send them back well before the 2nd of August. We now had four months to get signatures. A Channel 9 reporter and photographer showed up to do an interview and take pictures. I don't think they were too impressed. "Revolutionary headquarters" consisted of one home computer with a dial-up connection and a closet full of petitions. A small piece ran the following day on their website.

Word still spread. Many folks called to say that they had had no idea about this ballot initiative until they had read the spot on the Channel 9 News website, or heard the piece on public radio, and more parents and others participated in the effort to get signatures. They were all volunteers - parents, a professor, a public defender, and a few students from the University of Northern Colorado.

On August 2nd we arranged to meet at the Office of the Secretary of State. We were determined to make it a media event. Some thirty signature-gatherers and the media converged on the Office of the Secretary of State. We handed in our petitions, the media took pictures and did interviews and then left. We stayed. Of course we knew that we did not have enough signatures to make the ballot, but we did want to build on the momentum we had created. Two weeks later we would receive word that we had gathered 12,485 signatures, impressive in light of the obstacles stacked against us.

But that day the question became, "What do we do now?" Some students at our university had created a website and labeled our mission, The Coalition for Better Education. And while the site was very primitive, at least it provided a point of departure for activism. We sat in the waiting room of the Office of the Secretary of State, and brainstormed. We could advertise on our website. Or even better, we could check into media advertising, maybe outdoor advertising. Thus, we set the stage for our coalition as a resistance movement. Professor Laura Manuel made the suggestion, and the connection, to advertise on bus benches and bill boards. Carol

Carminative of Boulder, parent extraordinaire, offered to make political buttons - something she does to this day as her contribution to the mission.

I studied certain texts of Colorado Revised Statutes and pertinent case law. The case could definitely be made that parents had the last say in their children's education, and could exempt their children from CSAP testing without fear of ramifications. And so we developed our slogan: "Parents, We CAN do something about this injustice. Opt out letters at [www.thecbe.org](http://www.thecbe.org)." And our icon - CSAP in black letters, circled in black with a red line through the acronym. We have raised money for advertising every year, beginning in the spring of 2005, and are presently in our fall campaign to raise funds for two bill boards on local highways. And parents have taken action and opted their children out. Last year one hundred parents at an elementary school in Commerce City took the brave step to say No to the testing regimen. Many others throughout the state have done likewise. The media however have become loathe to cover these stories, and the Colorado Department of Education obfuscates when asked about the number of opt-outs.

In the legislative session of the spring of 2008, Representative Judy Solano from Brighton, Colorado for the second time sponsored a bill which would require school districts to inform parents of their exemption rights, and require that no negative consequences flow from such an option. This time the bill received much support. Our coalition was on the front lines in that piece of legislation, and in March of 2008 a number of our parents, teachers and public school students took the day off to testify before the Senate and House Education Committees in favor of this legislation. Everyone's experiences differed of course, but their messages were clear and heartfelt. I was most impressed with the young people who came forward. They spoke eloquently of the how high stakes testing was so insulting to them, so stressful, so antithetical to educational principles, and thus so devastating to our public schools. The legislation passed both houses and went to the governor's desk for signature.

In June of 2008, after both houses had adjourned for the summer, Governor Bill Ritter vetoed the bill, saying that he did not want to interfere with existing mandatory attendance requirements. However, he did not consider the legislation that requires schools to offer "alternative learning experiences" for those children whose parents have exempted them from an activity or evaluation. This past year Representative Solano once again attempted to re-introduce the legislation, but this year it did not advance past committee. Energies had been exhausted.

Since that spontaneous meeting on August 2nd of 2004, our subscribers list has grown. Twice a week I send out communiqués on the latest in the world of high stakes standardized testing. I am very grateful to our subscribers who

send me links to various letters, documents, and newspaper articles informing me of the latest in the educational landscape.

In the last few years, more and more parents have contacted me for whatever support I can offer as they buck an inhumane system and speak out for their children. These are the particularly brave parents who see their children's lives damaged and limited by the inhumanity of high stakes standardized testing. Our coalition's letterhead bears the motto - "Created to dignify the autonomy of our children and of their teachers." This message needs to resonate ever more widely in the face of a political climate increasingly insensitive to the needs and talents of our children and to the critical role that professional educators play in bringing out the best in their children. One educator in our coalition has taken it upon himself to collect anecdotes from parents whose children have been marginalized because they have not taken CSAP testing. He is now in the process of sharing these examples of educational malpractice with an attorney. So parents can not only rely on our coalition to strategize before meetings with local school administrators, but now also have recourse if they or their children have been subjected to any unfair treatment.

Now public education is faced with an even more formidable force - a Secretary of Education wanting to impose strict national standards under the rallying cry of "Race to the Top." Our coalition has taken an active role in speaking out against this effort to elevate competition above co-operation and to bribe school districts to conform to a dehumanizing agenda. We sent scholar, Lynn Stoddard, author of *Educating for Human Greatness*, to the organizing conference to speak out for our children and to resist the imposition of a regimen of national standards. We have also printed out several copies of the petition to dismantle NCLB, a petition which circulated online last year and acquired 35,000 signatures. The bound tome is 715 pages long, and contains piercing comments and anecdotes of the harms done by this legislation.

Of the two professions I have practiced, law and education, the first emphasizes competition and is long on bluster. Competition is good, often at any price. The second profession, education, is far nobler in that ideally it recognizes the individuality of the learner, and seeks to use the talents and interests of the student to connect with the curriculum. In short, the profession is one of love.

However something heartless in our society belittles love. And teachers, generally, are humble about their noble qualities. It is this humbleness that is responsible, sadly, for the quagmire public education finds itself in. Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood the power of love. Richard Lakin, educator and author writes, "Teaching must be first and foremost an act of love." Noted author, scholar and activist Susan Ohanian ([www.susanohanian.org](http://www.susanohanian.org)), who works tirelessly to give voice to those of us who speak out for the infinite diversity of our children in public education, also emphasizes the importance of love in our profession: "Loving forlorn children gives them life and possibility. Teaching is love in action, requiring no credentials." Once the profession recognizes the critical role that love plays in our relationships with our children, once our classroom professionals realize that we must speak for the students, then we can begin the slow, arduous, but wonderful journey toward the renaissance of this profession.

I have learned in the course of these last eight years that what we do locally is of critical importance. The lessons in critical thought, courage, and commitment that we leave our children and the support we give their parents can have positive results beyond our imaginings. Let us not forget that we send our children to school to become more human, to learn to co-operate in a society that needs co-operation for survival. Our mission is to instill compassion in a world hungering for it. We send our children to learn nurturing skills essential for the survival of all of us on our fragile planet.

Let us spread the word.





## Professional right to inform parents about tests

Larry Kuehn\*



The professional right of teachers to inform parents about the problems with standardized tests has been confirmed in British Columbia.

\* EDD, BC Teachers' Federation (Canada), Director of Research.

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) successfully fought to ensure that teachers maintained the right to freedom speech on professional issues. This was confirmed in an agreement between the bargaining repre-

sentatives of school boards and the BCTF on the content of letters to parents.

The issue arose as a result of the campaign of the BCTF against the standardized tests given to Grade 4 and Grade 7 students each year—called the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA).

### *Test results misused to promote privatization*

Teacher opposition to the FSAs was based on several factors.

One of the most significant issues was the misuse made of test results by the Fraser Institute. This is a right-wing “think tank” that has the aim of privatizing education (and most other public services) and eliminating social rights.

The Fraser Institute annually publishes a list of all the elementary schools in the province, ranking them according to results on the FSA tests. This practice is condemned by all the actors in the education system—from the Minister of Education to school boards and administrator organizations—as well as teachers, of course.

The evidence that test results generally reflect the socio-economic origins of the students in a school is overwhelming. In fact, that is confirmed again in the Fraser Institute rankings each year. School rankings generally follow the social class makeup of the student families.

If lower test results produced more resources to assist the school in supporting students with fewer early learning opportunities, that might be acceptable. However, that is not what happens.

The ranking of schools encourages the parents who can afford it to withdraw their children from the lower ranked public schools to send them either to another public school higher on the rankings, or to private schools. This results in a further separation of children by social class and the negative impact that has on both learning and social cohesion.

Damaging the public schools and promoting privatization of education is exactly what the neo-liberal Fraser Institute wants to happen. The top ranks generally go to private schools. These schools have smaller classes and they can choose which students to admit, whereas the public school must (as it should) take every student, regardless of their educational needs.

The Fraser Institute and other related neo-liberal organizations produce school rankings in other Canadian prov-



inces as well, with the same objective of promoting forms of privatization of education.

The objection of the BCTF to the tests goes beyond their misuse to promote privatization. In addition, they confuse two different elements—assessment of students to identify what they need individually on the one hand and system accountability on the other hand.

Teachers believe in using tests—if they are appropriate for the purpose. For individual students, ongoing assessment by teachers is necessary to identify educational needs and appropriate teaching. The FSA tests are not of use in this purpose. However, the Ministry of Education insists on results not very useful for this purpose be sent home to parents. This use does not have much educational validity.

The other use of the FSA tests is for school system “accountability.” If testing is appropriate as a way of identifying how well the schools are doing, it is not necessary to test every student to do this. A structured random sample is adequate for this purpose and would not provide the details that the Fraser Institute misuses in its school rankings.

### *Teacher union action to oppose inappropriate tests*

Two strategies were adopted by the BC Teachers’ Federation to stop the misuse of the tests. One was to have teachers refuse to administer the tests. The other was to encourage parents to refuse to let their children to take the test.

Teachers refusing to give the test would be the most powerful way of blocking its misuse. The BCTF carried out a campaign with its members to ensure that they understood the concerns and would be prepared to take action.

A referendum of the members was held on whether to refuse to give the tests. The overwhelming vote was in favour of this action. However, the employers soon went to the Labour Relations Board and got the propose action declared as an illegal strike. The BCTF decided then not to follow through with the boycott of the tests.

The campaign and referendum did have the positive result of highlighting the issues both for teachers and for parents. This then led to stepping up of the campaign to get parents to withdraw their children from the tests.



The union placed ads in newspapers and talked to local labour councils urging parents to refuse the tests. In several areas, teachers sent home letters directly to parents.

In response, the Ministry of Education put pressure on school administrators to require students to take the test over the opposition of their parents. Some school boards attempted to stop teachers from talking to parents or sending home information about the tests.

The union filed a grievance against the school districts that were attempting to block the right of teachers to give their professional opinion to parents. An arbitration had previously determined that teachers do have a right to speak on professional matters, including getting factual information directly to parents.

That right was reaffirmed and eventually the BCTF and the organization that represents the school districts negotiated the text of three letters that teachers can send home or give to parents.

The 2009 administration of the FSAs saw many students withdrawn from taking the test. In some cases, nearly all the students were excluded. This makes a significant challenge to any claim of validity to the ranking of schools.

### Seeking alternatives

Parents and the community do have a legitimate interest in knowing how their schools are doing. However, that interest needs to be met with valid approaches that include the school community in deciding what they value and whether that is being achieved.

To change the focus, the BCTF at its annual meeting in 2009 called for a moratorium on the testing for two years and the creation of a task force to examine the issues. The task force would look at these questions of how to legitimately answer the questions of how the school is doing.

The Ministry rejected the call for a moratorium and proceeded with trying to force school districts and school administrators to harass parents who want to keep their children out of the tests. In response, the BCTF continued on with its campaign to encourage and support the parents desiring to keep their children from these tests.

Looking at the issues surrounding standardized testing is proceeding whether the Ministry is interested or not. Several school districts and union locals have agreed to have a local task force to discuss testing. The provincial organizations in education are also committed to talking together about these issues in some kind of committee. A group of progressive individuals from within and outside the school system have also begun discussion and research about appropriate ways for answer legitimate questions about how our schools are doing.

The BCTF has identified areas that should be examined. In addition to looking at what types of evaluation are legiti-

mate and useful, it has called for attention to the impact of testing on the joy of learning and teaching. More details are available on the BCTF web site at [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca).

Work on education policy is an appropriate role of unions

Few dispute that teacher unions should work on behalf of their members, seeking good conditions of work, as well as pay and benefits that are appropriate for a profession. However, the role of educator unions in education policy is more likely to be disputed by some in the public and even among some union members.

The case of standardized testing is an example of where the conditions of work of teachers and the interests of parents, students and the community require that all parties take part in examining what we want from our schools and how we know whether they are producing what we want.

Processes that are democratic and inclusive are required. Unions must take a role in ensuring that opportunities for broad-based discussion exist and that teachers' views and needs are a part of that discussion.

The BC Teachers' Federation has played a significant role in ensuring that teachers clearly have a right to freedom of expression of their professional judgment, even on contentious issues.



## What is the Social Network for the Public Education in America?

Nowadays, the public education faces new challenges that are pronounced in similar form in different countries. In the western hemisphere, the process to construct the Area of Free Commerce of Americas (ALCA) includes initiatives that are directly tied with the education. The governments of the Americas are negotiating the ALCA through a series of meetings whose processes are included under the name of the Summit of the Americas.

The Network SEPA is a continental alliance that it has the objective to connect organizations of the civil society of the continent who share the preoccupation to protect and to improve the public education; like essential human right for the democratic development. The Network along with works other groups of the civil society that worry about the impact of the process of the ALCA. Between these organizations they are the International of Education (IE), the Confederation of American Educators (CAE), the Continental Social Alliance, the Caribbean Organization and Latin American of Estudiantes (OCLAE) and the Continental Secretariat of Education.

The Network coordinates the process IDEA that promotes investigations, conferences and mobilizations to defend and to improve the public and democratic education in the continent. At the moment near 100 organizations of educators, students, workers of support, parents of family, communitarian women, natives and of 24 American countries participate in the Network SEPA.

[www.forolaboral.com.mx/](http://www.forolaboral.com.mx/)

## What makes the Social Network for the Public Education in America?

The Network SEPA makes investigations, it elaborates communications networks and publications, and organizes conferences to defend and to improve the public education. The objective of our activities is to promote the understanding of the impact of the neoliberal policies to the education in the Americas and to propose alternative routes that develop a public, inclusive and democratic education.

The Network also serves to mobilize solidarity for educators, students and other that undergo repression in their countries to make activities in support to a public and democratic education.

[www.forolaboral.com.mx/](http://www.forolaboral.com.mx/)

## Coordinator Committee

Unión Nacional de Educadores del Ecuador (UNE)

Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina (CETERA)

Federación de Organizaciones Magisteriales de Centro América (FOMCA)

Confederación Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación de Brasil (CNTE/Brasil)

Unión Caribeña de Maestros (CUT)

Federación Magisterial de Columbia Británica – Canadá (BCTF)

Organización Caribeña y Latinoamericana de Estudiantes (OCLAE)

Steve Stewart. Secretario Técnico

# The other face of neoliberal policies of exclusion in education: the student struggle

Hortensia Escobar y María de Jesús Ramos\*



The different types of standardized tests in Mexican education and the resulting exclusion have generated discontent among the academic communities of various educational levels, in particular among students.

On the one hand, the exclusion of close to 200,000<sup>1</sup> students annually from upper-education institutions has generated frustration in a broad sector of young people, given the association of social mobility with insertion within a university education. Cancellation of this possibility has resulted in broad generations of youth left with an insecure vision of their future. In addition to the impossibility of access to upper education for many of these young people, they will also be left without dignified employment.

A similar phenomenon exists in the case of middle-upper education (bachillerato, equivalent to high school). Of the 150,000 students who take the sole exam required for enrollment into this level of studies in the Mexico City metropolitan region, only one third obtain a slot in the institutions that guarantee the possibility to continue professional or scientific studies (in the *Politécnico Nacional*, or the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*).

In contrast with the exclusion and reduction in the educational quality offered to Mexican youth, there is significant growth in the profits of the private entity responsible for application of the standardized tests to post-secondary level students and the expansion of evaluation markets. In

June 2008, the newspaper *La Jornada* reported that the National Center of Educational Evaluation (*Centro Nacional de Evaluación Educativa -CENEVAL*) had earned profits surpassing 3 billion pesos (300 million dollar).<sup>2</sup>

So aside from being used to exclude, the standardized tests are also a great business and are discriminatory.

According to the results of the standardized tests, trends are observed of exclusion of female students and those from laborer families, while the results tend to benefit students from private education institutions. "...of every 100 males who seek access to undergraduate education, 28 are enrolled, but only 20 of every 100 women. On the other hand, of every 100 children of laborers, less than 8 are enrolled, while more than double that number of children of functionaries or executives, 18 out of every 100, are enrolled ...."<sup>3</sup>

Unrest is growing among university students regarding the academic reform. Its viability is questioned given that, in current national conditions, in which neoliberalism has left a vast scenario of desolation, the country lacks development of technological productive forces to assure dignified employment for the new generations of professionals. It is clear that the few decent jobs available in the new technological economy are in the knowledge sector, which far from implying specialization and standardization, call for de-specialization, given the need for multi-functional workers. The student movement therefore points out that the modifications imposed on the study plans, rather than su-

\* Estudiantes de la UNAM y miembros del núcleo estudiantil de la sección Mexicana de la Coalición Trinacional en Defensa de la Educación Pública.

<sup>1</sup> For 2009, only 8.9% of the total of applicants were able to enroll in the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/06/21/043n1soc.php?origen=soc-jus.php&fly=1>

<sup>3</sup> Aboites, Hugo, 2007 "Matrícula, recursos financieros y selección de estudiantes en la UNAM."



pporting the mentioned objectives, are solely oriented to form technical laborers for employment in lower categories below the true scientists who have the technological tools that allow them to secure a higher labor status.

The student organizations are therefore critically important in the struggle for the right to public education and against the privatizations and exclusions disguised as quality.

In response to the first application of a sole exam for middle-upper level education enrollment in 1996, applied to close to 200,000 students in Mexico City and the surrounding metropolitan area, massive student and parent protests demanded the right to a place in public education that would allow the rejected students to continue their formation. Three months of protests including marches, rallies, the closure of the Stock Market, and sit-ins culminated with the acceptance by the education authorities to participate in negotiations that eventually improved the initial assignments made by CENEVAL.

The student strike that stretched from April 1999 to February 2000 in the largest university in Latin America, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) (with more than 300,000 students), was centered around the defense of the free cost of education, the demand for democratization of the university's governing bodies, and the separation of the UNAM from any association or role of CENEVAL, the monopoly of evaluation in Mexico. This strike demonstrated the consciousness among Mexican students that education is a right and that we must defend this right.

Another example of resistance to the exclusionary trends derived from the inequality of opportunities in today's Mexican society emerged in 2006 when a group of rejected upper-level education applicants formed the Movement of Applicants Excluded from Upper Education (Movimiento de Aspirantes Excluidos de la Educación Superior -MAEES), ins-

tituted following publication of the results of the Sole Exam. MAEES is a student movement concentrated in Mexico City but with participation of students from several other states. The Movement is supported by the growing and unconditional support (rarely seen in student movements) of the parents. This fact is a reflection of the generalized decline of the conditions of the majority of the Mexican population and its impact on the family institution, generating a widespread feeling of lack of hope in the face of the impossibility to secure a future for the children.

The demands of the excluded students include: a) the right to education as a fundamental social right; b) an increase in public expenditure dedicated to upper education; c) the increase of enrollment slots in the most important middle-upper and upper-level education institutions, including UNAM, IPN, UAM; d) compliance with Constitutional Article 3, and e) eradication of the sole admission exam and the generation of alternative evaluation methods.

In the past three years, the students successfully lobbied for the establishment of a negotiation roundtable with Education Ministry authorities, and an agreement has been generated in which the mobilized students are able to access some spaces, albeit very partially. It is clear that the mobilization of these young people has been very important to assure the social visibility of the problem of access to public high schools and universities. But the education authorities nevertheless refuse to open the debate to the issue of the education policies and the needs of Mexican society in this regard.

It is also important to note that the university reforms that include the incorporation of standardized tests generate local university movements in different fields of study of the middle-upper and upper-level education institutions.

In several UNAM departments, such as Education, Economics, Engineering, Geography, and Sociology, student





organizations have formed which may revert the a priori implementation of the reforms and modifications to the study programs and plans. For example, in the undergraduate Geography department, the most important change that the authorities attempted to impose was the abandonment of the study of how the human being develops in his space. Sociology was reoriented to prioritize knowledge and handling of statistics in detriment to the study of societies. The reform of the Education department included elimination of the study of courses that teach the evolution of education in Latin America, with a modified study plan that conceives the teaching process no longer as a personal interaction but rather as an interaction mediated by distinct technological advances. These are examples of just some of the reforms underway being challenged by those most closely affected.

The student and academic mobilization has achieved the beginnings of a still immature but very important debate for the university studies –and most importantly for Latin America– that define the direction of the reform in the UNAM. It is urgent to denounce those who have attempted to transform education into a consumer good, breaking with the meritocratic promise of social mobility with which the educational system was constructed and its use to socialize new meanings in relation to social order. “In this way, exclusion is not just an unanticipated effect of economic development, but rather an important part of the strategy of construction of a neoliberal ethos expressed in the transformation of the subjects, who no longer expect that the State resolve their problems, but instead are convinced that they are capable of tackling life in an individual and competitive manner.”

The idea is thereby generated that only the most apt (competitive) and strong (individualistic) subject (student) survives in this education system. In general only the most enterprising subject survives the system as a whole. This type of educational Darwinism converts into the guiding principle of the learning-teaching process.

The most important and immediate challenges against the education privatization and exclusion policies are, on

one hand, the demystification of this “social Darwinism” principle, exposing the essence of the standardized tests as forms of exclusion, and on the other, achieving the expansion of enrollment in the public middle-upper and upper-education institutions to comply with the Constitutional guarantee of the right to education for all Mexicans.

Education is one of the paths that lead societies to transform economic-social reality. For this reason, in Capitalism efforts are focused to develop a way to master and reproduce ideology, as well as to efficiently administer what the Capitalists call human resources. It should remain clear that the distinct student movements of yesterday and today are the immediate result of the lack of opportunities which in many cases becomes an obstacle for educational realization, even for social change itself. This scenario further vindicates the struggle for education as a social struggle for the people.

Our struggle is in defense of better education and free access for all to the same, in which evaluation is not subject to a simple test that determines our personal and professional future, and in the search for a school that guarantees a better future for all in the same conditions. It is fought alongside the struggle for an economic, cultural, and political system superior to the capitalist system: a system that fosters the construction of a better world.

The Mexican student movement has succeeded in preserving the free status of education in the UNAM and in revealing the reality of the standardized tests as exclusion mechanisms. It has also initiated a yet-immature but very salient debate on the right to critical education. Debate also has been reopened on the need for democracy in schools with the participation of all the community sectors. And the demand for education for all has become clear. Nevertheless, the current student movement needs the articulation and construction of more solidary networks so that the struggle may aspire to regional and world-scale victories.



## Some notes on the struggle of ecuatorian teachers against standardized evaluation

Edgar Isch L.\*



### Background

Neoliberalism has created its own discourse in the social area. In the case of education, its ideology is reflected in a series of ways throughout the region, a sort of “Educational Washington Consensus”, which can be summarized as follows: the educational quality crisis is one of “efficiency, efficacy and productivity”. If one adds to that a “managerial crisis”, then we face “a State that is incapable of providing quality education” because the “mass movement to make education universal caused the downfall of its quality.” The solution lies in “competition” but for that decentralization and privatization to happen, people should be willing to “invest in the education of their children”.

This speech has been heard over and over again during the last few decades because of the projects by International Financial Institutions, especially the World Bank and the Inter American Development Bank. They have replaced specialized international bodies such as UNESCO in the fields of educational (and social) orientation. Bankers transformed into teachers.

However, in the case of Ecuador, the analysis of the educational projects; as well as the evaluating documents by the IADB and the WB, show that the projects have not achieved the efficiency that was promised, much less the quality.

In the integral audit of the Ecuadorian External Debt, three educational areas and a technological one were analyzed. The educational areas or credits were BID 834/SF-EC, subscribed in 1990 for project PROMECEB; BID 1142/OC-EC subscribed in 1998 for the “Redes Amigas” Program; and credit BM 3425/S-EC of 1992, for EB/Prodec. Those three are the largest, the most resource-intensive and the most powerful participants in the destruction of the national educational system, and they are also the results of an illegitimate debt.<sup>1</sup>

In these projects, “...whose final purpose was to create decentralized educational structures in all things pedagogical, managerial and financial; the neoliberal policy is crystal clear. By separating the central ministries from the educational institutions of a homogeneous and/or geographical zone, the control is given to the community and parents,

\*Ecuadorian Teacher, Member of the Researchers SEPA Network, January 2010

1 ISCH L. Edgar (2008). WB and IADB: a debt to impose neoliberal politics in education. Comisión para la Auditoría Integral de Crédito Público -CAIC-. Quito.



which can be interpreted as a strategy to transfer educational management to private actors instead of the State.”<sup>2</sup>

The intent of favoring the private sector is also noticeable in the hiring of consultants and NGOs to do the works of teacher training, private printing presses, and construction labor. Those tasks used to be in the hands of the Ministry of Education, which is now weaker due to this ill-oriented process.

The motivation behind is clearly not considering the reality of the country and the projects are nothing but a series of impositions. Some, of an economic nature, are similar to the credits (loans?) of old times. But others disregard the national legislation, and thus apply a separate set of rules from those of the existing educational system. Therefore, changes in the legal system are promoted and labor conditions are twisted outside of the Law. The orientation that is followed is foreign to consultation processes and national agreements.

Because of all of that and much more, the popular and academic sectors — of which the Union of National Educators (UNE) stands out— demanded an audit. UNE was right since even the project reports themselves acknowledged that the substantial changes, like the creation of school networks, were outside of the current law.

The responsibility of the IADB and the WB is somewhat accepted in their own reports when they speak of the inefficiency of the loan (PROMECEB), the reduced progress (Redes Amigas) and even of having ended and closed the projects without the compulsory assessment (EB/PRODEC). The figures of the basic education learning curve, where the loans were directed, were of little or no use to the objectives that adorned the signing of the external debt components<sup>3</sup>.

Curiously enough, if they had not failed or avoided in complying with their own evaluations, they would have proven that the loans were unnecessary. Just as unnecessary as tying the country to the conditions set by a multilateral bank, where the standardized evaluation proposal was born.

In 1992, the World Bank EB/PRODEC Project carried out the first tests under the name of “APRENDO” (“I learn”) to assess the understanding of math and language amongst the students. Although some consideration was given to the life conditions, the information was buried deeply and the “grades” were only used to promote another campaign against the reputation of the public education system.

Nothing good came out of those tests because after the results were made public, no other action was taken to promote Ecuadorian education. On the contrary, neoliberalism weakened the educational system more and more

<sup>2</sup> ISCH L. Edgar (2008). BM y BID: deuda para imponer la política neoliberal en educación. Comisión para la Auditoría Integral de Crédito Público -CAIC-. Quito. <sup>3</sup> PALADINES, Carlos (2002). *Ibid.* Pág 11.

4. ISCH L. Edgar (2008). *Ibid.*.



by its budgetary reductions, the random fragmentation of the system and by placing all the responsibility of the whole system in the shoulders of teachers.

Not long ago, while speaking of the results of the “SER” tests, the Ministry of Education pointed out that the results showed that no progress had been made in twelve years. What was not mentioned was that during that time, the Ministry was headed by the same minister than in the two previous administrations (Raul Vallejo C). So for more than 5 years, he worked directly with the IADB and the WB neoliberal projects.

#### *Teachers' evaluation and the current Ecuadorian government*

When Rafael Correa first took office, he was widely supported since he had defended causes that had been popular for 30 years. In the beginning, while still trying to comply with his electoral promises, he significantly increased the social budget and he eliminated the “voluntary” enrollment fee of 25 dollars that had kept more than 300 thousand children out of school. He also offered school breakfasts and the delivery of uniforms in rural areas. The wages of teachers were increased, even if humbly, and there were talks of creating 12,000 new official teaching positions (no new posts had been created since 1998).

But later on, the government weakened its position, started showing signs of shifting to the right; and even violated articles of the Constitution approved in 2008. Furthermore, in spite of the existing funds, no efficient management was achieved, none of the 12,000 new positions were ever created, the contract-based system still remained, no substantial infrastructure improvements were made (beyond four schools “of the millennium” with new technology) but most importantly; no national educational proposal was presented that could in the very least justify the pompous and widely-used word of “revolution”.

The government of Rafael Correa is adding up more affronts against the popular sectors which for more than

thirty years defended the causes that made him win the presidency.

His liberal democracy regards all subjects as citizens and therefore, in a factitious way, as equals in society. But he is ignoring those who are the natural allies of the change process; those who are now questioning the role of Correa himself, as he has abandoned his initial positions.

Under this context and thorough a clever and intense propaganda, the government is acting in an authoritarian way, and has attacked indigenous populations, teachers, public workers, professors, college students, ecologists and communities who are defending their water resources from the abuse of the miners.

Was the problem with the teachers caused by UNE? The facts prove that is incorrect. On the one hand, UNE had not gone on strike since 2003, so the people who claim it is an annual event are wrong. Same with those who say it happens every time elections are approaching, since that was not the case either. UNE showed its support towards the government and the President several times, without “even asking a position as a janitor” in return. The support was given with the hope of one day seeing important proposals become a reality.

That was the situation when the Second Public Education Congress took place; which was organized by the Faculties of Philosophy, FEUE, FESE, the parents and many other actors who wanted to create a real educational plan. Clearly, the government had not been able to do so, but they loved using fancy words like “quality” or “warmth”; or using false phrases as the “literate country”. They even presented a fake award (SER 2008) to some schools only to backtrack later and say that they had only counted with provisional data. As a matter of fact, the definite results were not released until December 2009, but the key methodological elements remained hidden.

In 2008, UNE held its National Congress in the City of Loja and more than five thousand teachers welcomed President Correa, the first one in the guest list for such an important event. They gave him an integral educational proposal called “Education for Emancipation”. Obviously, while he was there, he neither insulted the leaders nor did he call them “the mafia”. He paid attention to the proposal and listened to the round of applauses with which the teachers supported it. He also heard the booing directed to the Ministry of Education for not having delivered the 12 thousand positions promised in the beginning of the administration (up until November 2008, only 3,000 permanent positions had been granted, while 6 thousand teachers held a temporary job in accordance to neoliberalistic flexible labor practices).

Sometime later, UNE announced its position regarding how the new teaching positions and school authorities should be designated, which was a merit-based approach after the strikes. But the government had already closed its ears and started attacking the union. They did not accept

to debate the General Law on Education, which forced UNE to present the National Assembly with their first bill of law supported by the left-wing block (the Popular Democratic Movement and Pachakitik).

The government distorted the proposals, the leaders were disqualified and Rafael Correa himself called for the creation of a new UNE. In spite of having full media support, his attempt failed and it was a political defeat which instead of harming UNE, reinforced the teachers support for it. The decision was made to keep UNE, the most numerous union and the one with the best internal democratic mechanisms.

The conflict of the teachers’ assessment emerged under such circumstances. It was a process which violated the recently voted Constitution of Ecuador, since it was done without the existence of the respective autonomous body and with only a partial technical compliance. It was a standardized evaluation applied in a country of an ample diversity, based on a True/False or multiple choice format and of a very punitive nature. The only result that came out of it was the pretention of blaming the teachers for the educational crises.

The intention has been to hide —and forgive us for repeating ourselves— that the educational crisis is the fault of neoliberal education and of the IADB and the World Bank external debt projects; and of the governments that never accepted and of the UNE criteria. If the UNE proposals had been heard and applied; there would have been some sense in the accusations against the union. But it has all been due to the decisions of the anti-popular governments, something that does not happen with any other professional association.

Quite the opposite! Thanks to the social struggle teachers have fought in the defense of public education, it has not been totally destructed and the neoliberal recipe has not been fully applied, as was the intention, in the insisted “municipalization”, the vouchers, the “freedom” of the educational market and the greater flexibility of teachers.

Nobody in the country spoke against the evaluation nor did the many critical voices —including former ministers and UNE. It was a simple and total rejection against its nature and so they demanded an integral evaluation of the educational system not merely based on an exam. They asked for an assessment that would not only seek a grade, but that would analyze the causes, with an integral view on training, and that would seek corrective actions. That is why the majority of the teachers resisted in spite of the threats and pressures and even when facing the police forces.

#### *The SER evaluation when applied to students*

The Minister, with its own neoliberal perspective, thinks standardized evaluation is appropriate. But a government that was democratic in its origin should correct the cour-

se of action while still timely. Unfortunately, a neoliberal approach is now “fashionable”.

Let us go back in time. In June 2008, the tests were applied to the students and even though no details were given regarding how the people in charge were hired or what methodology was followed, the test drafts were published on the website of the Ministry of Education. An educational researcher and former director of the National Educational Planning Office, José Brito Albuja, pointed out in a study that the tests had more than 300 mistakes, many of them quite serious, since there were more than one right answer or no correct answer at all in the multiple choice section.

Allegedly, the new tests have corrected the mistakes, but they are kept secret. Some awards for the “best educational institutions 2009” were presented by “educational unit” (integrated preschool, elementary and secondary or junior high school – almost non-existing in the public sector) which were not even considered in the initial methodology. By the way, they “forgot” to award a “winning” high school. Anyway, their methodology remains a secret.

After the awards and because of the criticism they got from different sectors, they accepted that they only had “provisional” data, but that did not stop the Ministry from attacking the public education system. It was not until November 2009 when the final results were obtained, fact that only cast more doubt over their veracity. Up until the present time, no measure has been taken stemming from the evaluation and almost nothing has been discussed from the results. For instance, as far as the school infrastructure goes, the schools got a grade of 3.3 over 10<sup>4</sup>.

### *Teacher assessment*

When finally the 12 thousand full-time positions were announced, the discussion centered around how to assess teachers. The jobs were meant for the people who had a precarious contract (which is forbidden by the New Political Constitution).

As unbelievable as it sounds, 97% of the people who took the reasoning test did not pass it. “According to the logical reasoning evaluations, the applicants obtained an average of 44/100 and 55/100 for the subjects they teach, two relatively low grades” according to Jaime Cardona, the Colombian civil engineer who has a Master Degree in Public Administration and who is in charge of the education standardization process of the Ministry<sup>5</sup>.

But instead of questioning whether there was something wrong with the test –because if we accept the opposite was true, it would mean that most of the adult Ecuadorian popu-

lation have rates below what is considered normal—the Ministry took advantage of the situation to attack the teachers, the universities and treated the designations in a suspicious way. What would a teacher do if 97% of his students did not pass a test? Would s/he not review it, rewrite it, validate it and apply it again?

Previously, in November 2008, a pilot teacher assessment was done with volunteers (who were offered a monetary gratification). Once again, the terms in which the people in charge of the assessment were selected remains unknown; as was the political context in which the results would be used.

Aside from the pedagogical and core-subject tests, an assessment of the school directives and parents was included. But the process had some uncorrected failures, as the following testimony shows<sup>6</sup>:

“The teachers who took the voluntary test last November complained about how little time they were given to prepare themselves for yesterday...The teachers were expecting to get good grades in this stage of the evaluation, because they say they did poorly the first time...Inexplicably, their grades were low, in spite of the fact that their self-assessment and the assessment of parents, students and directors were satisfactory; or there were notes on tests they never took...Samuel Riquero, professor of the 7th grade at the Enrique Vallejo School, pointed out that he got 39 points, even though his self-assessment grade was much higher, just like the case of his fellow workers and their principal...The leaders of the National Union of Educators (UNE) have denounced that many of the tests that were taken in November were lost by the Ministry of Education”.

There were multiple denounces, but the media ignored them and the Ministry discredit them. In spite of it all, and without any reports on any change or adjustment, teachers were required to take the generalized test under threats and claims that the teacher who failed it would be laid off. The President himself announced on national TV that the positions would be occupied by “high school students with short classes.”

What sort of evaluation has been proposed by the Ministry of Education?

There are several adjectives that describe the nature of the governmental evaluation. For instance:

**UNCONSTITUTIONAL:** Article 99 of the Constitution states that there should be an autonomous organization for evaluating the educational system. But since such entity does not exist, the Ministry (which is not autonomous) is in charge of the process.

**ILLEGAL:** As acknowledge by the Minister when he sent the amendments to the Law to fire the teachers, after having applied the process and having computed the results.

<sup>4</sup> “Education got 3,3 over 10 in infrastructures and equipment”. *Expreso Journal*, February 11, 2009. Guayaquil, Ecuador.

<sup>5</sup> “ ‘Elegible’ Teachers with notes in red in their evaluations, article by the *El Universo Journal*, June 7, 2010.



**DISCRIMINATORY:** It is conceived with only one type of professional in mind: one who works for the State. Nothing is said about teachers who work at a private school, as though they did not belong to the educational system. Wouldn't it be good if the ministers and the representatives took the test?

**DECEITFUL:** A test cannot measure the quality of the whole education, neither can it measure the quality of teachers (James Popham from the University of California asks: "How much can teachers know when they have survived without even the basic conditions?")

**ETHNOCENTRICAL:** It does not take into account the cultural or geographical differences. It is irresponsible to evaluate something while ignoring its reality and its applicable working conditions.

**EFFICIENCY-OBSSESSED:** Neoliberals see everything through the eyes of economic efficiency. For them, it is cheaper to train 30% instead of all the teachers. The idea is to train only those who fail, and forget about the rest.

**PUNITIVE.**-It was meant as a tool to lay off people, not to educate them. It is a reward or punishment approach.

**STIGMATIZING:** If the students learn about the "level label" that is given to their teachers, their relationship is damaged. It affects the authority and the rights of the teachers.

**EXPENSIVE:** Not only from the economic standpoint, but also in terms of the classroom hours lost.

**PRIVATIZING:** It helps to destroy the trust in public schools and the social value of professors.

**PARTIAL:** Teachers are judged separately from the whole educational system.

**CUANTITATIVE:** It only measures, but it does not evaluate. It does not evaluate the performance of such a difficult activity as teaching.

The proposal caused immediate reactions and conflicts. The government did not hesitate in announcing its repressive measures, or in sending policemen and army troopers to intimidate the teachers, with the support of the right-wing press. It even attempted to put one town against another one, and parents against teachers. It organized a national gathering in Guayaquil on May 29, 2009 with a very poor attendance in spite of the blackmail and threats that were reported many times over.

By then, UNE had already made a call for resistance under the auspice of Constitutional Article 98 that states: "the individuals and the collective groups can exert their right to resist vis à vis the actions or omissions of any public authority, people or legal non-state entity that might infringe upon their constitutional rights or do so to demand the acknowledgement of their new rights."

The resistance on the one hand, planned a boycott of the tests and most of the teachers refused to take them. On the

other, an integral evaluation proposal was presented stemming from the classrooms and not from a desire for standardization.

### *The stoppage becomes compulsory*<sup>6</sup>

The counterattack was an attempt to economically strangle the organization by preventing the voluntary contributions (which are voluntary as is the affiliation) from reaching the financial department of the Ministry; as well as by blocking the discounts teachers are given in certain stores with which there is an agreement. This was done from the highest authority spheres and from the Social Contract to structure another union, but again they failed.

A little time later, teachers were included in a governmental bill of law called "the Organic Law for Public Servants" which sought to eliminate eight wage components: basic wage, seniority, educational and family income, pedagogic compensation bonus, and the border and Amazon bonus (Napo and Galapagos) and the retirement incentive. This would have a serious impact on their income and rights.

This is how the government forced UNE to go on strike. In spite of the dire conditions, the union leaders never stopped expressing the need for a dialog and kept their doors open. In the mean time, the government rejected everything, accused and insulted, forgot the 30 years of neoliberalism and blamed the teachers for all the problems of the educational system. That was the beginning of the massive strike, accompanied by big public actions that would grow even larger with the solidarity from CONAIE when they started their own uprising.

### *The UNE platform included the following:*

To have five thousand schools reopened; transform one-teacher schools into multiple-teacher schools (complete schools); comply with the promise of full-time positions and stop the temporary contracts; infrastructure for the creation of the eighth years of basic education program for the current schools; a National Education Plan that is free, of a high quality and that involves teachers, students, parents and all the Ecuadorians. A Pedagogical Model that breaks away from the out-of-date teaching practices, the foundations for an Emancipating Public School that unifies the learning process with community and with social development.

Compliance with the governmental commitments, like a timely payment of \$25 per student in basic education, \$30 for students in the high school, accountability of the Ministry of Education to guarantee that a proper attention is given to the popular sectors.

<sup>6</sup> This fragment is taken from an article written by the author for La Tendencia Journal No 10 entitled: "The government and its conflict with teachers."

An Intercultural General Organic Educational Law that guarantees a free and high quality education, the participation and social controllership from the Congress of Education with Social Participation and the involvement of Educational Communal Councils in each Fiscal Educative Institution, every "Fisco-misional" and private school that allows for the participation of students and parents in the educational process. Accountability for the Professional Teaching Degree Law that eliminated the requirement of being a professional educator to be able to teach and established the evaluation as a sole cause for a lay-off and which made the educational institution officials and directors su-

bordinated to the Ministry of Education (which took away the teachers right to defend themselves, being represented and the surveillance according to the Law).

Prevent the laying off of 2,657 teachers against Constitutional Article 98.

Rights as the border bonus, a dignified wage and a retirement plan, the timely payment of the discounts for IESS contributions, the official appointment of thirteen thousand popular educators and the rejection of the proposed Organic Law for Public Servants.

Abolition of Executive Degree 1780 that hands over the legal authority of the Amazonia, Galapagos and Esmeral-



das to the catholic missions, as well as all State resources destined to education, health, highway administration, and communication means, fact that threatens the victory of secularism after the liberal revolution and Eloy Alfaro.

This platform was hidden from the public with the help of a great part of the media by arguing that the quarrel was only about the teacher evaluation. That is false, and the concessions granted by the government to reinstate the dialog prove it.

Unfortunately, the repression caused the death of an Amazonian indigenous teacher by the name of Bosco Wisma, who curiously enough reflected the unity of the teachers' movement and the indigenous one. It was not until that unfortunate event that the government opened up to dialog while the strikes went on, the indigenous groups marched in a national demonstration followed by the teachers in a protest that gathered more than fifteen thousand people. The beginning of the dialog gave rise to three initial agreements, the suspension of the strike and the start of the high level negotiation tables.

The dialog is bearing fruits, because agreements have been reached in numerous aspects of the Organic Law for General Education to improve education, like the incorporation of the principles of "Education for Emancipation": teachers, students and parents are guaranteed their right to participate; teachers were withdrawn from the Public Servant Law; the National Autonomous Evaluation Institute was created along with the school of governments (or communal councils); the indigenous movement recovered DINEIB; UNE proposals for ten different category tiers and dignified wages have been accepted; people in the Mountain Ranges have taken their evaluations, and no sanctions were exerted against the teachers who exercised their right to practice resistance.

But many other issues are still pending. Up until December, there is still the question of how to guarantee the right to education, the role of the municipalities (which is still open to interpretation according to the Law since the Constitution is not specific about it); the structuring of the educational circuits through a bidding and the change from the old tier system into the new one. The position of the Ministry is an economic objective of not granting higher wage increases to the already existing ones while UNE is defending the view that teachers should be remunerated according to their academic achievements, merits and seniority so that the new systems acknowledges wholly what the life of teachers is worth.

Education is an area of vital importance for the future of a country. That is what the world says. Different studies and specialized international organizations state that no reform will be successful without the active help of teachers, or even worse, if they are treated as enemies. They also agree

that having a unified and proactive guild is a positive trait to value. The government, the teachers and society as a whole should be aware of that because the dialog needs to continue. It should be promoted and publicized to open new spaces, so that without any prejudice or stereotype, new ways can be paved.

UNE has spoken of the need to hold a national debate on democratic ways, of the participation of parents, students, teachers and society from the very schools for the construction of a national educational project and the evaluation of the whole system, its history and the responsible parties. Quality public education requires financing but it also requires a new appreciation of the social work of a teacher, of a democratic management, of dignified working conditions that guarantee that the roof of a school will not fall on the heads of the children as what happened in Guayaquil where many were injured and others killed.

It is now up to the State to respond to the challenges that are supported by countless studies by UNESCO, the Education International Agency and other specialized organizations.

If we look back and remember what has happened with the dialog with the indigenous movement, the higher education and communication laws, we can conclude that the actions of the popular sectors are a strong wake up call for the government, but they also provide a chance (the last one?) for it not to deviate from the course that has earned the support of the majority. It would be very positive if, along from the dialog that resulted from the confrontation and the strength gained by popular organizations that are going back to their starring roles, a full rapprochement is finally achieved.

The best example is the electoral victory in Bolivia, where the support for the President who was sensitive to social movements is constantly growing. We must think about the future of a change process and the forces that are required to maintain it and of the orientation sources it should have. If not, the people will become disappointed once more and their stand could be radicalized or the Right-wing would take over the full control of the political establishment. The game is not over yet.





## The struggle against standardized evaluation: in defense of the right to education

María de la Luz Arriaga Lemus\*



Twenty thousand teachers in the Mexican state of Morelos (just south of Mexico City) declared a strike (public and constitutional) in August 2008 to demand cancellation of the so-called Alliance for Educational Quality (Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación -ACE). The strike lasted 79 days and included marches to the national capital. Education workers in the state of Puebla followed suit a few months later. In both cases, the teachers forming the masses of these movements surpassed union leaders, occupying the respective union headquarters and advancing their demand for union democracy. The protest soon expanded to 17 union sections throughout the country.

These measures were unleashed at the beginning of the new school year in the northern hemisphere following the first application of standardized tests to teachers to cover vacancies, in the context of strong attacks against public education and teachers.

While the cases of Morelos and Puebla received the most attention, protests, work stoppages and strikes were maintained in multiple regions of the country over the course of a year and in some cases continue today, almost two years later. Most notably, in two provinces in which democratic movements have waged active battles to open paths within the SNTE since the 1980s, Oaxaca and Michoacán, the government decided not to implement the ACE program, with the intention to limit the protest against this aggressive

neoliberal policy in the education sphere. Manifestations opposed to ACE have nevertheless also emerged in these states.

### *Why oppose an Alliance for Educational Quality?*

The Alliance for Educational Quality is in reality a pact forged in exclusion for exclusion. On 15 May 2008, the lifetime president of the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación -SNTE),<sup>1</sup> Elba Esther Gordillo, and Mexican President Felipe Calderón signed an "Alliance of the government and the teachers of the country represented by SNTE, for the quality of education."<sup>2</sup>

ACE was forged in exclusion given the complete lack of consultation with the education subjects (teachers, parents, and students). It is a pact between two national political power groups: that of Elba Esther Gordillo and that of Felipe Calderón and the PAN party,<sup>3</sup> to advance in the segmentation of the education system, and to continue to impose a business logic in the education sphere through maintenance of budget restrictions and increased use of standardized tests and the weight of the results of the same in the definition of

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<sup>1</sup> El SNTE agrupa a los maestros de educación básica, secundaria y superior, que dependen del gobierno nacional y los estados (provincias), es un sindicato corporativo, que forma parte del sistema político. Por su fuerza numérica y económica, se ha constituido en un grupo de poder que forma parte del bloque dominante. Este sindicato docente es el único en América Latina que no sólo avala las apolíticas neoliberales sino que las promueve. Al interior del sindicato, desde hace 30 años hay un movimiento democratizador que aglutina a una tercera parte de los afiliados al SNTE (más o



education contents, while also using them to economically reward or punish teachers.

Since 1993, a program has been in force in Mexico, promoted by the SNTE and the technocrats that shape the country's public education, of performance-based remuneration (according to productivity) for teachers and directors employed in the basic education system throughout the country. It is known as the "teaching career" (carrera magisterial) program. It initially evaluated five "factors": years of service, academic level, professional training, accreditation of updating and training courses, and professional performance. ACE further consolidates the productivity-based elements, suppressing certain factors such as years of service, academic level, and professional preparation, to exclusively consider three factors: student progress (measured through standardized tests approved by the National System of Educational Evaluation and applied to the students), criteria which now holds 60% of the weight in the carrera magisterial program; independently-certified updating courses, accounting for 20%, and professional performance, 20%.

The changes in the country's educational approach are based on education by competitions, which is a reductionist form of the teaching-learning process. The study plan for grades 1 through 6 (primary school) and the contents of the free texts distributed for these levels were changed for the 2010 school year. With ACE, standardized tests are reinforced as the form through which to "evaluate" quality: that of the students, the teachers, and the schools.

The combination of these ACE measures will not elevate educational quality. On the contrary, we fear that the result will be greater deterioration of education, given that the true sense and content of the teaching-learning process is contrary to these business criteria.

### *The Alliance: a means to restrict rights*

In Mexico, the right to education is a social right won in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, officially recognized and specifically formulated in Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution. What does this mean? That society mandates the State to

menos 300 mil trabajadores de la educación), que se agrupan en la Coordinadora Nacional de los Trabajadores de la educación y otros movimientos magisteriales emergentes en el último año en algunos estados como los de Morelos y Puebla.

<sup>2</sup> Discurso de Felipe Calderón, en el acto de firma de la Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación, versión estenográfica, publicada en el portal de la SEP [www.sep.gob.mx](http://www.sep.gob.mx)

<sup>3</sup> El partido gobernante es el Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), un partido de derecha.

guarantee public education, lay and free for all Mexicans, male and female, from preschool through the upper level.

With ACE, attempts are being made to modify Constitutional Article 3. The modification currently approved by the Chamber of the House –not yet passed along for Senate review— contains three substantive changes. Through the first of these, the free status of education is preserved, but the route is legalized to institutionalize contributions by parents and private parties (foundations, etc.). The second change is oriented to legalize the evaluation strategies (standardized evaluation of teacher and institutional performance). The third change, while preserving the obligation that State-imparted education be lay, eliminates this obligation within education imparted by private institutions.

### *Building alternatives*

The resistance to ACE continues, with a high cost being paid by the democratic teaching sectors. Educators have been fired for their participation in the Morelos strike and administrative sanctions have been applied against the teachers of Puebla and other regions of the country.

On the other hand, an encouraging element is the fact that this movement, in which thousands of teachers across the country currently participate, has at its core the defense of education as a social right, and has channeled grassroots and democratic action toward the generation of alternative education proposals. The struggle for union democracy accompanies this process, as a condition for the defense of education in Mexico.

In Morelos, numerous forums and workshops have been organized in this spirit since the beginning of the strike and throughout these almost two years. The democratic teachers organized three Congresses in 2009, one for parents, another for students, and another for teachers. Despite the administrative repression and harassment unleashed by official union headquarters, the democratic teachers of Morelos are currently elaborating their alternative education proposal, founded in transformative, humanistic, and democratic principles.

The teachers of Puebla are also currently in this process, and in Michoacán, the almost 60,000 education workers within democratic SNTE-CNTE section XVIII achieved the implementation of a pilot program of integral basic education schools, now in place for several years. This emancipative and democratic integral education project has succeeded in setting aside the instrumental conception of education, with integral forms of evaluation, incorporating communities in the education actions.<sup>4</sup> Democratic section XXII of SNTE-CNTE, grouping close to 70,000 education workers in Oaxaca, has also developed alternative education experiences in many of the state's schools, and since 2005 promotes the educational movement of the state of Oaxaca and the construction of the State Plan of Education.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Para más información consulte la página [www](http://www).

<sup>5</sup> El CEDES de la sección 22 cuenta con una página electrónica, [www](http://www).



# The evaluation that we have, the evaluation that we need

**Hugo Aboites,**  
**Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco**

BCTF Education Conference: "Protecting our children's future" & School Assessment Workshop-Rethinking Accountability  
British Columbia Teachers Federation, Vancouver, Canada

November 13, 2009.

In comparing countries like Canada and Mexico we tend to emphasize the obvious: deep differences in their history, politics, social structure and, more specifically, in the features of their respective educational system. For example, it is hard to get away from the fact that Mexican basic education system has nearly 20 million students, that there is basically one single teachers union in the whole country with 1.5 million members, and that the Constitution mandates that the President of the Republic and its cabinet would determine the contents of the official school books that are issued to every student of basic education. These features may be noteworthy, but they hide the fact that neoliberal globalization in many respect is pushing a vastly different educational systems into a uniform culture. One of the most notorious and important is, no doubt, the conception and practice of the assessment of schools, children and teachers. Countries of many different continents we all seem to be converging

in a common culture of what it means to evaluate, to assess and, thus, what it means to educate.

In countries like Mexico the pace has been especially rapid and profound. To the point that this country is now an extreme example of just how far the promoters of the new assessment are willing to go. Before the nineties, for example, evaluation, as we now know it, was practically not existing in Mexico. Practices such as standardized testing were confined to verifying a few samples of students of basic education, or to select those who will be admitted in some of the most demanded public universities of the country. But by the beginning of the nineties, the IMF, the World Bank, NAFTA and then the OCDE explicitly pressured Mexico to organize a complete structure of evaluation. Therefore, in 1990-1992, the federal government established the first merit pay programs in its history for teachers and faculty; promoted a private system of accreditation of professional programs; created a replica of the American Educational





Testing Service (ETS) (called Ceneval or National Center for the Evaluation of Higher Education) and has recently (2006) started a massive programs of testing for students of elementary and secondary education.

As a result of this latter initiative, students in grades three to twelve, absolutely all of them, must now undergo a federal standardized test on Spanish and Math, called ENLACE (Examen Nacional de Logro Académico en Centros Escolares). In addition, those who finish grade 12 and want to continue to grade 13 are evaluated by a single national admission standardized test called EXANI-I (Examen Nacional de Ingreso-1). Those who finish grade fifteen and want to proceed to higher education must pass the EXANI-II, also a multiple choice test; those who finished the second year of higher education may be tested with EXIL or intermediate standardized exam (Examen Intermedio de Licenciatura); those who concluded higher education are evaluated with EGEL (Examen General de Egreso de Licenciatura), an exiting test that also serves as a certification of readiness for the job; in addition, those who desire to go to a graduate school have to approve the EXANI-III, similar to the previous ones. Furthermore, all those who wish to become teachers in public schools have as the only requisite, to pass an 80 items test, and in the works is a law that will require every one of the three million professionals of the country to pass a standardized test every five years to renew their certification.

As a consequence of all this, right now about 17 million students are evaluated every year. In about three years we will be reaching the 100 hundred million subjects tested, a number equivalent to the size of the entire population in Mexico. All this means that from the age of 8 to the age of around 70 people will be tested, and tested, and tested again. It has been said that in the medieval ages the church was to accompany people from cradle to grave. It is clear now that evaluation has emerged as a new and equally powerful religion.

How to explain this test mania? One truthful but incomplete explanation points to the pressure brought to bear by the above mentioned international financial organizations. They had "helped" to solve the enormous debt crisis of the eighties, but in return they demanded and gained the right

to place Mexican public finances under a close scrutiny. Education, being the single most important part of the national budget –up to 25 percent- and the bigger of the public administration in terms of expenditures, personnel and infrastructure, was the obvious main target of the surveillance. Accreditations, tests, merit pay programs, were then the concrete instruments of this big brother strategy. Seen from this perspective, for Mexicans educators accountability was born not as a way in which they can see what was going on with education, but rather as an instrument to keep a close check on them. The implicit rationale seemed simple: if you follow the American way and use the American rituals then you are in the right track, you have an efficient and quality oriented system. In this perspective, assessment was to be considered mostly as an imperialistic instrument.

However, this hypothesis does not explain something rather paradoxical in our continent. Like the fact that both the Canadian and Mexican structure of assessment or evaluation share some very important and essential characteristics of subordination. The bone structure of assessment as a control instrument seems to be the same. If this is true, it means that there is something in common between the two countries that is creating the same type of structure in spite the fact that Canada can hardly be considered as a country as subordinated as Mexico.

Following is a list of traits that Mexico and Canada now share in the field of evaluation:

We –Mexican teachers and faculty- did not conceived or designed the evaluation structure, it was simply imposed on us. And, as far as is known, neither Canadian teachers had a chance to voice their opinions regarding the creation of the evaluation structure which begins to be constructed around British Columbia schools. In that respect, in both countries assessment share a similar authoritarian trait.

Besides being authoritarian, the present strategy of assessment appears as essentially external to schools both in Canada and Mexico. It is not something that flows out the educational processes that take place in classrooms, and teachers do not participate in the conception, design and operation of the assessment practices.

It is an assessment that is culturally imposing. A single form of assessment for all schools; a uniform way of thinking what achievement means that is imposed upon many different and diverse cultures, languages, regions, educational needs and schools throughout the country.

It also tends to be irrelevant in the sense that it does not addresses the contents and issues that are capital in a given province, region, culture and school. A Canadian school may be located in an area of strong immigration from Asia or a Mexican school could be in the middle of a region with a strong presence of original people, yet the present assessment strategies do not consider or include this at all.

The assessment that is used both in Canada and Mexico (and more and more other countries) contributes to the impoverishment of the curricula. Many studies have confirmed that 'studying to the test' is a classroom strategy that greatly reduces the attention and time teachers devote to





other areas of the study plans. For schools in poor contexts, specially, the test becomes the reference of the basic curriculum, as they strive not to fall too behind in the scores. The triviality and superficiality of test, furthermore, induces to a reduction of the complexity of what should be studied in the classroom.

Assessment in the form of standardized testing emphasizes the individualization of teachers, students and schools. By ranking schools, the evaluators prompt them to become competitors. Students face learning collectively as a group in the classroom, but then the test emphasizes individuality. In Mexico now and probably later in Canada, evaluating children has become an evaluation of teachers and the state and local authorities use the results to subtly pitch teachers against each other.

Test results tend to be used also to disqualify schools, teachers and students. By parading test results of different schools, the links of collaboration between parents, communities with schools are eroded. Recrimination usually follows the insistence in comparing and disqualifying teachers and schools.

Standardized test, nevertheless, is usually not a very good and instrument to measure achievement. A significant number of items of these test have confusing, incorrect or several correct answers. Paradoxically, the instrument that is used to measure "quality in education" is in itself a manufacture of questionable quality.

External assessment takes the place and excludes the professional educator and its complex and multiple functions as a day by day evaluator. It also excludes the active and democratic participation of students, parents, school communities in the assessment of what is going on in school. From being the main actors in the educational process, teachers and students become a passive object, the evaluated.

Standardized testing, as the Mexican and American experience shows in many studies, has been proven openly discriminatory against women and those students that come from poor families, indigenous communities or different cultures.

Both in Mexico and Canada testing is not done by a public university, a group of schools or a public office but by private agencies responding to private interests. Assessment not only tends to be bias against the more vulnerable public

schools but has also become a lucrative enterprise in spite of the claims of being provided by “non profit organizations”. Evaluating 70 million people again and again, as it the case in Mexico, has certainly demonstrated its potential as a very profitable industry.

-II-

This convergence of traits between so different countries requires a different explanatory hypothesis. A more comprehensive explanation.. In that direction we can think that the international financial organizations simply play a subsidiary role in the case of countries like Mexico. They were only the instruments of a deeper strategy. Such strategy is a world trend aimed at reducing education, to deny the majority of the children the opportunity of constructing significant knowledge. We are dealing with a trend that emphasizes that most students of all ages should only receive a minimal baggage of abilities, information and values (the so called ‘competencies’ of the European Tuning Project) that are relevant for their future as part of a planetary workforce. A docile workforce that is prepared by a disciplined army of teachers always controlled and afraid of what the tests will be. A trend that is actively promoted by governments, corporations and by the circular logic of the evaluators (if things do not get better with systematic evaluation,

that only means that more evaluation is necessary). This is a trend that has no boundaries and makes no substantial distinctions between rich and poor nations. The basic idea is that globalization should also create in every country a globalized workforce destitute of present labor and social rights.

In spite of this preconceived future, teachers in many countries are resisting. In different manners they try to analyze and respond to the meaning and implications of this new wave of assessment. They also resist in different manners, like demonstrating, bringing the case to parents, media, communities and other organizations, trying to rise consciousness and gain force vis a vis this new phenomena. But both in Canada and Mexico we are also witnessing that teachers not only choose to resist but seek to create new ideas about what assessment should be. A different assessment, that brings together the point of view of teachers, students, parents, communities. And an important part of that process consists of collecting as much inspiration as possible to gain perspective and force in order to venture into creating other possible worlds of assessment.

One of the possible sources of creativity and strength for us is to try to define what we want by moving in the opposite direction to the where the above mentioned traits insist in taking teachers and school communities. With that in mind,







it is possible to say that we want assessment strategies that are 1) defined from the dynamics of the schools themselves; 2) culturally and academically diverse; 3) flexible, that is, capable of responding to local, regional and school issues, as well as capable of responding to priorities and concerns of parents and community; 4) a source of enrichment for the curriculum and for school, parents and communities activities around the school; 5) a manner for strengthening the collectivity and solidarity traits among teachers, students, parents, communities and other schools; 6) of a quality defined by the school and students needs; 7) not based on standardized testing; 8) a source of growth in democratic and citizens values and practices, 9) a source of pride for the schools and communities, and 10) a public and free good.

Another important source of inspiration consists of taking a look at what teachers, students and schools are doing at the classroom, school and community level. As alienating assessment begins to occupy more and more territory, teachers tend to feel the need to individually or collectively defend themselves and respond. And they create a vast multitude of small, anonymous, almost clandestine spaces of a counterculture of learning and assessing. These initiatives are the stuff from which the dreams of other possible education and assessment are made. These initiatives should be recovered, systematized and circulated. In Mexico, for example, some teachers of the state of Oaxaca are engaged

in a project that is called Tequio educativo which involves a more respectful relationship with the community, as teachers in a public assembly present to parents and others what their plans are for coming into this village and they ask permission to educate their children and invite them to participate in doing so. Other teachers seriously involve in recovering the language, legends and other cultural practices of the indigenous communities and including them in the curriculum, with the help of the members of the community. In Chiapas, the zapatista communities created their own educational system, choose teachers among the young of the communities, arrange for their training and support them. Initiatives like this all have some type of implicit way of assessing or evaluating what is considered important.

In other cases, like in the Xochimilco campus of the Metropolitan University of the City of Mexico (UAM) a different teaching-learning strategy has been officially in use for more than thirty five years, based on intense student participation, with the teacher acting as a coordinator; lots of readings and discussions; the development of teams of research on socially sensitive topics, and, also, a form of assessment democratically designed by teacher and students. This assessment explicitly intends to respond to the question on how can evaluation help to better learn. It is an strategy that in fact has displaced standardized testing and even writing exams from the institutional culture. As a result, the

grade that students obtain depends mostly on their effort as they are evaluated by the indicators they choose, and does not depend on the subjective appreciation of the teacher –or on external evaluations. It is a concrete way to return to students power over the learning process.

Experiences as the above have recently become relevant in the Mexican context of deep teachers unrest, due to unilateral government reforms (including assessment) that deeply affect their job stability. Since the year 2008 the discussion among teachers have moved from the perspective of merely organizing resistance to also the general idea that teachers have to begin making their own proposals for other education. And in such a trend, the need for a different assessment quickly surfaces, also in unexpected manners. In two states of Mexico teachers decided to boycott the National Exam from grades 3-12. In one instance, teachers barred the entrance to the school of the applicators of the exam and in other instance a group of teachers simple closed the road and stoped and retained the trucks that carried the booklets for the exam. As a result the official “Evaluation Week for ENLACE” had to be cancelled. At that point teachers were faced with the question of what to do during the five days that there was no classes (nor exam, of course). Weeks later, some of us proposed to engage in a completely different evaluation, a community and student based assessment week to know and reflect about the school in a truly “Parents, teachers, students and community evaluation week”.

During five days –the proposal went-, parents of the students of each group should gather to discuss where the students and the school is. This, to be done in the form of a mixture of events that include teacher-parents conferences; a discussion of parents and students of each group in every grade, and sessions of assessment of the school as a whole involving students, parents, teachers and members of the community. Teachers explain the situation and problems of the school and offer solutions; parents and community ask specific questions, voice their criticisms and make suggestions, and then in a final event at the end of the week, some tasks and initiatives are approved to be carried out jointly. Later, teachers and local school authorities discuss how to support and set in motion the approved initiatives.



The dynamics and results of the session of each school can be shared –in the form of a brief summary- with other schools, in the form of a growing net (and of course with the use of internet). This net may pass from the simple stage of sharing the results of local assessment to the creation of links of solidarity among schools more distant. How one school solved one problem may be of interest to many others. How another school came about evaluating itself may help others. The proposal also includes the idea that after the evaluation week finished selected representatives of schools and communities come to a gathering at the local level and, later, at the state and national level. In this succession of events it will be possible not only to strengthen the relations of solidarity between students, teachers and parents of different schools, regions and states but also to review the overall report on the situation of the schools at each of these spaces. A state report on the situation of the schools is possible, and it could be used as the official teachers evaluation of the schools. Solutions to the most recurrent and widespread problems can be proposed at every step as well as initiatives to be taken by the union, communities, groups of schools or by higher educational authorities for the betterment of schools and the students education.

With proposals like this it is possible to say in a concrete manner what do we mean when we say that we want assessment strategies that are –like we said before- defined from the dynamics of the schools themselves; that are an open space for schools culturally and academically diverse; flexible, that is, where it is possible to capable of respond to local, regional and school issues, as well as to priorities and concerns of parents and community; a source of enrichment for the curriculum and for school because students, parents and communities say what they expect from the school; a manner for strengthening the collectivity and solidarity traits among teachers, students, parents, communities and other schools; a source of growth in democratic and citizens values and practices, and a way to revitalize the presence and function of the schools in the communities. A public space to run the schools offered by teaches as a public and free good.

If anything else proposals like this could be used as a point of start of a discussion about how far the idea of ‘other’ assessment can possibly go. And, above all, it serves to show that we should aim at a cultural change deep from the schools themselves. When gatherings and dynamics like the one here exemplified start involving more and more teachers and schools, they become unstoppable. As George Martel puts it, “they will not have enough people to police schools once teachers decide to begin to create their own alternatives”. In this and many other ways, Canadian and Mexican teachers, already brothen by the resistance to neoliberalism can also become brothers and sisters by the search of another wider, more socially just and humane definition of education. This could be the best of the contributions from the local schools to change the depredatory course of the present neoliberal globalization.

## A dialog between the leaders of COLPROSUMAH to be shared abroad

December 14, 2009, La Ceiba, Honduras



During the XL Ordinary Congress of the Honduran Teachers Professional College (COLPROSUMAH), carried out in the City of La Ceiba from December 9-14, 2009; a group of the leading teachers devoted some of their time to reflect upon their current circumstances, the coup d'état, their stories, ideas and feelings as Honduran women in struggle.

Their commitment, transparency, courage and love for the Honduran people and for all our peoples encourage them to share their stories and arguments in this Virtual Magazine of the IDEA Network, Intercambio.

They come from different provinces, like Danli-El Progreso, Trujillo-Colón, Yoro-El Progreso, Tegucigalpa, Guaimas-Yoro, Santa Barbara and others. Pseudonyms are used because if we protect their identity, we protect their fight and the Resistance of this admirable people.

*Interview by: María Trejos Montero*

**Elisa:** –Before this happened (the coup d'état), I never thought of myself as someone important, because nobody had ever looked our way; nobody had paid attention to people of limited resources the way President Manuel Zelaya did. He worked for the poor, which seems to have been his greatest sin. That is the reason why the elites banished him from the country on June 28, violating his rights as a citizen and as the main political figure of our country.

That is why our moral principles and convictions led us to join the Resistance in the City of Progreso de Yoro.

**Chavela:** –Previously, with President Zelaya, we lived in peace. He is a good president.

**Mar:** –I supported president Zelaya because he had a project I believed in. That is why I supported him. And through this project, I keep on supporting him.

Zelaya passed a wage increase for the teachers (2007-2009) with the Wage Adjustment Program (PASCE).



**Samara:** –No other president had granted us that benefit. Furthermore, he demanded free education. But I don't mean to say that everything was perfect.

**Mildred:** –I was sure he was good for us, as teachers and as a nation. I did not foresee this change and this attitude in a two-party country. I feared they would not let him go on (President Zelaya), and people laughed at me when I said that. The way in which he identified with the poor, the fight for the minimum wage, for fuel...

That is why the media war began, accusing him of siding with President Chavez. That makes you wonder, but we did not expect a coup.

### *June 28, the Coup d'État...*

**Sileny:** –Michelleti's roots go further than his birth.

His father sympathized with the atrocities committed by Mussolini...

**Chavela:** –Up until now, I had never lived through a coup d'état.

There was no coverage of it on the day it happened. I first learned about it when I heard the news on Telesur. That is where I first found out about the humiliations they made him go through and the way in which he was sent to another Central American country. I was disgusted by the people behind the coup and as of that moment, I became a part of the Resistance. We were not organized then, but we did bond.

I took part in a protest trek through seven Honduran provinces (Gracias a Dios, Atlántidas, Yoro, Santa Bárbara, Copán, Ocotepeque), we walked all the way down to San Pedro Sula, in the province of Cortes, where a mass was celebrated; and then there were some special acts. At that time the Costa Rican National soccer team was in San Pedro. Honduras was to play Costa Rica. The repression was strong, since they feared the Resistance was coming to disrupt. There were around 5000 soldiers...

**Alma:** –...Mel provided us with things no other Administration had given us. The elite turned against our leader because it felt threatened of losing its power over the country. For instance: the concessions, the thermal contracts, tax cancelations and other things.

**Doris:** –I believe that because of this Coup, we have gone back more than half a century. The far-right showed their claws, but the most conservative sector, speaking on behalf of democracy, are just like the pro-coup fraction...

### *And telling the truth...*

**Chavela:** –TV Channels, like Choluta Sur, have been repressed. Truth is not allowed. The station was taken over. From June 28 until the present day, has been interfered with because it does not agree with the Coup d'état. It is an independent channel owned by Edso Amado López who has fought and resisted every act of repression and humiliation he has been subjected to.

The same has been done to radio stations like Radio Progreso, Lobo, la Catracha and many more.

### *It's all about fighting and resisting!*

**Mila:** –The day before the Coup, I was very motivated because of the Cuarta Urna (Fourth Ballot Box) referendum, a public consultation that would greatly benefit the people. I became aware a coup had happened at 6:40 am, when the soldiers arrived to take us out of the church and close downtown Trujillo.

**Mar:** –The Coup d'état happened because this Project (President Zelaya's) was good for the people. That is why they decided to take him out, those people who for thousands of years, since the time of the conquest, do not want to share anything with the people. This is a never-ending story.

**Mila:** –...and the only crime that Manuel Zelaya committed and is committing is to benefit the people.

**Samara:** –As soon as the Coup d'état happened, there was a complete and immediate rejection of it.

**Elisa:** –It has meant an enormous disrespect...those violators of rights...the impotence of seeing our compatriots fall, people who should never be forgotten due to their bravery and their offering of love to our country.







We will continue with the Resistance, So that our rights are respected, and out of love for the Our organization COL-PROSUMAH and love for our Country.

**Mildred:** –We did not expect the Coup d’état...

It happened when I was in my hometown, getting the Cuarta Urna referendum organized with my brother. That 28 of June at 7 AM they arrested my brother. A car with a loudspeaker announced his detention and we all got together at the park.

–What is he accused of?

And a policeman told me: –He is a scoundrel who is stirring the people...and he said that there was no coup. Since they would not let him free, they wouldn’t give him back to me, I told him:

–I’m leaving, but I will be back and then we will see whether you or not you release him. I left the park and I told the people that we had to show them that he was a “son of the people” and that I needed 20 men to free him.

–What are we going to do? The cells of the town are easy to break open.

The only thing we could do was break him out. I grabbed a rod to break the lock.

Only five men joined in. Then, 15 women joined us. We were 20, well 21 (I never count myself in). We went to “la posta”. I started arguing with the policeman to create a diversion. They opened the cell and the others escaped...

We went to the park. They tried to get a hold on him three times. Police cars, punches, arguments, yelling...

They left. The second time, they used the patrol cars to create a blockade. The third time around, they came with an anti-riot team and tear gas.

<sup>1</sup> This Sunday, during the interview at la Ceiba, \_\_\_\_\_, member of the Resistance and Human Rights defender, was assassinated in Tegucigalpa.

This motivated the people to vote in la Cuarta Urna. They (the policemen) were able to steal a ballot box. We decided not to go through with it.

**Nora:** –Let us be clear: the coup d’état was provoked by the oligarchy, by 5 families...Why? Because Mel favors the most vulnerable.

Arbitrary suspension of the school year: a decree imposed

The de facto government issued a decree in which we were ordered to leave the educational centers by October the 30th; in spite of the fact that the Organic Educational Law establishes other dates. Michelletti threatened us, saying that if we do not obey, he militarize all the schools and kick us out by force. There was a great deal of violence against the teachers: there have been beatings, tear gasing and murders: 5 and others from the popular organizations (killed).<sup>1</sup>

Through this repression, he has tried to weaken the Popular Resistance Front. He has not won because the teachers, parents and popular organizations are continuing with the resistance, until we get a new constituent assembly.

#### *And about the Resistance...*

**Samara:** –The Resistance process has been strengthened along the way...according to the organizational needs of each community, province, neighborhood, quarter and educational center.

**Maritza:** –As a starting point, I agree with what Mar has said.

The Resistance is a philosophy that guides our everyday activities. We have been the Resistance since the day we were born, as women, we have resisted since I before Colonial times.

It is a daily philosophy, and it did not start on June 28.

**Mila:** –...the teachers got together to form the Anti-coup Resistance Group in Trujillo Municipality.

I attended several long marches in which we slept in gas stations, in schools and in community centers.

We were in Tegucigalpa, participating in the marches from the Pedagogical University, to the different centers and every time, we were attacked by the police and the army. But we would not be stopped, because we supported one another, we looked after one another and with the National Resistance we expect justice will be served for the people who planned and carried out the Coup.

I conclude by saying: Long live the Resistance! We are still resisting!

**Samara:** –And as Mar has said: We move forward with the Resistance. And then she added: “without forgetting or forgiving”.

**Doris:** –The nation has been united to form the Resistance Front engaging all the different sectors of society, regardless of age, political affiliation, religion, schooling, profession, occupation, teacher guilds...the workers, the bikers...

I dressed up a monkey as a soldier and that almost cost me my life...

**Reina:** –I am a part of the Resistance since June 28! I dressed a toy monkey as a soldier and that almost cost me my life. The day President Zelaya came back to Honduras, I was chased from the Brazilian embassy all the way to my house...Quite a race!...An hour of running all alone, going to places where the cars could not follow me. They could never catch us. So I am still part of the Resistance, but the gorilla stays home.

#### *In the Resistance, everybody shares, laughs, cries...*

We want to convey that we have not left President Zelaya alone; but it is difficult to fight against the armed forces, against a powerful oligarchy.

#### *International Support*

**Doris:** –We have had international support, but it is not enough. We need to create more awareness to strengthen the project of the National Constituent Assembly.

The year 2010 will be a very difficult year for the teachers. The victories of our college (teachers' association) are at risk and we need to find new strategies to defend what belongs to us. If we continue to be divided, the new government will hurt us more.

#### *What we have learned...*

**Reina:** –This (the fight) has taught us that we must teach our children and youngsters to have a more critical mind, so as to avoid another situation like the one we are currently facing.

**Mildred:** –As part of this movement (for the defense and freedom of our brother) we went to Tegucigalpa to join in. We are leaving without any organization...That day I ended on the other side, and my daughters in COFAL.

–We have attended all the demonstrations.

**Samara:** –In some places, the parents joined us and said:

–Keep on going! Don't stop.

They accepted the three day stoppage, even though that was not the solution.

**Samara:** –Even though there is a lot of repression, not only military but at all levels, the media, ourselves, we are not discouraged from continuing the struggle. Let them chase us. We have to be very careful, keep our eyes wide open.

**Mila:** –I have not suffered for having left my daughters alone, but I do fear having them arrested.

I am sharing this fight with all the people.

**Chavela:** –This teaches us a lesson: women cannot remain silent, or humiliated, but we have to resist until we achieve our objective. We need to fight for peace, for being free and not having anyone repress or humiliate us; and to no longer suffer from anxiety or humiliation. For that rea-

son, today, tomorrow and forever we will resist come what may, no matter what.

This experience is new to me, because I did not know the consequences of a coup d'état. I never suspected the crisis into which our country would fall: we are not acknowledged, neither in an electoral way, nor are we eligible for economic aid from friendly nations. Everything was cut off. In many ways, we do not know how far this will go, but the Resistance remains...

#### *Pedro is murdered...*

**Mildred:** –We have seen our brothers die. We lost Pedro, but it only made us more courageous. He was captured in the wee small hours of the morning, and then he appeared dead, with 42 stab wounds. It made us remember the 1980s, when Felix Martinez was stabbed 48 times. It was a clear message from the Dead Squads, headed by Billy Joya (National Security Advisor for the coup regime and former officer in the notorious 3-16 Battalion that kidnapped, tortured and murdered activists in the 1980s). That day, "Tigre Amaya" was at Auca. The objective was to capture us and take us to Chile (a community in Northern Honduras).

#### *And as a woman...*

**Reina:** –As a woman, I feel happy to be a part of this movement (the Resistance). I have learned that through struggle many things can be achieved; and I have discovered true friendships. Here (with the Resistance) everyone shows his or her true colors, there are no masks. What you see is what you get... Period.

#### *The family...*

**Chavela:** –The family was divided: sister against sister, husband against wife, teachers against one another because of their "religions".

#### *Those who do not support the Resistance*

**Chavela:** –There are people who have benefitted by their political affiliation, by the things Micheletti has given them; and because they have no political, union, social, cultural and religious consciousness.

**Doris:** –Of course, there is a sector of the population who is supporting the coup (some of them out of fear).

#### *Our children...*

**Samara:** –Our children are the ones who are suffering the most. They have been left alone. We just want to give them a country with better options, greater opening and more participation.

#### *From now on...*

**Elisa:** –I hope for significant changes, for a true democracy that pays attention to the poor, the people "below", those who are not included by the health and educational systems. I hope for assistance for the agricultural workers, so that they can work and earn a living for their families.



**Chavela:** –I hope a solution is reached as soon as possible and that there are no more adversities. I hope all Hondurans will be united in the fight for the democracy we wish for the coming years.

#### *No more coups in Honduras!*

**Yoconda:** –We will fight against the oppression of the people and vindicate them for all the things that were taken away from them.

**Julia:** –Move forward and never look back.

**Alma:** –I will always be a part of the Resistance.

May this movement change the country.

We are sick and tired of the oligarchy and the foreigners. Our country belongs to us.

**Mar:** –A fight against the groups in power is coming our way, but it is also a fight against some of our own kind, the teachers. Not everyone rejects the Coup. Some of them, for their political convenience, are on their (the coup leaders') side.

**Samara:** –We need a process to train all the sectors and get ready for the fight that awaits us. Even though we sometimes feel disheartened, we do not surrender.

#### *It is not only about Mel's return*

**Mar:** –The objective is not only to have Mel return. It is about the restitution of the constitutional order and the Constituent Assembly.

#### *The young ones*

**Karen:** –This fight has been a place for the young to participate in all the democratic process, especially for the young who are excluded from otherspaces of participation.

That is why we are devoted to bringing down the barriers, to fighting side by side with the people, to achieve a fairer and more equitable constitution for every social class.

#### *In the next issue*

We will share a virtual interview with the youth who are actively participating in the Resistance process.

These people are promoting new ideas in a movement that is deeply rooted to their nation, but they are widening the perception of reality (adult-based mainly) with their own perspectives.

Sources of the internet pictures:

Nodo 50.org.; blogspot.com; ipsnoticias.net; ka senlarred.net.

#### *The rest: COLPROSUMAH Congress*

**Chavela:** –Some of the women have a problem, because their husbands work for a private company. They are in favor of the Coup and forbid us from participating in the activities of the Resistance.

My husband would say: "You are not going!" But I did anyway, regardless of the conflicts this would cause in our relationship. I am an open-minded woman who knows that a woman does not need to be subjected to her husband's

way of thinking. I did not care for his opinion regarding the Coup. Before all of this, there were no restrictions or contradictions in him.

**Nora:** –I feel committed to my people, as a teacher who knows about the real world...But people have awakened and said:

–Enough!

If we are organized better living standards for our students and people, for the dispossessed.

**Alma:** –I was in the struggle since before the Coup, and now with the Resistance, in spite of all the repression, especially in El Paraiso, my province, We were not allowed to leave our houses when our president was at the border. But even when the First Lady was outturned back by the coup supporters; we, in spite of our fear, took her back. We organized all the Resistance and we even dared to have a motorcade escorting her.

**Doris:** –I have always participated in the fights of the teachers and the people to defend our rights. I am a defender of the Law. I never do to others what I would not like to have done to me. That is why I am forever committed to the Resistance, for the return of the constitutional order.







# Intercambio

