

#THE EDUCATION WE NEED FOR THE WORLD WE WANT



Perspectives from adolescents and young people
from Latin America and the Caribbean

Initiative:



Campaña
Latinoamericana
por el Derecho
a la Educación

Support:

unicef 
para cada niño

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#LA EDUCACIÓN QUE NECESITAMOS
PARA EL MUNDO
QUE REAMOS



1. INTRODUCTION

In articles 28 and 29, treating the right to education, as well as in the General Observations, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) sets, as part of the obligations of the member States, the responsibility of ensuring the right to education from early childhood to higher education, making sure education is free and prepares the students to practice and defend human rights and to respect the environment; making sure that it is an education with gender equality, peace and tolerance between peoples, cultures, ethnic groups and all religious groups. The Convention also determines the right to participation of girls, boys and adolescents.

Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention, in the occasion of the celebration of the three-decade anniversary of this Treaty, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE, for its acronym in Spanish), with the support of UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, carried out, from October 2019 to April 2020, the campaign called “The Education We Need for the World We Want”.

That initiative searched to bring together and reverberate the voices of adolescents and young people from the region. They shared their struggles, demands and opinions, as well as their proposals and the challenges ahead in regards to their human right to education. Furthermore, this was an opportunity of generating mobilization, participation and dialogue among adolescents and young people from different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, contributing, in that sense, to the collective construction of the education we need for a world with more justice, peace, equality and democracy, whose foundations are the respect of human rights and the promotion of social and environmental justice.

The adolescents and young people from Latin America and the Caribbean who took part in this campaign and shared their views reinforced directives and propositions that were already being highlighted in the more recent protests and mobilization led by students and young people at the regional and global level, with growing emphasis on the environmental agenda.

Such demonstrations, as well as the frequent protests led by students and youth movements in different countries from Latin America and the Caribbean, presented similar demands and slogans calling the States to adopt urgent measures in benefit of the construction of another possible world: a more egalitarian, sustainable, democratic world, with more respectful relations among all beings and towards nature; they also denounced the negative and harmful impacts of neoliberalism to human life and the natural resources, proposing the urgency of rethinking our economic, political and social model.

The importance of these calls and demands is even greater now, in face of the global health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic that we are presently experiencing. We are confronted by an emergency context for education after the school closures were adopted as part of the containment measures against the virus, since they reveal and aggravate social issues that were already being pointed out by the students and young people, appearing with more gravity in Latin America and the Caribbean –a region known as one of the most unequal in the world. Factors such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, discrimination, violence and the absence of the State in its role of ensuring the rights to education, health and social protection, besides other fields of public policies, are even more evident in the present situation.

In such a context, it is urgent and necessary to rethink our education, our society and economy models, as well as the exercise of citizenship and also the world and the future we want. In order to protect, respect and fulfill the right to education in the present situation, it is crucial that the education community dialogues and considers everything that is implicated in the current pandemic, in social as well as environmental terms, what includes acknowledging the centrality of looking after other people's lives, practicing solidarity and collective responsibility. After all, practicing the sense of community is also an integral part of the human right to education and this collective thinking of considerations, ways and proposals must be based on the respect of the right of participation of members of education communities, among which are students, adolescents and young people.



Students from the school of “Dois Riachões” slum, of the Landless Movement (MST, by its Spanish acronym), Bahia, Brazil. Photograph: CLADE archives

From this perspective, this document aims at contributing to those debates; it stresses and organizes the demands and views from adolescents and young people, which were received by our campaign. Their dreams, demands, proposals, struggles and expectations reinforce the perspective of an emancipatory, rights-ensuring education. An education that values critical thinking, that translates into freedom, emancipation, inclusion, overcoming all forms of discrimination and building a fairer, more peaceful, democratic and sustainable world.

Enjoy your reading!

*Had I known happiness was
behind my door
Outside, where liberty
was taken for granted as a concept*

I would have valued so many things...

*From the most significant
such as attending school
Hearing everyday
the sound of turning pages
while the teacher spoke and sometimes
a colleague would laugh*

*To what I considered irrelevant,
like the coins rattling in my pocket.
As I strolled on the streets, greeting everybody,
with a handshake.*

*A handshake, a hug, a kiss;
now I cannot give¹.*

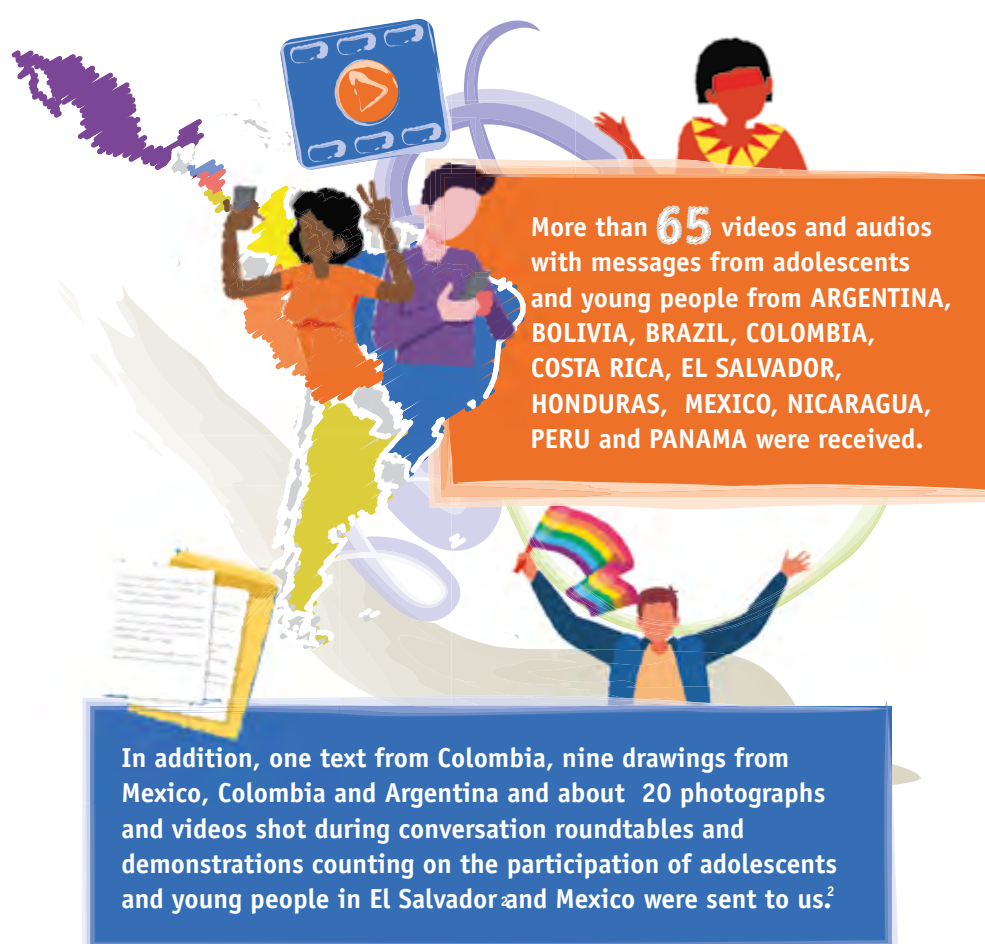
*(fragment of the poem titled "Behind the door, quarantine day 8", written by
Alejandra Solano, student at the University of Costa Rica)*

¹ Poem titled "Tras la Puerta, Día 8 de cuarentena" ("Behind the door, quarantine day 8") - available in Spanish.

2. "THE EDUCATION WE NEED FOR THE WORLD WE WANT" CAMPAIGN



Within the context of “The Education We Need for the World We Want” campaign, we encouraged adolescents and young people from Latin America and the Caribbean to share their expectations, proposals, demands and opinions on the human right to education through the presentation of texts, videos, audios, poems, drawings and photos, among other formats of their preference. In addition, the campaign included communication and advocacy strategies aimed at contributing to make their perspectives visible in the media and to promote the appreciation of such proposals and views, and their consideration in the education policy decision-making spheres.



² Find all testimonies and results of this campaign in the virtual dossier available at: <https://redclade.org/especiais/laeducacionquenecesitamos-para-el-mundo-que-queremos/>, in Spanish, Portuguese and English.

3. ADOLESCENCES AND YOUTHS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Wall painting made by students, artists and teachers of Prefeco Melchor Ocampo middle school, in the city of Morelia, México, presenting the perspectives of adolescents and young people about their right to education

3.1 What does it mean to be young or adolescent?

Defining with precision what it means to be young or adolescent is a difficult task. The reason is that the experience of adolescence and youth varies substantially around the world, among countries and regions, causing this category to be constantly filled with very fluid and changing definitions.

According to UNICEF, there is a “wide variation in national laws setting minimum age thresholds for participation in activities considered the preserve of adults, including voting, marriage, military participation, property ownership and alcohol consumption. A related idea is that of the ‘age of majority’: the legal age at which an individual is recognized by a nation as an adult and is expected to meet all responsibilities attendant upon that status”³.

The concepts of “youth” and “adolescent” come to be especially fluid in regards to the challenging and unequal contexts within the region, in which many people with ages corresponding to the adolescence are forced to meet responsibilities, obligations and challenges that are typical of the adult universe. As stressed by UNICEF, independently on what is said about the laws determining the point of separation from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, innumerable adolescents, girls and boys all over the world are working, married, looking after sick relatives or participating in armed conflict –all of these activities corresponding to the adult universe–, and they are robbed of their childhood and adolescence⁴.

In spite of the absence of a definition of adolescence that is internationally accepted, the United Nations defines adolescents as people between ages 10 and 19, corresponding to the second decade of life.

In regards to the concept of “youth”, different definitions have been expressed in both theoretical and practical debates on this subject. The notion of youth is not static over time and it finds itself exposed to different historical, cultural, social and economic transformations within societies (UNDP, 2015).

As a consequence, the ways of understanding youth have ranged between more conservative and functionalist postures, and other more comprehensive and progressive postures⁵. In the former, youth is viewed from the so-called adultcentric paradigm,

3 UNICEF (2011): *La adolescencia - Una época de oportunidades*, pág. 8 [Adolescence, an age of opportunities, p. 8] - available in Spanish.

4 UNICEF (2011): *La adolescencia - Una época de oportunidades*, pág. 12 - available in Spanish.

5 Duarte, C. (2013): *¿Juventud o Juventudes? Acerca de cómo mirar y remirar las juventudes en nuestro continente* [Youth or Youths? About the ways of looking and looking again at youths in our continent] - available in Spanish.

that is, the perspective supposing the superiority of adult people and understanding youth as a transitional period towards adulthood, in which the adult person is the model to be followed by young men and women in order to be incorporated to society, to be socially productive and respectable⁶.

The aforementioned adultcentric perspectives define and understand youth as a stage in the life cycle in which people are prepared to join the world of work, or as a “social group” defined especially by age⁷. Also from the adultcentric perspectives, youth has been understood as a “set of attitudes towards life”, or as the “future generation” that will take the adult roles.

From the innumerable criticisms to the adultcentric paradigm, a new way of conceiving youths, focusing on their diversity, appeared. As underlined by Bourdieu⁸, the notion of youth is rather a construction, both historical and social, being open to an epistemological turn that overcomes singularization, in which instead of talking about a youth, it is necessary to talk about youths.

This turn towards the notion of “youths”, as underlined by ECLAC and OIJ [Spanish acronym for International Youth Organization for Ibero-America] (2014), enables the adoption of a new epistemological basis, wide and comprehensive, of youth, conceiving different ways of being young, in which factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation or others generate differences influencing how being young is experienced.

Regardless of the fact that these issues may be hindering an exclusive and precise definition of such term, in a more general way, the UN considers as “young” those persons between the ages of 15 and 24.

“A better understanding of the contemporary juvenile identities requires a talk about youths in plural form, because young people and their identities are so diverse as societies themselves (UNFPA, 2008)”.

6 UNICEF (2013): Superando el adultocentrismo [Overcoming Adultcentrism] - available in Spanish.

7 Duarte, C. (2013): ¿Juventud o Juventudes? Acerca de cómo mirar y remirar las juventudes en nuestro continente - available in Spanish.

8 Bourdieu, P. (1990): La juventud no es más que una palabra [Youth is nothing but a word] - available in Spanish.

3.2 What is the number of adolescents and young people in Latin America and the Caribbean?



⁹ UNFPA (2011): Informe Regional de Población en América Latina y el Caribe [Regional Population Report in Latin America and the Caribbean] - available in Spanish.

4 EDUCATION: WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE REGION WANT?



The demand for public, quality, secular and free education guaranteed as a human right enabling other rights, as well as a call for comprehensive, emancipatory, inclusive, egalitarian and non-discriminatory education is present in the testimonies from adolescents and young people, which our campaign collected.

They also say no to the criminalization of student-led demonstrations and ask for an education encompassing views from the global South, that is, an education that assumes a de-colonizing Latin American view. Adolescents and young people want, therefore, an education that promotes the participation of citizens, generates empathy, enables debating and critical thinking environments and teaches “how to think, not just to obey”. A diverse, ludic, free of prejudice education, that develops all talents and is properly funded. They demand an education that is feminist and transformative as well, with gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education.

The highlighted elements are many and they mesh together the human right to education in all its depth, complexity and comprehensiveness, and education guaranteed from a holistic, human rights perspective. Next we will delve into each of those points raised by adolescents and young people.

4.1 For a humanistic education and sustainable development

“[...] that our public education should come out of the four walls of school, of university, that all learning and teaching processes should contribute to economic, as well as social, cultural development of a region, of a country, of the world.”
(Elizabeth Chauca, Bolivia)

Since 1999, UN celebrates, on August 12, the International Youth Day¹⁰, searching to promote and praise the role of young people and adolescents in transformation processes and to raise awareness on the challenges and opportunities that are present in this life stage. In 2019, the celebration of such date focused on the issue of “education”, reinforcing the roles of adolescents and young people in promoting the necessary transformations towards the accomplishment of Goal number 4 (SDG 4)

¹⁰ [International Youth Day, August 12.](#)

from the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda¹¹, establishing that States have the obligation to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

SDG 4 target 4.7 determines that the countries must: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”¹².

In the context of the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want”, many were the testimonies and demands shared by adolescents and young people from the region, stressing the importance of ensuring inclusive, equality and quality education, which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Some testimonies from adolescents and young people mention an education “with no limits, so one can learn more than basic knowledge”. An “environmentalist education, more human, comprehensive, solidary, inclusive, innovative, creative and transformative, renewed and with no borders, that leads us to fulfill our dreams and goes beyond the four walls of the education center”.

“[...] the education we need for the world we want is an education that makes us [...] growing, not for the sake of individuals, but for the sake of society, of the environment we are part of, of an ecosystem that doesn’t work for us, but rather we should be the ones working for it.”
(Gareth Sella, Colombia)

“We want an environmentalist education for a less polluted world, with greater appreciation of natural resources. An inclusive education for a united world. An egalitarian education for a peaceful world. An education in values for a world free of violence. [...] A more human education for a world free of hierarchies. A comprehensive education for a happy world. A humanist education for a solidary world. An equitable education for a fair world. An education for all for a world with more empathy.”
(Students from Morelia, Mexico)

¹¹ For further information, read SDG 4.

¹² <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>.

In their proposals, adolescents and young people defend there is an intrinsic relation between ensuring the right to education leading to sustainable development and ensuring education contexts in which the human rights are respected and realized, with humanistic pedagogical practices that make us even more human.

“What makes us different from machines or Artificial Intelligence?”, asks Brayan Imanol Narváez Salcedo, second grade student from San Juan de Pasto (Colombia), in an article sent as a contribution to the campaign “The Education We Need for the World We Want”. Then the same student tries to propose an answer in his text:

“The main difference at this moment is our condition of being aware of the world around us, our capacity of thinking, creating, innovating, starting from scratch, sometimes from the relational nothing, this is something machines or Artificial Intelligence still have not been able to do, so we should focus on human development, specifically in recognizing its potentialities and the uses of its exclusive capacities¹³.”

(Brayan Imanol Narváez Salcedo, Colombia)

“The kind of change I expect in Brazilian education is that students are seen as real human beings. Because within our system, they are seen as robots that need high grades.”

(Thais Camargo, Brazil)

In this sense, second grade, higher education and Youth and Adult Education (EPJA, by its acronym in Spanish) students from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru shared their demands in regards to the realization of an emancipatory education that enables rights, during a student talk held in the occasion of CLADE’s 10th Regional Assembly, in Bogota, Colombia (2018)¹⁴.

¹³ Article by Brayan Imanol Narváez Salcedo to the campaign termed “The Education We Need for the World We Want”.

¹⁴ Evaluation note on the talk with students from Latin America and the Caribbean on emancipatory, rights-ensuring education, held by CLADE on October, 2018 - available in Spanish.

The participants of such meeting highlighted the necessity of recognizing cultural, sexual and identity diversities within education centers and ensuring a human rights-led education that promotes thinking, in connection to art, culture and territories, allowing students to mobilize and be protagonists in the analysis and transformation of their own realities.

“We want a collective education comprising the knowledge from our ancestors, rich in culture and humanity. An education towards Mother Earth [“Madre Tierra”, in Spanish], recognizing her as its foundation. A communal, popular and feminist education. An education to make us free, shaping us from affection to affectivity”. This is how university student Alexander Reyes Guevara, from Nicaragua, synthesized the debates of that encounter.

4.2 Ensuring quality education as a human right. But what quality are we talking about?

“[...] we need that the right to education that is enshrined by international treaties, by the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, is fully and unequivocally fulfilled. Otherwise, we cannot discuss anything else and this is why I strongly demand the right to education.”

(Felipe Urbas, Argentina)

“Everyone has the right to education”, states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948, in Article 26. Besides, this Treaty determines that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the following years, other human rights instruments reinforced and detailed the necessity of ensuring free public education for all as a human right, such as: the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁵, the World Declaration on Education for All¹⁶ and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG 4, referring to education.

¹⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹⁶ World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs.



Graffiti activity carried out with young people from the state school Maria Augusta Correa in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Photograph: CLADE archives

Although progress was achieved in terms of a perspective of equality and human rights and thanks to the efforts of the international community and the organized civil society, in practice, over the last years, in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, what has been unfortunately observed are tendencies towards the implementation of policies that prioritize the technocratization and homogenization of education systems and persons, seeing them as simple tools that have a power of consumption and are good to be incorporated to the labor market, from a purely instrumental and commodifying view.

This merely technical training that serves the market goes hand in hand with the homogenization of education and the existence of schools that pursue competitiveness, while education centers understood as spaces of gathering, debate and critical thinking are left empty. As a result, students and teachers no longer recognize themselves as political beings, but rather as people who should get good grades in standardized educational tests given on a large scale, replacing the achievement of a true quality education that guarantees and promotes rights and freedoms¹⁷.

¹⁷ A closer examination of such tendencies may be found in the document “Educar para la Libertad” (Education for freedom, CLADE, 2019).

“We want an education that is not centralized in a few cities and that is not imparted only to a few privileged persons. We want an education for all, in which we all fit, an education that is valid for all regions and a quality education. An education that, whether religious or not, is not framed by ideological prejudices, but rather teaches us how to question the world, which does not teach us to repeat contents without even knowing what we are saying, but rather teaches us to think, an education that makes us more critical. Only this kind of education can take us further as individuals and as a nation. This is why I invite you to fight for such education. This is for me the education we want, this is the education we need.”

(Juan Pablo Escallón, Colombia)

The analysis of the contexts of different countries reveals that standardized tests, especially the international ones, taken as the only way to measure quality in education and assuming a reductionist and utilitarian perspective of education, have been influencing the political-pedagogical processes and the conviviality relations within education communities. These tests, in general, are developed with no participation of actors from the education community, and many times they are even developed by private for-profit companies, when education evaluation should rather be a collective exercise that allows the improvement of the education system and our own improvement as persons and as a society¹⁸.

The perspectives shared by adolescents and young people from the region counter such technocratic tendencies of proposing an instrumental education to serve the market. On the contrary, they defend an education that prioritizes rights and dignity over test results.

“[...] we need an education that abandons this flawed evaluation system in which only the amount of information a child or young person absorbed within a given time is evaluated, without looking at the context surrounding that person, without looking at that person’s development, or at their evolution during that period of time. We need a more humanized and less mechanical education.”

(Vitoria Cepera, Brazil)

18 CLADE (2019): “Education for freedom: for an emancipatory education that guarantees rights”

4.3 For public and free education

“What I want for education in my country is that [...] it can be free and accessible to all of us, that education fulfills our dreams and above all that it helps us to set up the foundations to develop our lives. In addition, education in our country always should make sure that we know our rights; this really has to be guaranteed.”

(Jackeline Fuchs, Perú)

Guaranteeing education as a human right for all depends on the strengthening of free public education systems, counting on proper public funding in adequate quantity. This is what the adolescents and young people from Latin America and the Caribbean who participated in our campaign demand. Their demand is not an empty speech; rather, it requires the accomplishment of what is set by different human rights instruments as an obligation of the States.

According to SDG 4, target 4.1, the countries have the responsibility of: “by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”.

According to Education 2030 Framework for Action¹⁹: “The provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education –of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes– should be ensured for all, without discrimination. The provision of free education includes the removal of cost-related barriers to primary and secondary education. Immediate, targeted and sustained action is required to provide meaningful education and training opportunities for the large population of out-of-school children and adolescents”.

19 UNESCO (2016): [2030 Education Framework for Action](#).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Article 28²⁰, also sets primary, secondary and higher education as a right for girls, boys, adolescents and young people, whose gratuity must be progressively ensured.

In turn, General Observation 13 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)²¹ stresses that: “The progressive implementation of free education’ means that, whereas States must give priority to free primary education, they also have the obligation of adopting concrete measures to implement free secondary and higher education”.

Therefore, the States must urgently duplicate efforts to implement these international agreements, ensuring and prioritizing fair and adequate financing of public free education systems, even in times of economic crises.

“It is very necessary that the opportunity to have an education is given to all children, it is a right, it can’t be denied and we all must have equal opportunities, and I believe it is necessary that the State makes sure it is not violated, that [the State] contributes, visits communities, helps, because today there is [sic.] [...] a lot of children who cannot have access to quality education, due to problems in their homes, for not having the resources to make it.”
(Noelia Benítez, Argentina)

“I call on you [...] to keep fighting for public education with equal opportunities for boys and girls, an education with no borders, that is capable of offering everyone the same, to keep helping boys and girls from my country and the rest of Latin America to fulfill their dreams.”
(Alejandra Solano, Costa Rica)

20 Article 28, CRC: “1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means”. – Convention on the Rights of the Child.

21 General Observation N° 13 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.



Dialogue at the University of El Salvador (UES, by its Spanish acronym). Photograph: Jazmin Elena archives

In their testimonies, adolescents and young people reinforce that quality and equality in education depend on education gratuity for all and on sufficient public funding to ensure that education centers have the adequate infrastructure, as well as teachers with good training and dignifying work conditions.

“[...] we have lots of difficulties, since our education is insufficient in regards to the teachers, the materials or infrastructure. We [...] have an education in which three out of ten primary school teachers do not have higher education degrees, that is, education is low quality. Mexico will always have the challenge of providing good quality in education, since education is a guaranteed right for all. This is why we have to fight for public, secular, free education.”
(Eilyn Ríos, Mexico)

“[...] we can go further, we find schools whose infrastructure is almost falling apart [...]”
(Fabrizio Matta, Peru)

4.4 Protagonism, participation and democracy: education for and with adolescents and young people

“The education we want is an education centered in the needs of the student and in which we have a voice and vote.”

(Yann Liao, Panama)

From the perspective of the young people and adolescents who took part in the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want”, education must be guaranteed for all as a human right; it must be participatory and democratic, that is, it must promote the students’ protagonism in regards to their own histories and their participation in the construction of their learning at school.

The document termed “Por una Educación Garante de Derechos - Demandas de Estudiantes Secundaristas para América Latina y el Caribe²²” (“For a Rights-Ensuring Education – Demands from Secondary Students for Latin America and the Caribbean”, CLADE, 2017), reaffirms that adolescents and young people demand adultcentrism to be overcome and the implementation of inter-generational policies, allowing the distribution of power and responsibilities within schools and in the development of education policies, as well as the inclusion of youth cultures in pedagogical practices.

In line with that document, testimonies sent to the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want” reinforce that the participation of members of the education community must be present in the design, definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policies and political-pedagogical projects; this is a fundamental element of democratic management in education.

Adolescents and young people have demonstrated to praise democracy and participation in education spaces and in policy-making; they should be practiced in conditions of equality and with no discrimination, recognizing every member of the education community as a legitimate and fundamental interlocutor and, furthermore, taking into account that education must prepare for citizenship, for collective action and thinking.

In the student and youth talk held by CLADE in the occasion of its 10th Assembly (Bogota, Colombia, October 21, 2018), representatives from student and youth-led movements from different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean highlighted

²² CLADE (2017): Por una educación garante de derechos - Demandas de Estudiantes Secundaristas para América Latina y el Caribe [For a Rights-Ensuring Education - Demands from Secondary Students for Latin America and the Caribbean] - available in Spanish.

the necessity of recognizing cultural, sexual and identity diversities within education centers and guaranteeing an education for human rights and critical thinking, connected to art, culture and territories, allowing students to mobilize and take the lead in the analysis and transformation of their own realities²³.

The demand for participation was also present in the messages from children and adolescents from the region, who participated in the 22nd Pan-American Child and Adolescent Congress and in the Third Pan-American Child and Adolescent Forum that were held in Cartagena (Colombia), from Oct. 29-31, 2019²⁴. The Third Pan-American Child and Adolescent Forum brought together delegates between ages 12 to 18, from 14 countries in the region; in such an occasion they highlighted the importance of being recognized as rights holders, and of having assured their right to participation, to free expression and to be heard. Equally, they externalized that they have the right to receive adequate empowering information to know and defend their rights in all municipalities and communities.

In order to have an effective and equal participation, they demanded the overcoming of adultcentrism and the reconsideration of the methodologies and dynamics focusing on their listening and participation. In addition, they demanded the overcoming of inequalities and gender barriers that inhibit participation in public debates. They emphasized that the conversation on policies for childhood and adolescence must include not only people living in capitals and urban areas, but they must also take into account the contributions from remote populations, such as rural and indigenous ones, as well as migrants and persons with disabilities²⁵.

They asked, in that sense, for an education that ensures information on their rights and the social and political context, allowing them to be participating citizens, agents of change in their communities and society. The participants of the initiative “The Education We Need for The World We Want” expressed similarly.

23 Find more information on the results of such dialogue in this note on [CLADE’s 10th Regional Assembly](#) - available in Spanish.

24 As one of the three component bodies of the Inter-American Children’s Institute (IIN) of the Organization of American States (OAS), Pan-American Congresses have been considered important forums for exchanging, thinking and sharing experiences among the States from the region. On the one hand, in these gatherings the advances, challenges and country commitments towards the development of policies for children and adolescents are made visible; on the other hand, the agreements made in such Congresses have informed the elaboration and implementation of policies and laws regarding childhood and adolescence across the region. The last edition was held in Cartagena, Colombia, in October 2019 and CLADE participated in it, launching the campaign “The Education We Need for the World We Want”.

25 For further reading on the demands presented by children and adolescents during the 22nd Pan-American Child and Adolescent Congress and the Third Pan-American Child Forum [click here](#).



Photograph of a poster made for a rally organized by young people in Mexico to demand the realization of the right to education, on November 20, 2019. Photograph: CADEM Archives

"I believe education should be initially public, free, secular, that it should have quality. [I believe] that students can have an active participation in the decisions on how they expect the education they believe to deserve should be."

(Efraín Ordoñez, Honduras)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child determines the right to participation of children, adolescents and young people. Although it is recognized internationally, as well as by some legal frameworks at the national and regional level, the right of children, adolescents and young people to participate in the debates and definition of education policies and pedagogical planning is still far from being respected and fulfilled in practice.

Besides, in some countries serious setbacks were unfortunately observed in regards to that right, and they even applied repressive measures and criminalization of students' protests commanded by governments, with discriminatory and stigmatizing bias against young people and students being disseminated in mass media in different national contexts.

“Being young is a risk to be cautiously taken, causing increased fear, to the extent that we are scared of both criminal groups and national security agents. And from both perspectives, the media play an important role in criminalizing such a population. The doubt shifts towards: Why do they do that? Are they responding to a particular agenda that benefits media? Or are those who influence on the criminalization of young people and students not related to media?”
(Jazmin Elena, El Salvador²⁶)

“In September 2018, Sebastián Piñera’s [Chile’s president] government proposed the Aula Segura [Safe School] Law, giving the directors of education centers the authorization to open investigation processes against students presumed to be guilty. That is, the student must prove he/she is not participating in the issues they are accusing him/her of, rather than the contrary. In 5 days, a student could be expelled from his/her education center and he/she would have to see how he/she would manage to go on with his school journey in the same year. This Law came along with a media campaign showing secondary students as if they had no propositions. But we do have clear demands and the representatives of political classes do not want to respond to them.”
(Victor Harambour, Chile²⁷)

26 [Full text by the university student](#) - available in Spanish.

27 Víctor is a speaker at the Coordination Assembly of Chile Secondary Students (ACES, by its acronym in Spanish). Find more on his perspectives and Chile's context in this [article released by Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil](#) (in Portuguese) or [watch a video](#) containing that student's intervention in the Third Regional Meeting of the Articulated Network of Legislators and Civil Society for the Right to Education in Latin America and the Caribbean - available in Spanish.

4.5 Critical, transformative, decolonizing and emancipatory education

“I want an education that teaches me to think and not to obey.”

(Marilyn Figueroa, Panama)

“It is not enough to know how to read ‘Peter Piper picked a pickled pepper’ [‘Eva vio la uva’, in Spanish]. It is necessary to understand the position Peter occupies in his social context, who works to produce the pepper and who gets profit from such a work²⁸.” This sentence written by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire translates a necessity expressed by many adolescents and young people in regards to the education they want for another possible world: an education that brings them inputs and means not only to learn how to write and read, but also to learn how to make a critical and reflexive reading of the reality in front of them, proposing ways to improve it.

“The education we need is an education that is capable of listening to social problems and putting them in the center of academic debates, an education built from and for society and an education that dignifies life in all its dimensions.”

(Laura Victoria Meyer, Colombia)

From this perspective defended by the adolescents and young people, education must be emancipatory and popular, contributing to a transformation towards justice and social equality, with free and democratic dialogue, critical thinking and collective thinking. “The principles of popular education teach that education must be dialogical, from and for the promotion of horizontal relations, with pedagogies and practices that foster critical conscience in regards to the world, thus being capable of promoting transformation and freedom.”²⁹

28 Free translation of Paulo Freire’s book termed “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” - available in Spanish.

29 Fragment from the document “Education for freedom: for an emancipatory education that guarantees rights” (CLADE, 2019).



Activity to dialogue with young people from state school Maria Augusta Correa, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Photograph: Fellipe Abreu

“What is education? For me, education is freedom, since only through it we all can get to live in an environment of harmony and culture of peace, also the fact that children in our country can grow up in a healthy environment, in an environment that encourages you to discuss your rights, your duties and how the State is obliged to make sure it [education] is universal, free, with quality.”
(Jazmin Elena, El Salvador)

According to Paulo Freire, education must be fulfilled as a practice of freedom, becoming concrete from a pedagogy in which oppressed persons have conditions to meet themselves and to assume a position as free beings, subjects of their own history. “It is necessary that education –in its contents, programs and methods– is adapted to the ends pursued: allowing men and women to become subjects, to build themselves as persons, to change the world, to reciprocate with other men and women, to make culture and history (...) an education that emancipates, not one that adapts, domesticates or subjugates³⁰.”

30 Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire - available in Spanish.

Similarly, embracing the principles of popular, critical, emancipatory education defended by Freire and other popular educators and activists from Latin America and the Caribbean and the world, many testimonies sent to CLADE by adolescents and young people affirm the importance of an education that prepares subjects not only to be in the world, but also to be with the world. Not only to live and shape their own identities, but also to be working in the construction of a more equal and fair society.

“I believe the education we need for the world we want is an education that makes us stronger as humans, an education thought from the human side for a change, not an education that is given to us to be simply memorizing some formulas and concepts, but one that allows us to use these to transform (...) I believe this is why it is necessary to protest, I believe this is why it is necessary to go out to say we need a change.”
(Gareth Sella, Colombia)

In their demands for an education that is critical and transformative, they also highlight the necessity of developing Latin American thinking within education contexts –decolonized and critical thinking in comparison to the hegemonic eurocentric/western concepts that are imposed in education systems.

“An education or pedagogies of education that are more liberating or liberating of thought are required, that is, to deconstruct existence and knowledge through the scientific method too, creating a new knowledge that is somewhat more didactic, and [we believe] there should be a re-circulation, so to speak, of the knowledge and contributions from both teachers and students during their training for a professional life. In that sense, we do believe that in Honduras and at the level of America region as a whole, this type of education to decolonize thought, existence and knowledge should be practiced, helping to shape the America all of us want.”
(Christian Izaguirre, Honduras)

4.6 Egalitarian, inclusive and non-discriminatory education

"[...] this is the education we need [...] an inclusive education, [that produces] a differential approach, allowing the inclusion of all different groups with no discrimination or segregation."

(Leonardo Suárez, Colombia)

In the talk with adolescents and young people from Latin America and the Caribbean, held in the occasion of CLADE's 10th Regional Assembly³¹, students from eight countries underlined that it is urgent to ensure an education leading to social equality and equity. A diverse, inclusive and non-discriminatory education, that promotes conviviality and peace, and leads to overcoming violence.

"We want an education that instructs us in social equality and equity. A diverse education. An education with no distinctions based on color or ethnicity. An education that opens the world to us, making us part of it. A human, emancipatory and rights-ensuring education. An education that recognizes us as diverse and does not try to neither standardize, nor homogenize us. An education for conviviality and peace. An education that does not compromise freedom."

(Alexander Reyes Guevara, Nicaragua, participant in the referred talk³²)

These ideas are reinforced in the testimonies sent to CLADE's and UNICEF's campaign, for example, in the following statement:

"We need an education with no barriers for learning, so all of us have the same right, we need to receive quality education with no race, religion, sex or sexual preference discrimination, so every one of us can receive an education as it must be".

(Sara Navarro, El Salvador)

31 For further information on the results of that talk, read our evaluation note on [CLADE's 10th Regional Assembly](#) - available in Spanish.

32 [Youth and adolescents demands, shared in the talk held by CLADE](#) - available in Spanish.

In fact, challenges faced by adolescents and young people in regards to their right to education, as expressed in the testimonies sent to the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want” are representative of one of the greatest challenges to be overcome in Latin America and the Caribbean: ensuring that the policies and programs aimed at guaranteeing and fulfilling rights are equally accessible for all. This is one of the most unequal regions in the world, fully inhabited by millions of adolescents and young people living in poverty, being socially excluded or facing discrimination for being indigenous, black, poor, migrant or refugee, for their geographical location, for living in rural areas, for their gender identity or sexual orientation or for having disabilities, among other reasons³³.

In order to address such challenges and take into account the social, ethnical, cultural and economical diversity of this region, it is necessary that States ensure affirmative action policies and programs focusing the specific needs of different groups of population and also of society as a whole, acting to make sure that inclusion, the human rights perspective and a pacific conviviality among different groups are respected and observed as cross-cutting principles in all public management, especially in what refers to those social policies affecting adolescents and young people.

Adolescents and young people, in their testimonies, relate inclusion to guaranteeing other social rights beyond education, as well as with gratuity and universality of rights and policies to overcome violence and discrimination in education contexts.

“[...] we don’t have an inclusive education, we don’t have an education that acknowledges differences, we don’t have an education that respects people with disabilities. We don’t have an education with inclusion, that knows and recognizes, that recognizes the Andean communities, the Amazon communities, the Afro-Peruvian communities, the LGBTQ communities and this is the most important and the foundation of what it means to be a citizen. (...) Concerning infrastructure, sadly in regards to Lima, and I say this at a personal level, not all education centers count on basic services, not all education centers count on ramps for wheelchair users, not all education centers count on electricity, water...”
(Jhonatan Hernández, Peru)

33 UNICEF: *La Promoción del Desarrollo Adolescente en América Latina y el Caribe* - available in Spanish.



Students and artists paint a mural at the Prefeco Melchor Ocampo High School in Michoacán, Mexico, within the framework of the “The Education We Need for The World We Want” initiative. Photograph: CLADE archives

“We need an education in which, beyond theoretical knowledge, they teach us how to be more human, with respect, with peace.”
(Estefania Martínez, Mexico)

“[...] as young people, we very much need the support of people who believe in us, because not all of us follow the same paths in our struggle to keep going to school, for professional reasons we need a lot of support, both in regards to the economical situation and to the social, the political...”
(Luciana Peixoto, Argentina)

4.7 Secular education, with gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education

*“My hopes?
We need a change, we need equality.
This is lacking in many countries, although we are in the
21st. century, we have to be given the chance of deciding
on our own bodies, and even if this is a subject I do not
want to meddle with, religion, religion must have its
opinion separated, there must be a completely secular
State for countries to be more prosperous...”³⁴*
(Gabrielle Metzner, de Panama)

Adolescents and young people defend, in their testimonies, the urgency to ensure inclusive education and education for gender and sexuality equality, allowing to deconstruct patriarchal patterns and to affirm standards, roles and gender relations in conditions of equality and equity. Besides, they express a position in defense of the recognition, respect and valorization of the cultural, ethnical, linguistic, race and gender difference, among others, in education contexts.

Various human rights instruments recognize that education plays a decisive role in the achievement of gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination and violence. Thus they impose the States the obligation of protecting and ensuring the rights to education and to live a life free of violence and discrimination.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, establish that States have the obligation of implementing actions towards the elimination all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and Education 2030 Framework for Action³⁵ recognizes that “gender equality is inextricably linked to the right to education for all”.

Nevertheless, according to the publication “Por una Educación Garante de Derechos - Demandas de Estudiantes Secundaristas para América Latina y el Caribe” (Defending a Rights-Ensuring Education: Demands from Second Grade Students for Latin America and the Caribbean, CLADE, 2017), the tendencies to remove the gender perspective from education centers and to reduce or eliminate specific actions aimed

³⁴ Fragment of the text *Ensayo* (Essay), by Gabrielle Metzner - available in Spanish.

³⁵ *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4.*

at confronting inequalities based on gender and sexual orientation are concerning issues in many countries in this region. “It is true that such a tendency does not affect only education and it must be contextualized within a larger frame, in which religious fundamentalism and conservative ideas that act to influence public policies and governments’ actions in general are growing stronger. But the fact is secondary education has been incredibly affected, since resistance or refusal to address issues regarding gender and/or sexual identity inhibits, for example, the adequate prevention of different forms of harassment, violence and stereotypes that are frequently present within education contexts, and to which adolescents are particularly exposed.”³⁶

Similarly, children and adolescents participating in the Third Pan-American Child and Adolescent Forum³⁷ (Cartagena, Colombia, October 2019) demanded the right to comprehensive sexuality education, an education based on gender equality, as well as the right to receive proper information, to social inclusion and to have a family. In addition, they demanded respect for LGBTIQ+ families’ rights³⁸, among which is their right to have families, what might generate guarantees and opportunities of having a family for many children who are waiting to be adopted.

Adolescents and young people participating in the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want” expressed themselves in the same way:

“[We find ourselves] in a conservative State in which we cannot talk about many issues, such as violence, sexuality, gender identity, because this is frowned upon and it generates repression and ignorance. We need to have a little more empathy and this starts in our classrooms and in our schools, to know that the person next to us is part of the same people and the same society and what happens to them must concern us or it must be an issue for us.”

(María José Gómez, Colombia)

36 Source: [Por una educación garante de derechos - Demandas de Estudiantes Secundaristas para América Latina y el Caribe](#) - available in Spanish.

37 For further information, read the text: [¿Qué piensan estudiantes de América Latina y el Caribe sobre la educación y otros derechos humanos?](#) [What are the thoughts of Latin America and the Caribbean students on education and other human rights?]

38 Acronym for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Asexuals.



Participants of the III Pan-American Forum of Children and Teenagers, in Cartagena, Colombia. Photograph: ICBF Colombia

“In our Third Article of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, two major aspects are considered for education: first, it should be secular and second, free, without considering that education should have quality and be inclusive.”
(Angélica Pedraza, Mexico)

“We want a depatriarchalized education that decolonizes us, instead of an adultcentric, commercial, misogynist, transphobic, lesbophobic, homophobic education.”
(Alexander Reyes Guevara, Nicaragua)

4.8 Education in its relation with technologies and the media

“We [...] need a media education, the media always misinforms what is happening and in part it is also good to educate yourself to know what to believe and what not to believe in the news, why is that coming out, we need social education in such regard in order to stop believing in lies.”

(Alejandro Restrepo, Colombia)

Adolescents and young people participating in the campaign “The Education We Need for The World We Want” also approached the role of media and technology in education. In their views, it is crucial to ensure an education that is concerned with the critical assessment of communication and of what is disseminated by the media and on digital social networks.

Opinions from adolescents and young people mirror the understanding of popular communication movements and activists in regards to communication: this is understood as a process which, in its relation with education, allows the analysis and construction of different sociopolitical, economic and cultural environments based on the development and expression of critical views on social issues and the promotion of change and new narratives, through actions to strengthen democratic debates and a more diversified social participation.

The relevance of learning about the uses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to disseminate ideas and produce communication and knowledge was also an element that gained importance in the testimonies of adolescents and young people.

“What I advise teachers is to make proper use of technology, of a camera, a mobile, an app, even a meme, in order to encourage students to put more interest in the subjects, be them math, social sciences, literature, or others.”

(Rubén Mayta, Bolivia)

“[We need] an education that provides the necessary tools for an effective development, besides [involving] different areas of knowledge, like sciences, technologies, humanities, arts, engineering, among many others, allowing to prepare critical, analytical, investigative and also purposeful subjects.”

(Leonardo Suárez, Colombia)

4.9 A comprehensive education: with art, culture, joy and emotions

*"In each decade in each year
There are young people fighting the future
They raise their voices and break walls
Even though many accuse them of being nothing
My generation will be like all others
It will be the one turning the world around
Rebelliously and peacefully
Raising their voices and daring to cry
To order the winds
The air for those forbidden to breathe"³⁹*

*(fragment of a poem written by Víctor Gabriel Flores Hidalgo,
from Bolivia)*

Testimonies from adolescents and young people from the region also stress that a comprehensive education, fulfilled as a human right, must be related to art, culture, leisure, play and enjoyment in such a manner that emotions, affectivity and artistic and cultural expressions are recognized and become part of the policies and public education systems. "Art and culture also dialogue with learning through joy, expressiveness, playfulness, ludic activities and sensibility⁴⁰."

Participants in the Third Pan-American Child and Adolescent Forum demanded their right to play, to rest and to leisure, positioning against child labor, maltreatment and trafficking, and they also demanded their right to have access and enjoy cultural and artistic activities as part of their education process. "We want to know, to live and to feel our rights", affirmed two Mexican students at that moment⁴¹.

Participants of the campaign "The Education We Need for The World We Want" made statements along this line.

39 Fragment of the poem "[Pasando Puertas](#)" ("Passing through doors"), by Víctor Gabriel Flores Hidalgo - available in Spanish.

40 CLADE (2017): [Por una educación garante de derechos - Demandas de Estudiantes Secundaristas para América Latina y el Caribe](#), page 22

41 For further reading, check this [article about the Forum](#) in CLADE's website.



Participants of the conversation with students held within the framework of CLADE's 10th Regional Assembly in Bogotá, Colombia (October 2018).
Photograph: Jazmin Elena/CLADE archives

"[...] education should be a comprehensive education to enhance the student's skills in order to promote his/her expertise and peace of mind in the classroom. At the same time, they should look at various points of view in the moment of teaching a subject, not abstaining from new things, for example, whatever, a more ludic class, say, a book, films or videos, which the teacher may have or use the school resources to get."
(Sofía García, Colombia)

"I'm really good at music, drawing, singing, I am really good at it, I want an education that I can benefit from, to be taught about it, to be taught its history, to be taught good actions I can carry out to improve everything I can offer to the world, because maybe I only can be a good author, or I can be a good artist, or I can be a good singer, or I can be an excellent dancer, but nobody ever found out because they only told me that Science, Math and Spanish were the most important."
(Nicole Akist, Panama)

"[...] we need a better country, that grows through education, because only a country that grows through education will be able to transform and create transformative persons in a world that is forgetting the human, the natural and the artistic."
(Gareth Sella, Colombia)

5. FINAL REMARKS



The accomplishment of the human right to education, enshrined in diverse international instruments –the Convention on the Rights of the Child among them; a popular, liberating, emancipatory and transformative education that responds to the necessities of students, where they have a voice and their right to participation is respected. An education in which they are taught to think and not to obey, that goes beyond the four walls of the school, in which there is no discrimination or violence, an education which contributes to the consolidation of a culture of peace, dignity and respect for the human rights. An education that includes and respects people of different ages, races, cultures, ethnic groups, social classes, geographical locations, gender identities, sexual orientations, capacities etc. A public, free education, properly financed with public funding, with quality, an education that is secular, humanistic, inclusive, egalitarian, democratic, feminist, environmentalist, leading to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights.

These demands, wishes and proposals brought to this campaign by young persons and adolescents through videos, audios, poems, photos, paintings and texts, mirror their struggle for the construction of an emancipatory, rights-ensuring education that promotes transformation towards a more sustainable, fair, inclusive, egalitarian and democratic world, with dignity and rights for all.

The seeds shared in this document, fragments of the voices and participation of adolescents and young people from the region, open our ways to the acknowledgment of freedom, democracy, participation, egalitarian and respectful relations within education communities and inclusion as fundamental elements of the required education for another possible world, with more sustainable and healthy relations among humans and with nature.

We hope these messages can fly long distances, be taken into account by authorities and decision-makers in our region and in the world, especially in a moment in which old rules and truths imposed on us by the neoliberal model of economic development are jeopardized by the sanitary, environmental, climate and economical crises we face in the whole planet. We consider that situations of emergency and uncertainty such as the one we are facing in the present demand dialoguing, thinking, dreaming, creating, “hoping” and rethinking ourselves collectively, towards the construction of education systems that are more committed and pertinent, contributing to reach new and better models of development, society and humanity.

*Wings are missing to raise you from the floor
Those wings with which you could feel that sky, you can make them by yourself
It takes time, happiness and tears
Being able to be the person you had planned
But education always
has calmed you
Knowing every seed has a cycle
Knowing that by knowing more you have grown
Now touch the sky with your hands and feel the smell of your wishes
Things that arrived
And things you have planned*

(Fragment of the poem “Crece” [“To Grow”], by Víctor Gabriel Flores Hidalgo, from Bolivia⁴²)

⁴² To read this poem and others written by adolescents and young people in the region, which were sent to the campaign “The Education We Need for the World We Want”, check the last issue of CLADE’s “Poetizar” (“Poetize”) newsletter, or [this gallery of poems](#) - available in Spanish.



Rally organized by young people from Mexico to demand the realization of their right to education on occasion of the anniversary of the Mexican revolution, on November 20, 2019. Photograph: CADEM archives



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