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Editorial Introduction

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Beginning with this issue, the Inter-American Journal of Education for Democracy has a new editor, although the journal will continue to be published in the framework of the actions taken by the Inter-American Program on Education in Values and Democratic Practices of the Organization of American States (OAS). This academic journal will now be edited in Mexico, and will continue to reflect the plurality that has characterized this project. We would like to express our appreciation for the collaboration from the institutions that supported the publication of the first three volumes, and we would especially acknowledge editor Bradley Levinson. And we now express our gratitude for the support from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and particularly the Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research (CRIM) for its assistance. We've started our new task of editing this journal by inviting Dr. Teresa Yurén, a distinguished Mexican philosopher specializing in education and value formation, to coordinate this issue. The experts from the Americas invited to contribute their viewpoints are just as outstanding as Dr. Yurén, and include an Argentinean, two Brazilians and two Mexicans. Dr. Yurén's presentation of these contributions brilliantly and precisely summarizes the invited authors' writings on

education for democracy. All of the authors in this issue are from Latin America, and it is thus not surprising that they emphasize that the concept of democracy is in permanent construction and there is consequently an ongoing need for education for democracy. As we will also see, there is growing dissatisfaction with democracy in Latin America—despite the enormous advances achieved in some of the region's democracies in recent decades, surpassing other decades of authoritarianism. There are also subtle differences and varying demands expressed in the contributions to democracy from the various countries in the Americas, based on particular histories. And this means that different educational processes for democracy are required.

This is especially clear in the contributions to this issue. For example, in the two articles written by Brazilians, despite major social achievements that have brought recognition for Brazil as a world leader, a case is made for more inclusive, profoundly democratic education based on the country's ethnic and cultural, indigenous and African roots. This would seem to be totally unexpected, given the achievements that Brazil has offered to the world in area of education, including citizen education and participation—but in reality, it is

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not so surprising.

The 2010-2011 Latinobarómetro survey found that 20% of the Latin American population feel discriminated against for some reason, and in fact this percentage increased from 17% in 2009. Brazil is the Latin American country in which the highest percentage of the population (34%) feels discriminated against, followed by Bolivia (33%), Guatemala (32%), Peru (28%), Chile (21%) and Mexico (21%). In contrast, El Salvador is the Latin American country in which the lowest percentage reports feeling discriminated against (7%).

When those interviewed were asked in the same survey what percentage of the inhabitants in their country were, in their opinion, discriminated against for racial reasons, the highest percentage was reported in Guatemala, with slightly more than half (51%), followed by Brazil (46%), Bolivia (43%), Mexico (43%), the Dominican Republic (42%) and Nicaragua (42%). In contrast, those interviewed in Chile reported that 21% of the inhabitants in their country were discriminated against for reasons of race, and this was the lowest percentage among the Latin American countries surveyed (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, p. 56).

As this issue goes to press, various European countries and the United States find themselves immersed in economic crisis. Paradoxically, Latin America has better possibilities for confronting this crisis, and while the region's countries will undoubtedly be affected, Latin Americans have greater confidence in their governments (45%) in comparison with Europeans (29%) (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, p. 51). Several years ago in 2003 this situation was the opposite, with only 19% of the Latin Americans interviewed expressing confidence in their governments, in contrast with 31%

of Europeans. Nevertheless, the construction and consolidation of democracy is necessary, and even urgent in some countries, since support for democracy diminished in the region between 2010 and 2011, following consecutive increases during the previous four years. The Latin American countries with the most significant decreases in this regard are Guatemala (-10%), Honduras (-10%), Brazil (-9%), Mexico (-9%) and Nicaragua (-8%) (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, p. 29).

There are different reasons to explain this growing dissatisfaction with democracy in the various countries. In the case of Brazil, a partial explanation may be the change in president. While Brazil's new president has a 67% approval rate, this is significantly lower than the 86% rate reported for Lula at the end of his term in office the previous year, and there was also a 16% decrease in the country's image of progress. In Mexico the decrease of -1.4% may be attributed to the "wave of violence," according to the Latinobarómetro. Another factor explaining this drop in support for democracy in Latin American countries may be found in a decrease in the perception that actions taken by governments are "for the good of all people." The overall average for Latin America for this perception dropped from 33% in 2009 to 30% in 2010, and then decreased to 26% in 2011. Uruguay has the most favorable percentage in this regard, with 54%, while the lowest percentages in Latin America are in Mexico (17%), Honduras (15%), Peru (15%) and the Dominican Republic (9%) (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, p. 35).

One possible interpretation of this decrease in support for democracy might be—instead of a step backward in the consolidation of democracy—rather, an increased demand for democratization. It is especially notable



that Mexico and Guatemala are the two Latin American countries with the lowest percentages in response to the following phrase of support for democracy: "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government," with 40% and 36%, respectively. Mexico also has the highest percentage in response to the statement that "it's all the same," implying an alternative in which the government may or may not be democratic, with 36%, in comparison to 27% in Colombia, and an overall average of 18% for Latin America.

This is congruent with the feelings in these countries as to whether democracy has improved. The Latin American countries with the highest percentages for those surveyed indicating that democracy has improved are Panama (35%), Uruguay (35%), Argentina (31%), Ecuador (29%) and Brazil (29%). The lowest percentages in this regard are reported in Mexico (16%), Costa Rica (14%), Chile (12%), El Salvador (12%), Guatemala (7%) and Honduras (5%) (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, pp. 37-40).

Questioning democracy as the best form of government, particularly in countries where citizens are more likely to question their support for the system or report that it's all the same to them, is found alongside questioning whether democracy has improved in their countries. This is perhaps more understandable in the case of Mexico, but is much less clear in the case of Chile, one of the Latin American countries with the best economic performance. There is no doubt that reforms are necessary in a number of variables in the political system, and this is especially notable in the response that those interviewed have maintained for 15 years regarding their level of confidence in fundamental actors and institutions in their democracy and their

political system. In the overall Latin American averages, those interviewed expressed the lowest level of confidence in political parties (20%), followed by trade unions (28%) and the Congress/Parliament (28%), and the judicial branch (31%) (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011, p. 48).

This matter of trust cannot be sidestepped when it comes to democracy. Although uncertainty characterizes democracy and democratic transitions, this does not imply chaos or anarchy, as pointed out by Pzeworski (2003, p. 48):

Democracy is a system for addressing conflicts in which the results depend on actions taken by participants, but there is no concrete force that controls the way in which events unfold. None of the opposing political forces know beforehand how specific conflicts will evolve, since the consequences of their actions depend on the actions of others, and the latter cannot be anticipated unambiguously [...] the fact that uncertainty is inherent to democracy does not mean that anything is possible and nothing can be predicted [...] democracy is not equivalent to chaos and anarchy.

This signifies that citizens' level of confidence in the role played by these political actors in a democracy is a determining factor—especially when there are elections as highly contested as those in Mexico in 2006. It is important to point out that the majority of experts believe a transition to democracy has not been achieved in Mexico—without explicitly addressing the various stages necessary and furthermore, difficult to identify precisely. Along these lines, we might recall a warning from Schedler: "It is frequently difficult to



say at what point a transition begins, and sometimes it is difficult to know when it is over; and normally it is impossible to say when consolidation processes are concluded" (Schedler, 2004, p. 25).

In this context it is important to ask whether there is actually something to be accomplished by education for a democratic citizenry. Various experts have reiterated that a democratic citizenry is built alongside democracy, with citizens participating and exercising their political rights as citizens—and not only in elections. As Ana María Salmerón has commented extensively in this issue, civic education must transcend a school environment, and pedagogically, must maintain a systematic interrelation with any and all public and private settings. François Chevalier reminded us of this, quoting Mexicans from the early 19th century: "Does the first school not continue to be a genuine municipal freedom, for citizens to learn to govern themselves, a necessary preliminary step to democracy?" (Chevalier, 1989, p. 44). Some experts have emphasized that in response to the lack of confidence in institutions and the problems in a transition to democracy, democratic citizen participation is one of the paths to democratically strengthen governments.

Nuria Cunill (2004) states that given the dramatic social and economic inequality in Latin America, citizen participation is a social right. In a number of Latin American countries (Brazil and Colombia, for example), Citizen Schools have been established—and not only for children but also for citizens. The aim is to confront and prevent diverse social problems as critical as violence and crime—which are the most severe problems, together with economic development, for Latin American countries.

Of course, a number of Latin American countries have initiated reform-oriented paths for renewing or initiating citizenship education beginning at the elementary school level. At least six of these countries—with support from their Ministries of Education, at the initiative of the Inter-American Development Bank, and with support from the OAS for the 2010 meeting—signed an agreement and launched a program for evaluating the achievements from these reforms oriented toward democratic citizenship education. An example of the latter is the incorporation of the evaluation of citizen education as proposed by the IEA. These results have not yet been widely and systematically disseminated, and this is one of the objectives we have identified for our Journal (*Sistema Regional de Evaluación de Competencias Ciudadanas—SREDECC*, 2010).

For the moment, the results from the 2011 Report from *Latinobarómetro* reveal the importance of education for democracy in the construction and consolidation of democracy in this region of the Americas. One indication of this can be observed in an aspect of civic culture, specifically compliance with the law. The highest percentages indicating that "citizens comply with the law" were reported in Uruguay (54%), El Salvador (44%), Panama (44%), Chile (42%), Ecuador (39%), the Dominican Republic (39%) and Brazil (37%). In contrast, the countries with the lowest percentage are Peru (12%), Bolivia (16%), Mexico (19%), Guatemala (19%) and Colombia (19%) (*Corporación Latinobarómetro*, 2011, p. 55). A pending task, of course, is to study the relationship between education for democracy and the consolidation of democracy in the Americas.

In summary education for democracy has the potential to contribute to the



construction, improvement and consolidation of democracy, beginning with elementary-level instruction, but also extending to education for

youth and for citizens, including key players in the political class, and members of political parties, Parliament, Congress and trade unions.

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