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Editorial Introduction

Medardo Tapia Uribe*

There are two focuses of analysis in the articles in this new issue of RIED/IJED. One is considered to be an essential element of education for democracy, necessary for developing critical consciousness, as maintained in Freire's work. The article by Gustavo Fischman and Victor Díaz refers to the most profound of the paradigmatic roots of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The other focus demonstrates that dissatisfaction *with* democracy persists in the Americas, although at the 2010 Forum on Latin American Democracy held in Mexico, this phenomenon was expressed as dissatisfaction *in* democracy, or in other words, within the experience of democracy.

Perhaps as part of this dissatisfaction with democracy, participants at the above-mentioned Forum, within the framework of the Second Report by the OAS and UNDP entitled "Our Democracy," stated that they were able to address and delve deeper into three issues that are central to the debate and that are challenging democracy in Latin America:

1. If democracy is able to pay the social dividends promised to the poorest citizens [...]
2. If we have the democratic oversight necessary for such, and [...]
3. If democracies are efficient in guaranteeing freedom and security. (Magdy Martínez, 2010)

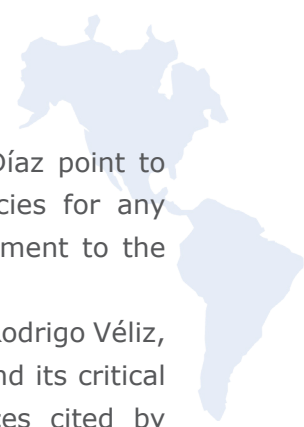
In the conclusions reached at the Forum, it was acknowledged that there is a deficit in political representation in Latin America, especially in relation to the most vulnerable citizens, and it was recognized that the commitment made to these groups in society is no longer being met. It was also recognized that while social policy cannot be expected to resolve public security problems, it is not acceptable to "[...] ignore the breeding grounds of poverty in which the social environments of crime flourish." (Martínez, 2010)

Dante Caputo, the coordinator of this Second report, made the following statement on democracy during the Forum's final session:

We all understand each other when we talk about democracy as something more than casting votes [...] a democracy of well-being [...] A type of democracy based not only on the right to vote, but on the right to have access to the minimum conditions that should be guaranteed in the political sphere, in the civil sphere and in the socioeconomic sphere of a society. (Caputo, 2010)

In this Second Report, Valdés Zurita (2010) acknowledged a "deficit in social, civil and political terms with citizens" in Latin

*Chief Editor. PhD in Education from Harvard University. Researcher at the Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (CRIM-UNAM). Email: medardo@unam.mx



American democracies, although he also acknowledged that:

These deficits are the result of a series of realities shared by Latin American societies. The threats of organized crime, the growing presence of communication media in electoral races, the lack of control over money in electoral campaigns, and poverty and social inequality are some of the pending topics in our agendas. (Valdés, 2010)

And he acknowledged that some of the achievements have been possible “[...] due to participation by critical citizens who insisted that the political class make a break with a system.” (Valdés, 2010)

The articles in this issue of RIED/IJED are thus quite pertinent, since two of them are focused on basic education in two indigenous communities, addressing the inadequate political representation affecting Latin American youth. These articles also analyze how some youth have been educated in democracy on the basis of critical thinking. One case is the displaced population in the Ixcán region of Guatemala. An education in critical thinking based on the methodology developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* allowed them to assume a critical perspective in their pedagogical work—in an exchange with their own traditions and the enormous problems of repression and persecution as they fled and established their communities in the Ixcán during the war in which they found themselves immersed.

Three of the four articles published in this issue refer to Freire’s work and demonstrate its current relevance with vigor. However, as Freire himself would have wished, they also extend beyond what he proposed.

And this is what Fischman and Díaz point to as one of Freire’s greatest legacies for any educational program: his commitment to the democratization of society.

In fact, as commented by Rodrigo Véliz, the pedagogy of the oppressed and its critical perspective is one of the sources cited by teachers in the Primavera del Ixcán community¹ for their own pedagogical work. Véliz refers to this text with familiarity, although he does not mention it in his bibliography. This is perhaps because the teachers maintain they learned to be critical during the war and later through their participation in the national dialogue that culminated in the 1996 Peace Accords.

Véliz also emphasizes that education was fundamental in this process, reminding us that in 1973 over 50% of the population in Guatemala was illiterate, but by 2010 this figure had been reduced to 19.4%. While this was not exactly cause for celebration, it did allow indigenous communities and the Ixcán community in particular to participate in the peace dialogue process. Thus, teachers in Ixcán, in their role as mediators, and citizens in general, accepted that education should be “conceived of as dialogue, and not an imposition of knowledge as in ‘banking education,’ a term used by Freire.” (Véliz, in this issue)

Fischman and Díaz recognize precisely that this Freire/Critical Pedagogy movement has been applied in a dialogue of diverse dimensions and characteristics, and has even enriched Freire’s paradigm among teachers, students and citizens. This is the case in the Ixcán, where this dialogue has facilitated the development of the communities’ own education program, and teachers and citizens in the Ixcán have engaged in a beneficial dialogue with Guatemala’s Education Ministry. This has resulted in contributions to educational programs and has impacted the pedagogical process in classrooms and schools.



This dialogue-based education has made it possible for the Ixcán indigenous communities—who fled from repression and worked to prevent their culture and their lifestyles from being utterly destroyed—to become part of the school curriculum. Participation by Ixcán teachers, students and the community has actually become a process of democratic education. And this underscores what Fischman and Díaz point out with regard to the pedagogy of the oppressed:

[...] it is worth the effort to pursue even short-term experiences in democratic education in a single classroom or through an effort made in all the districts. These experiences not only teach us to expect more from schools but also teach us that by improving education, individuals and community participation are linked to the objectives of equality and solidarity, and also provide access to knowledge that is socially and scientifically relevant and to improvements in individual and socio-educational results. (Fischman and Díaz, in this issue)

It is important to highlight, through the theses presented by these two authors, that the processes of developing the contributions made by teachers and citizens to the basic education process in the Ixcán are part of the democratic education of these teachers and citizens. When these processes are placed into practice at the individual and collective levels, it is a result of actions undertaken due to a commitment to social justice in their community and in cooperation with others, from whom they gain an understanding and awareness that allows them to critically challenge the hegemonic structures of persecution and annihilation.

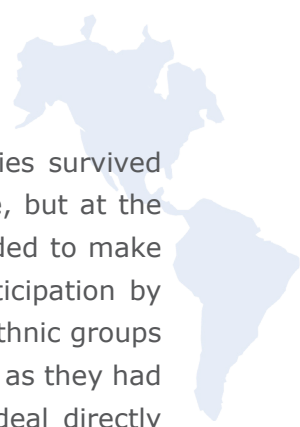
Nevertheless, we need to delve deeper into this renewed perspective of critical

education as part of the democratic education of the most vulnerable groups in the Americas.

We need to further develop these alternative pedagogical paths to achieving critical democratic education, since the proposal for critical education has long been established in Mexico and the rest of the Americas,² through laws and programs, but they cannot yet be considered as achievements.

My hypothesis in this editorial proposes that the construction of democratic education is not an easy task and there are surely many paths to placing it into practice, as illustrated in the articles in this issue: those developed by indigenous Guatemalan communities and described in the article by Véliz; those developed by Nahuatl communities and addressed in the article by Medrano; and those developed by young people and discussed in the article by Hernández. Some of these multiple paths are being constructed by teachers, citizens and even students themselves.

Dialogue-based education, as pointed out by Véliz, is in pedagogical terms “[...] the primary generator of knowledge, and on the basis of dialogue, two different worlds can understand each other, and with a critical attitude, seek ways to build their reality.” This pedagogical alternative was constructed on the basis of three determining focuses that should be considered as the basic points in democratic education for those who are most in need, in order to facilitate more active participation, given their exclusion: first of all, as displaced persons, they were forced to defend their culture without having a territorial reference; secondly, a popular education project, with roots from Freire’s work, was linked to a broader project for social change within a context of war; and finally, teachers played the role of mediators in relation to the government’s standardized curriculum and the Ministry of Education and other authorities within the Guatemalan State.



Véliz points out that these teachers served as a critical pedagogical liaison between two curriculums—the one established and regulated by the State and the one safeguarded by the ten rural indigenous Mayan communities of displaced persons. It is important to point out that the Ixcán communities were the social and economic nucleus of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres*), as a consequence of a number of massacres committed against them and their collective escape into the mountains.

The significance of the above in terms of education for democracy in the Ixcán communities is that inhabitants had to re-learn how to organize themselves, and especially in relation to their new status as war displaced. In particular they organized land plots for growing food and formed an emergency committee known as the *Comité de Emergencia de Parcelarios del Ixcán* (CEPI) and also a popular education team (*Equipo de Educación Popular*) for teaching children to read and to understand their situation as war displaced.

The pedagogy used by Ixcán teachers and the critical pedagogy used with young people to help them develop into democratic citizens are clearly useful tools. One of the methodologies used was Freire's "generating words" methodology in which everyday words and terms were selected for teaching reading and writing. One example was the Spanish word for refugee, *refugiado*, which was strategically useful since it contains each of the five vowels. Other key words were "production" and "security," two fundamental elements in their community organization. The idea was for children to learn about democracy and organization from their own experiences in their communities, from the obligations, commitments and benefits and the democratic and community values behind these forms of organization and experiences.

These displaced communities survived clandestinely for an entire decade, but at the beginning of the 1990s they decided to make their plight known publically. Participation by the Ixcán communities—with 25 ethnic groups represented at that time—was not as they had hoped, and it was necessary to deal directly with the Guatemalan State. In the area of education they found they had to confront the State's books, methods and pedagogies from their own "culture of resistance." Those who had become teachers while in the displaced communities had to face the challenge that they summarized into three educational tasks: the development of society in general with an eye toward participation and action; the development of the community *from* and *for* the community; and the development of each student at the individual level. All of this meant that schools prepared students not only in academic terms but also in ethical-moral terms in relation to society.

Topics covered in the schools were basically determined by the official textbooks, but the discussion was focused on the particular situations experienced in the communities—and not in abstract terms or added superficially to give an indigenous "flavor." The process led to a constructive dialogue focused on confronting the topics proposed in the textbook. For example, topics such as nutrition and health were expanded upon to include the school plots for growing food where students and the community cooperative worked. Although not stated explicitly by the author, the entire process was designed to educate through dialogue, with attention given to the communities' problems of health, nutrition, and other economic and social issues. This focus was even apparent in the arrangement of the students' desks, placed in a semi-circle to facilitate dialogue, and in the efforts to link intellectual work with physical work as much as possible.



As we explore other democratic education processes presented in this issue of RIED/IJED, we find the democratic education of youth addressed in the article by Corina Fernández, and results from an indigenous community in the Mexican town of Hueyapan, presented in the article by Verónica Medrano. We can observe how individuals are educated in this critical awareness of democratic participation in situations that, while different from those in the Ixcán region of Guatemala characterized by war and peace-making, share elements of social exclusion and vulnerability.

We can also observe that learning focused on organized participation as citizens is another element found consistently in citizen education for democracy.

In fact the article by Corina Fernández addresses this type of education for democracy through practical participation—outside the official curriculum—as seen through the experiences of community leaders and new generations in the community of Hueyapan. This focus can be witnessed through a number of generations of inhabitants, and was once again proposed for youth education in 2007 in the *Tlalana: Youth and Self-Management* project.³ The objective was to form groups possessing skills in leading local, participative, viable and self-sustainable projects. This renewed citizen education project was a continuation of efforts in which those inviting adolescents to participate had been educated through their own participation as adolescents working in eleven adult literacy campaigns. Over 3,000 youth were educated through these campaigns that taught over 25,000 adults in 97 communities in eleven Mexican states to read and write. This was truly an example of education for democracy, far beyond anything found in the official curriculum in public education. The element found consistently in this new call for participation was a focus on

learning to organize in order to take collective action in response to various social problems. As explained by Fernández:

These campaigns have attempted to bring other adolescents closer to the reality of rural communities in our country, in order to help them develop their abilities to understand that reality and transform it. To this end these campaigns have promoted a type of community organization that provides tools and links that can generate self-management processes that respond to local needs. (Fernández, in this issue)

In the article by Verónica Medrano we once again observe citizen education for democracy that extends far beyond the right to vote. It was in 1919, the author notes, that “the inhabitants of Hueyapan decided to take the organization of school institutions into their own hands” (Medrano, in this issue). And this has taken place at different moments in time through a variety of demands made and dialogue undertaken with different institutions in the Mexican State—and even in inhabitants’ own families, especially in relation to schools, since schools were not always accepted by all members of the community. Thus, inhabitants took “ownership” of schools on individual and collective levels, and the main argument in favor of the existence of schools was based on their usefulness for everyday life in Hueyapan, in response to the economic needs of individuals and the community.

Also in this process, the use of inhabitants’ native language in schools as well as in homes was defended. Knowledge of their language became a resource for this dialogue and for the various negotiations carried out, and even led to one of the women in the community collaborating with researchers at



different times in Harvard University and the University of Indiana. In fact she spent time at these universities to participate in the development of a Nahuatl dictionary.

This democratic education generated by members of the Hueyapan community—since many of them did not attend school or did not finish elementary school—taught them that they had to become organized in order to participate in bringing schools to the community, for example. Furthermore, if they wanted to represent and speak on behalf of their community, it was necessary to address inhabitants' everyday problems, language and culture. These aspects had been ignored by the teachers and community leaders who had previously attempted to expand schools in the community, assuming that these elements were not necessary. As pointed out by Medrano in her article, it is important to note that in 2005 10.4% of the population above the age of 15 years was illiterate and 39.6% had not completed elementary school.

Also important to highlight is that this process of democratic education, which has sought to take ownership of school administration, began in 1919 and has been expressed in different ways through the years. During the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency in Mexico (1934-1940), for example, Hueyapan inhabitants expressed their disagreement when elementary students were required to march through the streets, shouting "long live socialism." And inhabitants also protested when the first teachers from outside the community arrived, only speaking Spanish and not allowing students to speak in their own language.

Hueyapan citizens, through the initiatives they have undertaken, have continued to learn how to participate democratically in order to establish more schools, and defend the right for local problems and local culture to be

addressed in these schools. This was the case when inhabitants negotiated the establishment of complete elementary schools, after schools with only up to fourth grade were offered, and then later when the technical junior high school was established in early 1980 and the senior high school in 2005.

Another important aspect in terms of education for democracy is that through their organized participation, Hueyapan inhabitants created a trust for administering this process, with key, useful participation by municipal government authorities. Once again, as in the case of the Ixcán region in Guatemala, the role played by the junior high school principal and teachers was very important for dialoguing and negotiating with government and educational authorities, and with parents, and even for recruiting students. Medrano refers to teachers as mediators. In fact the role as mediators—actually political representatives—that both Medrano and Véliz attribute to teachers is highly important for creating schools as institutions that contribute to socially and culturally strengthening communities.

The historical rejection of schools by Hueyapan inhabitants was also a rejection of the quality of schools. This was true in the case of Hueyapan's technical junior high school, when some parents preferred to send their sons and daughters to the junior high school in Tetela del Volcán, the municipal seat. There was however a gradual process of acceptance after 2006, when a graduate of Hueyapan's junior high school was elected as municipal president, and worked to improve the school's quality, establishing a connection with a national institute of agricultural research and with the National Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in order to offer courses open to Hueyapan farmers and residents.

Later, local authorities took responsibility for making the necessary efforts



to establish a senior high school in Hueyapan, and in fact—as also occurred in the case of the junior high school—it is physically located in the local government building.

These articles are thus important for illustrating to us the key points around which democratic education is constructed in communities characterized by clear deficits in political representation and a clear lack of State responsibility for ensuring a democracy of well-being and trust.

The processes addressed here demonstrate that basic education is insufficient for becoming educated in democracy, and that citizens—such as those in the Ixcán region, who were being persecuted at the same time, and those in Hueyapan, who did not attend school—end up preparing themselves for democratic participation. At the same time, the citizen education received by Mexican youth through their participation in literacy campaigns, through other citizens dissatisfied with democracy in Mexico, also illustrates that the programs, the methods of formal education and even the time for which they are offered are all insufficient to confront the challenges

for democratic education mentioned in the Second Report from the “Our Democracy” study and the challenges in confronting these deficits in social, civil and political citizenship, as discussed at the 2010 Forum for Latin American Democracy.

Along these lines, it is important to observe the ways in which different groups confront these deficits and respond to the challenges identified in the report prepared under the auspices of the OAS and UNDP,⁴ specifically: the challenge of democracy for guaranteeing freedom and security. This is especially pertinent if we consider the often-made recommendations regarding the need for citizen participation in confronting this challenge (UN-Hábitat, 2009; UN-Hábitat and Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2011; CEPAL, 2008).

As always, we express our appreciation to the Organization of American States (OAS) and the *Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias* for their support in the development of this issue of RIED/IJED.

Endnotes

1. A community of persons displaced by the war in Guatemala, composed of ten ethnic groups, and previously known as the Communities of Population in Resistance of the Ixcán.
2. In this regard it is important to recall that the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the OAS proposes: “A type of education in which teaching and learning are part of the same process. A type of education that allows for building consensus through dissent, and that problematizes reality and develops critical consciousness. A type of education that, on the basis of facts and data, develops opinions based on respect for diversity in beliefs and values—without losing sight of the common good. Education for democracy extends far beyond educating young people regarding the merits of representative democracy, and is based on the need to develop civic and ethical values that will allow them to become citizens who are unrestricted, informed, critical and able to act responsibly in transforming their environment.” (González Luna, 2010: 22)
3. *Tlalana* in the Nahuatl language means “to put down roots.”
4. “The presentation by the OAS Secretary General was partially focused on the enormous challenge faced by democracies in confronting crime and in developing the necessary capacity for fighting crime.” (Martínez, 2010)



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