

**Resist and Re-exist: Reflections on ALE and COVID-19 from a Latin America and the Caribbean perspective****By Giovanna Modé and Adelaida Entenza, Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE)**

The major public health emergency and crisis resulting from the spread of COVID-19 has led to a unique scenario and unprecedented global uncertainty. This scenario affects our region, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), since the end of February, and has led to the implementation of a series of measures, at national and regional levels, basically focused on the imposition of social distancing and restrictions on mobility - social isolation, confinement, quarantine - with a view to controlling the spread of the virus, preventing the collapse of public health systems, and protecting the health, public welfare and lives of people.



The extraordinary impact caused by this crisis in the region includes multiple dimensions: socio-economic, political, legal (particularly in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law), cultural, gender, community, ecological and environmental, ontological, psychological, and technological (for example: digital hyper connection, telework, virtual education, etc.).

Although it is difficult to anticipate and measure the real impact of COVID-19, there are already some estimates regarding the scenario that awaits us. For example, the most recent estimates made by ECLAC<sup>1</sup> indicate that poverty, extreme poverty and inequality will increase in all countries of the region; poverty will increase from 186 to 214 million people and extreme poverty from 67 to 83 million people<sup>2</sup>.

The magnitude of the pandemic has led to certain rights and freedoms constraints, limitations on people's autonomy being imposed, and a shift from public spaces to private-domestic and virtual spaces. From the human rights perspective, concerns are raised about the risks associated with the restriction of rights, as well as the proliferation of discourses based on the promotion of fear, excessive controls and surveillance policies (in many cases incorporating the use of technological tools and computer applications, such as georeferencing and mobility control through cell phone monitoring and biometric recognition) under the guise of serving for the collective well-being (SURIAN, 2020).

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1 <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19>

2 [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/presentation/files/informe\\_especial\\_3\\_ppt\\_covid-19\\_reporte\\_3.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/presentation/files/informe_especial_3_ppt_covid-19_reporte_3.pdf)

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This new global scenario calls for new tools for analysis and action – since those that we currently have no longer respond to the challenges that are being imposed<sup>3</sup> - and at the same time the old challenges are not only still in force but are also accentuated: the multiple inequalities, forms of discrimination and racism, gender violence, limitations and disputes around a “virtual education” in a scenario marked by fake news, manipulations of social networks, such as those undertaken by conservative electoral campaigns for Donald Trump in the United States, Brexit in United Kingdom and copied by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

In addition to the deepening of existing inequalities, it is more pronounced for certain groups or collectives, such as the elderly, the most vulnerable or marginalized people, women, migrants and refugees. Along with this, we see the appearance of greater racism, xenophobia, discrimination and violence. Clearly, a scenario like the one described also poses unique challenges to the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>4</sup>.

In particular for civil society that works from a human rights perspective, all of the above imposes the prioritization of strategies oriented to the overprotection of rights and the eradication of policies and discourses that justify that they can be minimized or undermined. This is precisely the case of education for youth and adults, an area for which this brief essay draws attention. In the LAC region there are already several examples of how this educational level is subject to losing priority in public policies, as it was clearly observed in Colombia, where funding to new cycles and processes for training of young people and adults was suspended, as well as the hiring of educational personnel<sup>5</sup>, or in the municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, where resources for adult literacy in the city were suspended<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond the key issue of the restriction on the guarantee to the right to education, which has been a matter of deep concern and subject of debate in recent months, in the case of education for youth and adults it is necessary to also bear in mind other reflections, which may also provide more beyond this level of education. So, in addition to observing the limits of a non-classroom education during the crisis, within ALE a central dimension to take into account is its potential to overcome the crisis itself. How do we imagine education for youth and adults in the new world that we are living in and based on the regional context? It is in this spirit that in this short essay we share some reflections.

A first relevant point is the need to reclaim for this level of education one of the most present characteristics in the history of popular education and particularly in the movements for adult

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3 Hospitality and virtuous immunity. Patricia Manrinque. Wuhan soup - Contemporary thinking in times of the pandemic. Aspó, 2020.

4 Positioning of civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean in the lead up to the 2030 Agenda and its implementation within the framework of COVID-19. Latin America and the Caribbean: Little progress and new challenges for the 2030 Agenda (May 2020): <https://redclade.org/wp-content/uploads/Posicionamiento-de-la-Sociedad-Civil-de-América-Latina-y-El-Caribe-ante-la-Agenda-2030-y-su-implementacion-en-el-marco-del-COVID19-FINAL-F-1.pdf>

5 Ministry of National Education of Colombia, Directive No. 5, March 25, 2020: "Guidelines for the implementation of pedagogical strategies for academic work at home and the implementation of a modality of food supplement for consumption at home" <https://www.mineducacion.gov>

6 The São Paulo Literacy Movement is part of the local public policy for adult education. <http://www4.fe.usp.br/faculdade-de-educacao-da-usp-em-defesa-do-mova-sp>

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literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is its ability to promote the exercise of thinking and co-create the world, preparing proposals and alternatives to respond to the current context. It is precisely this calling for change, as Oscar Jara<sup>7</sup> said in a recent interview with CLADE, "transforming resistance into re-existence", based on liberating, dialogical educational processes aimed at developing our capacities for social and personal transformation, linked to processes of organization and participation.

One of the various contributions of popular education is to have as a starting point a view of students as subjects with the full potential to contribute and build critical thinking - and therefore generate action. There is politics involved in this exercise and it is no coincidence that Paulo Freire, the precursor of such powerful ideas, is attacked by conservative groups at this time, precisely in his region of origin. His proposal to offer people tools so that they have access to knowledge to change the world is still immensely in force and in direct conflict with proposals that the curricula for ALE should offer minimum basic needs for the labor markets. The skills necessary to access decent jobs are essential; however, the possibilities of youth and adult education go much further. There is a pedagogy of indignation, as Freire would say, and there is also a pedagogy of hope.

The second point has to do with a reflection on the identity of youth and adult education in our region, a topic that challenges stakeholders, researchers and the educational community itself. Traditionally in Latin America and the Caribbean, this level of education, in spite of all the diversity experienced in the countries, is understood as a second chance for those who could not learn in their appropriate time. It is not necessary to reinforce that it is precisely the most historically excluded populations that demand opportunities for literacy and education of young people and adults - and thus it remains a fundamental issue of rights, reparation and justice.

However, the context of the pandemic reminds us of the important challenge of broadening the perspective for a lifelong education that goes far beyond minimum skills. More than ever, it reminds us of how essential youth and adult education is for the field of health and care, both individually as well as collectively and globally, for the plane of subjectivities (the expansion of feelings, imagination, and confronting and overcoming fears), and for the sustainability of life: a more sustainable future, new paradigm shift, socioeconomic relations that respect territories and communities, food policies, social construction of the habitat and collective production of knowledge<sup>8</sup>.

It should be noted that in the framework of this pandemic the emergence of solidarity has also been evident, a deeper perception of social relations, of the field of sensitivities and awareness of fragility, thinking of ourselves as humans and not based on individualities, the distinction among the dimensions that are fundamental for the development of life, the sustainability of our societies and the planet; and those that are not. And precisely in the face

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<sup>7</sup> <https://educarparalalibertad.org/noticia/dialogo-virtual-con-oscar-jara/>

<sup>8</sup> Education, public health and management of epidemics. What lessons are you leaving us? Alessio Surian. Thinking about the Pandemic Collection. Coronavirus Social Observatory. CLACSO. Buenos Aires. May 2020. <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/se/20200512065911/4-Alessio-Surian.pdf>



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of these possibilities, there would be the opportunity to see adult education processes as spaces for reflection and construction of alternatives.

More than ever, it is an issue for everyone, and in the LAC region, the pandemic imposes on us the challenge that we all have to continue learning and, in this light, the collective subject of the youth and adult education becomes much broader, which requires that the demand must be strengthened and the response more comprehensive.

Contrary to the discourses that affirm it as a lower-ranking right, easily displaced given the public health crisis, the current scenario shows us the need to think about transformations of youth and adult education as a field in itself, as a fundamental field in the construction of new realities and ways of life compatible with a sustainable, fair and caring world. This is how the call for youth and adult education can be strengthened as a right and increased as a priority by public systems, which is essential in imagining and co-creating a post-virus world.