

Introduction

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Educational research is a broad field with many branches that explore the phenomenon of teaching and learning. Research topics related to formal education in the classroom are more than enough to occupy educational academia. However, due to deficiencies in the quality and coverage of formal education, it is also essential to study the projects that are developed with and for people excluded from these systems, projects that seek to “guarantee” the right to education and cover the gaps left by formal education.

There are countless educational projects provided by religious, academic and community groups, civil society organizations, and others interested in going beyond traditional school spaces and formal models to teach. Furthermore, there are many innovative teachers who seek to implement different strategies to educate their students. These grassroots initiatives often lack formal design, impact assessments and funding, though over the past decade there have been numerous efforts from the academic field to professionalize and strengthen educational projects of this type.

This issue of *Diálogos sobre Educación* publicizes the accomplishments and areas of opportunity of diverse initiatives to complement traditional education styles, contributing to the critical analysis of the role of education “beyond the classroom”.

We open with an article by Ronald Nigh and María Bertely from *CIESAS Sureste* analyzing “Indigenous Knowledge and Education in Chiapas, Mexico”. The article presents two grassroots intercultural education projects: i) *Laboratorios Socionaturales Vivos y Milpas Educativas* (Living Socio-Natural Laboratories and Educational *Milpas*) that serves to strengthen indigenous values and customs among those who have left and returned to the community, and ii) a gardening project in an elementary school called *Laboratorios para la Vida* (Laboratories for Life). The article presents the Intercultural Inductive Method used in both projects, exploring “how to expand and enrich local knowledge with Western knowledge through five transversal axes: Agroecology, Nutrition, Natural Sciences, Local Knowledge, and Interculturality”.

The second article, by Roberto Rafael López Gómez y Dafne Bastida Izaguirre, emphasizes the importance of informal environmental education in rural areas through a case study carried out in the community of Palo Alto, Jalisco, bordering the *Sierra de Quila*. The study shows how rural communities’ overuse and exploitation of natural resources can cause devastating effects to ecosystems. The findings show an urgent need for projects of informal education in rural communities to help residents understand the impact of their actions on the environment.

Informal education is a primary strategy for intervening with street children around the world. Suany Irslandy Vergara Ocampo’s study in Medellín, Colombia on how children relate to the streets, encourages us to consider how formal and informal education is structured and

used to “domesticate” children in modern society. Vergara Ocampo reflects on the formative values of daily activities of children in the streets and how these differ between those who inhabit the streets and those who use the streets primarily in transit from one controlled space to another (home, school, extracurricular activities, etc.). The author also considers how perceptions of “the streets” vary from one socioeconomic group to another.

In addition to empowering street children, projects of informal education are often used to address questions of women’s rights and issues of gender equality. The article entitled “Advancements in the fulfillment of the training and education rights of women and girls, 20 years after the Beijing Platform for Action” by Lourdes del Carmen Angulo Salazar and María de los Ángeles Galván Portillo from the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Guadalajara* presents an astounding number of indicators reflecting the continued inequality in educational and training opportunities for women. The authors revisit the objectives set in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to propose new strategies to reduce the gender gap in work and education around the world, emphasizing the potential strength of public policy in addressing these problems.

With the remaining three thematical texts for this issue, we move into the environment of formal education. Adriana Piedad García Herrera’s article on teacher training and the right to education focuses on the national public university, *La Normal*, that offers an undergraduate degree in elementary education. García Herrera highlights the importance of direct involvement with elementary schools throughout the four-year degree, arguing that these experiences are what sensitize the future teachers to the complex responsibility of teaching, more so than the formation they receive in the classrooms of *La Normal*.

The article written by Orlando Reynoso Orozco and Tanya Méndez Luévano, shares the findings of a study regarding the academic success of 88 undergraduate students, considering indicators available prior to the start of their university careers (high school grade point averages, scores on college entrance exams and College Board test results). Their findings suggest that regulating conduct and emotions in daily life can affect attention spans and self-control necessary for academic success. If this is true, how could projects of informal education and other efforts outside the classroom better support students prone to internal challenges that could hinder their academic success?

Along the same line, we have included another article from Colombia by Yasaldez Eder Loaiza Zuluaga y Luz Delia Osorio that presents a study seeking to contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in middle school science classes, specifically abilities to analyze information, infer implications, propose alternative solutions to problems and back one’s position with logical arguments. The research considers experiences in the teaching process that specifically contribute to the advancement of analytical skills in adolescents and could thus potentially transform their natural science classes from experiences of banking education to problem posing.

In addition to these articles, the number includes the testimony of an incarcerated student's thirst for education during more than two decades in the federal prison system. Francisco Torres Hernández describes his determination to study law and the positive impact advanced education has had on his life and others imprisoned with him. This short text, leaves us thoughtful about the extreme inequality in educational opportunities throughout the world for an infinite number of factors such as one's class, gender, or criminal records.

In closing, we continue to focus on education in prisons with the article presented in the Debate section of this number entitled "Empowered or disempowered? The impact of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in Mexico". The text comes from the final paper of a Criminology student in a course on "Crime, Justice and Social Inclusion" that I teach in the Metropolitan Prison of the Jalisco state penitentiary system. Here, Isaac Jimenez and I review some of the most urgent problems currently found Mexican prisons and how education is fundamental in attending this crisis. The article shows the profound impact Inside-Out has on incarcerated individuals as well as the university students who participate in this unique educational program.

All nine articles presented in this issue of *Diálogos sobre educación* inspire us to recognize the potential of innovative education projects offered outside the typical classroom setting. The use of different pedagogies, teaching and research strategies, such as those explored in these texts, is fundamental for individual students to improve their educational experiences and for society, as a whole, to reduce the severe inequality in educational opportunities available to different sectors of the population.

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