



9th Trinational Conference
May 7-9, 2010

Trinational Coalition for the Defense of Public Education

Declaration¹

Montreal, May 9th, 2010

We represent education staff belonging to unions in Mexico, the United States and Canada that are associated with the Trinational Coalition for the Defense of Public Education. We coordinate activities to safeguard public education against the effects of privatization and government underfunding that became more acute with the signing of NAFTA in 1994 and during the recession of 2008 that led governments to implement budget restrictions in education networks. We consider adequate, fair funding of public education to be a responsibility of States, and it must not be subjected to the vagaries of the economic situation.

We observe, from our collective experience and reflection, that neither national education policies nor investments have proved equal to the challenges that have to be addressed in a world where the broadest access to humanist and democratic education is more necessary than ever.

We consider sufficient, equitable funding for public education an absolute necessity. The existing system that favours private education, accessible to the more affluent to the detriment of an underfunded public school system, must be brought to an end.

¹ This Declaration is mainly inspired by the declaration adopted at the Hemispheric Forum on Education held at the second People's Summit of the Americas, April 17–18, 2001.

We firmly believe in the need to reverse this deplorable trend. This requires collective action. We assert that our education systems require significant democratic transformations. Through our organizations, we will continue to work tirelessly, in solidarity, to effect changes that will provide for the needs and the well being of the people.

We affirm that education, including not only general education but also technical or vocational training is a fundamental, universal social right. This right must be guaranteed through a public service coming under the jurisdiction of and financed by the State. We will therefore join forces to resist the market-driven and elitist policies that now prevail in many places in North America and that are leading to growing privatization of education.

Education is not a commodity that serves to make corporations richer. Students are not products. They and their parents are not consumers, nor clients of education. Education personnel are not mere service providers. We adamantly oppose the inclusion of education in any agreement on the liberalization of trade in services. We also object to the commercialization of education and of all public services, as well as to the use of commercial discourse and the determination to impose the cost/benefit ratio as a concern in education.

We declare that comprehensive, accessible education must prepare free and critical-minded individuals, active and committed citizens who show respect for diversity and human rights, are open to the world, are concerned about the future of the planet and sustainable development and who have acquired a critical understanding of globalization. Education must prepare men and women for life, for changes in the work world and lifelong personal development, not train them narrowly for a specific job.

We assert that basic education, technical or vocational training and higher education must take into account issues of food safety, sustainable farming, sustainable energy development and environmental protection issues as well as matters relating to human rights, democracy, intercultural relations, responsible consumption and fair trade with the express purpose of building a viable future.

We defend accessible education as an instrument of social justice and emancipation for all individuals throughout their lives. It promotes equality between women and men, regardless of their ethnic origin, sexual orientation, beliefs or philosophical choices, or learning potential. It trains human beings to prefer cooperation and solidarity rather than unbridled competition, to seek peace as well as fair and peaceful conflict resolution and to oppose violence and militarization.

We struggle for free public education that is fully accessible at all levels and throughout life. We are convinced that compulsory basic education for all, young people and adults alike, should provide for a minimum of eleven years of schooling. We reject the adage that success for the greatest number means mediocrity. On the contrary, we argue that quality education is impossible without democratization and the elimination of inequalities.

We intend to combat the racism, exclusion and marginalization affecting visible, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities, particularly students from Black, Aboriginal and Latin-American communities. We assert that students with disabilities, adjustment or learning difficulties, and working or itinerant street youth must have access to special services that ensure their schooling. Finally, we demand that particular attention be paid to rural education and respect for rural culture.

We uphold a vision for adult education that guarantees the right to public education for all adults. In addition, we urge governments to create the conditions conducive to a culture of lifelong education by increasing learning opportunities in the workplace and in living environments.

We oppose the concept of quality narrowly defined on the basis of standardized tests and other similar measures when they confine education to what can be easily measured and fail to address the specific needs of students. We demand that these tests not be used as instruments of exclusion.

We intend to continue contributing to the development of pedagogical models and approaches that meet our people's cultural, economic and social needs and aim to lower academic failure, dropout and exclusion rates. We endorse democratic governance of education at all levels and in all institutions that is based on the involvement of staff, students and communities.

We recognize the importance of services that support education in the schools as well as the contribution of other institutions (public libraries, educational radio and television). We acknowledge the contribution and expertise of workers in the areas of popular education and community action.

We affirm the need for quality, free, public, accessible higher education in which academic freedom, professional autonomy and the institutional autonomy of universities are respected in which guarantees are provided to ensure that research serves the development of society instead of being subjected to the needs and requirements of private corporations.

We believe in an education that respects religious and philosophical choices, the right to freedom of conscience, and the right to equality.

We support the struggle of Aboriginal nations and Native peoples for control over their educational institutions to ensure respect for and promotion of their language, culture and heritage and for an education that values and promotes ethnic diversity and linguistic and cultural plurality. Public education must incorporate the history and culture of these peoples, and personnel must be trained accordingly.

We appreciate how important it is for national minority linguistic communities to exercise control over their educational institutions to ensure the development and promotion of their language and their culture.

We demand respect for the exercise of union rights, including the right to unionize, to conduct collective bargaining and to strike. We will continue to struggle for the recognition of professional autonomy of education personnel, so that they secure fair salaries that recognize the nature of their work and enable them to live in dignity, as well as adequate retirement provisions. We will pursue our fight to improve learning, teaching and working conditions. We demand health and safety standards that adequately protect both personnel and students and translate into a health code for public schools.

We denounce the unequal treatment of women who make up the vast majority of education personnel. They must enjoy adequate maternity protection; we also commit to fighting all forms of discrimination in employment.

We maintain that the changes needed for democratic education require sound pre-service training for education personnel as well as continuing professional development that is free and accessible to all.

We recognize the importance of making effective use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for educational purposes so as to meet the needs and priorities identified by communities and not those dictated by commercial interests. We support in particular the creation of networks for the sharing of knowledge and a cooperative work culture. Attention must be paid to the risks associated with a narrow use of ICTs or one that attempts to circumvent national sovereignty over education. We object to the use of distance and virtual education as a substitute for direct education.

In conclusion, we strongly reaffirm that education is a right, not a privilege. The democracy to which we aspire is one of equality, freedom for all and solidarity. It is rooted in the dignity of the individual, proper living conditions and respect for the political, economic, cultural, environmental and social rights of all.