

Note from the Editors

The crises of climate change and ecological collapse present dual challenges for public schools throughout the Americas. As institutions working with children and youth from all sectors of society including the most vulnerable, public schools must adapt to address the direct impacts of these crises on the school community. These can range from mental health issues generated by climate anxiety, ecological grief, depression, and outright terror at the enormity of the crises, to physical threats such as displacement, forced migration, deadly heat waves, malnutrition, lack of potable water and poor air quality from wildfires.

But, as the primary public institution for social reproduction, public schools must also equip new generations with the skills and analytical tools they need to address the crises that threaten them. Nurturing technical skills for constructing a new zero carbon economy are an important part of this, but alone they are not enough. Students must develop the analytical thinking needed to assess and recognize the roots of the ecological and climate crises, and the organizing skills and hope that enable them to mobilize collectively to demand changes that address the roots and the symptoms of the crisis.

This issue of Intercambio Magazine explores the public education we need to build an active citizenry with thinking and skills that empower them to address the crises. It outlines obstacles that must be overcome to make these changes in public education, and explores some concrete examples in different parts of the Americas where community and schools come together to defend the earth.

Ecuadoran environmental professor Angela

Zambrano begins by exploring the kind of public school needed to address the ecological crisis. She outlines the characteristics of an educational paradigm that implies responsible attitudes and aptitudes with nature, which go beyond romanticism about protecting the environment through volunteer work. Zambrano proposes an eco-pedagogy that teaches, through critical thinking, the fundamental relationship between nature and human beings within it.

In a similar direction we find the article by Brazilian theorist and labour activist Roberto Leher, who argues that the rupture between nature and society is derived from the contradictions of capitalism. Leher discusses challenges of ecological education in a national context in which climate change and the environment issues have been recast by the resurgent populist far-right as part of the “culture war.” In Brazil and other countries of the Americas the populist right’s influence in public education must be overcome to fully address ecological crises through a collective struggle for the preservation of life on the planet.

On climate change’s physical impact on school communities, we find a concrete experience in the students and teachers of the city of Merritt in the western Canadian province of British Columbia, whose homes and public schools were inundated when unprecedented flooding swept through large areas of the province. High school teacher Nick Kazanoski, author of this chronicle, also describes a less visible aspect that affected students following the floods - climate anxiety in young people who see their future threatened.

Coinciding with this concern and analyzing it from a broader perspective, Canadian health science professors Gina Martin and Kiffer Card describe the effects of climate change on student's mental health. They consider the repercussions the new reality has on children and youth and call for concrete action to address them that should be available to all educational institutions. It should be noted that in public education the means to address students' mental health are often very limited and are inadequate in the face of increased manifestations of climate anxiety and ecological grief within school communities.

Indigenous education, in the revitalization of traditional knowledge, offers a richness of experience to students that can all help address the environmental crisis. In the face of challenges generated by the tensions between agro-industry and traditional indigenous agriculture, Mazatec teachers Fortunato Morales P. and Benigno Pioquinto García analyze "The relationship between traditional Mazatec foods and Indigenous Schools" in Oaxaca, Mexico. Responding to specific ecological problems through an education imbued with interculturality and environmental commitment demonstrates the strengths of a versatile public education that adapts teaching and curricula to the needs and cosmovision of the communities it serves.

Among other concrete experiences, we have the contribution of Adriana Martínez Rodríguez who describes a community school of ongoing training in the face of the socio-environmental devastation of the Atoyac – Zahuapan Basin in Mexico. The school was created with the aim of strengthening the community social subject to confront the pollution of the basin and those responsible. It disrupts the idea of schools being only for children and adolescents, to incorporate the community and the territory as a whole.

"The Argentine Free Courses on Food Sovereignty and the Peoples' Right to Food", comes to us from teacher-researchers Graciela Mandolini, Melina Vanesa Gay and Claudia Nigro. They present the experiences of the Free Courses of Food Sovereignty, a program jointly operated by the Agro-technical college "Libertador General San Martín" in Santa Fé, Argentina and the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences of the National University of Rosario. The program connects research on food sovereignty with public elementary schools, farmers markets, and popular organizations, leading to the construction of an educational community and social action with an important impact.

From Guatemala, community organizer Ana Laura Rojas shares the experience of native seed recovery through school gardens "The Imagery of Seeds." It is another example of how traditional knowledge in combination with action in public schools can help address the challenges that capitalism's rupture with nature on a global scale presents to communities and how, from the local level, alternatives can be found.

Finally, in our literary section, we present the Juan Fernando Álvarez Gaytán's review of "In defense of teachers' struggles" by Enrique Álvarez Carrillo. Álvarez Gaytán describes Álvarez Carrillo's critique of attempts by mainstream media to discredit the Mexico's influential independent teachers' movement, which has often served as an important referent for struggles to defend public education and teaching-learning conditions throughout the Americas.

We trust that these articles will be welcomed by the readers of Intercambio Magazine and that it demonstrates the importance of dreams and of transforming them into reality from, by and for public education. The right to education is deeply linked to other human rights and those of nature, and we must defend them if humanity and other living things are to have a future.