

EDITORS' NOTE

“Reconfiguration of teaching work and the structure of schools”

(Translated by Almudena Esperanza Antiman Ramos)

The COVID 19 pandemic disrupted the lives of our societies on a worldwide scale, triggering new forms of interaction and organization of communities. One of the most affected sectors is education, particularly in regard to the work of teachers and the structure of schools.

Teachers greatly intensified the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) losing, in many cases, control of their work. Teaching work also became more precarious. In addition to general instability and low pay were the lengthening of work hours, the multiplication of tasks, the intensification of physical exhaustion, and the disappearance of the distinction between teaching work and personal life at home. The health of education communities, teachers and students, were negatively affected by the stress of facing an unknown disease in uncertainty, confinement, and ruptured social contact.

Unions was also affected, making the collective defence of education workers more difficult. In the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, we recognize a before and an after in the conditions

in which teachers carried out their work, and the structure of life at schools and communities. The IDEA Network presents in this issue of Intercambio the results of investigations done by teacher-researchers from Cuba, Ecuador, and Mexico; and accounts of lived experiences in the collective work of educators from Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico.

We begin with the contribution from Cuban teachers Oscar Ortiz and Xiomara Cano who analyze their experience. While there are parallels with the rest of America, Cuban educators have the singular experience of the creation of health brigades made up of secondary and post-secondary education teachers and students, tasked with identifying and reporting possible outbreaks or symptoms of COVID-19 in their communities. These brigades helped reduce the speed at which the epidemic spread. They also highlight the challenges faced by Cuban teachers and by students in returning to the new normal.

Stalin Vargas speaks to the overexploitation that Ecuadorian teachers experienced while

working from home in a virtual capacity. The Ecuadorian education ministry required teachers to extend their working hours while also reducing monthly salaries by 8.33% under the argument that “the classes are being performed virtually.” Vargas also highlights the challenges experienced in the return to in-person classes as fear of the pandemic eased.

Lucía Rivera, Roberto González, and Marcelino Guerra place at the centre of their analysis, the impact of the pandemic and the confinement on Mexican women teacher-mothers. These women taught remote classes from the home, tended their students’ needs and the demands of the education system, while also providing care to their own at-home children. These teachers developed diverse strategies to sustain the way of life in their own families. In this context, care is understood as a political problem, since caring is a process requiring collective efforts that encompass the broad range of everyday life, including education and its modalities.

Marlene Escobar reflects upon teachers’ work following the return of in-person classes after the declaration of the COVID-19 sanitary emergency. With great detail, the article shows us the volume of responsibilities bestowed on public primary school teachers in Mexico upon the return to in-person classes, post-confinement. Some of these responsibilities had already been performed by teachers for some time, but new ones surfaced during the pandemic, and others emerged from the tumult that characterized the accelerated pace of teaching that accompanied the return to in-person classes.

Gloria Indira Aguirre and María Trejos, in collaboration with teachers from Chiapas-Mexi-

co, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, offer us a collective reflection from communities and the perspective of students on the conditions of teaching work and school reorganization experienced during and after the pandemic. These include the challenges raised by the use of Information and Communications Technology to navigate new circumstances, and how the existing inequality and social, cultural, and economic vulnerabilities were visualized. They point out that the pandemic contributed to the immobilization of the teachers’ movement and opened space for the implementation of reforms that impact public education and legitimize the interests of the dominating classes.

Additionally, due to its significance, we present an article from teacher Jackson Potter, Vice President of the Chicago Teachers’ Union (CTU), that describes the experience of building a strategy of transformation where a union is organized to serve workers but is also immersed in communities and defences of public education as a social right. The CTU’s fight succeeded in changing their city forever and has served as an inspiration that mobilizes grassroots educators throughout the USA.

We close with the declaration of the Mexican Section of the Trination Coalition in Defence of Public Education in support of their government’s new free textbooks. The new texts are the object of an ultra conservative right-wing offensive, that is active in all of America and the world under the guise of “parents rights.” These reactionary forces not only reject, but also burn and destroy books to prevent their delivery to millions of Mexican children and youth whose right to education is violated.