

FOOTPRINT ARTICLE 2
A dream about the V Conference on DE
Somos andando²: Towards everyday
re-politicization of education



During the IV Conference on Development Education organised by Hegoa, over 325 people from all over Spain and Latin America came together at the heart of the capital city of Vitoria to reflect on *how to change education to change the world. Through emancipatory educational action!* A considerable challenge to take on... In that context of systematic crises and cutbacks on public goods, there was no place for lack of transparency or indifference. The challenge was crystal clear: Are we capable of building an alternative way of life to the capitalist market? What role would education play in all this? And finally, what is the current role of educators who are there in the classroom every day with the future of our society?

These six years have gone by so quickly, but we have managed to put into action some of the proposals we designed together at the IV Conference and we have seen the results of this work with our own eyes. Not only have these proposals been launched, but we have also, again as a group, been constantly developing them, through the to-ings and fro-ings and the highs and lows of this *emotional adventure* of making changes to change the world. The proposals designed back in 2014 were:

1. DE as a means of (re)appropriating happiness and desire

The recovery through Development Education of concepts that have been taken away from us, such as happiness, joy and desire, has been fundamental. As echoed by members of the Desazkundera feminist groups³, the challenge consists in building *lives that are a joy -not a hardship- to live*. Education is presented here as a tool for creating our own happiness, yet not from a consumerist and capitalist perspective where happiness is a momentary state that is always dependent on the accumulation of

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² Literally, “we are walking” yet in the sense of being defined by this act and as such, it takes on a deeper meaning of moving towards a goal, of progress and determination (use of the verb “ser” – to be, definitively and unchangingly) as opposed to describing the transitory, literal act of walking. On a conceptual level, a similar idea in English would perhaps be “the definitive path”, “the never-ending quest” or “the constant journey”.

3. For more information about the Desazkundera feminist groups:

<https://feminismosdesazkundera.wordpress.com/about/>

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material goods and on personal fulfilment. In contrast, we need to break away from the models of self-sufficiency, individual success and fleeting desires sold to us every day by the markets through the media. To do this, education must be a *daily and commonplace* antidote in the classroom. We receive a constant barrage of capitalist violence that mercilessly destroys links between real human beings and reinforces the idea of self-sufficiency for success but also as the way of facing frustration. In response to this attack, feminist economist Amaia Pérez Orozco (2013) points to the urgent need to *nationalise "the failure"* and to mobilise collective responses away from the individualist mindset.

2. *I am because you are: Supporting difference*

Secondly, at the IV Conference there was also a palpable desire for an education model that placed differences at the heart of all practice. This proposal called for the creation of *an ethical code of unity and differences*, based on the idea that the cause of my neighbour is also my cause. This does not mean that differences should be simplified but rather the complete opposite; recognition that we are divided up according to various types of difference such as race, social class, gender, age, sexuality, origin, etc. These social categories are, however, purely constructed concepts that have been assigned different social values, power and, therefore, privileges.

As such, this proposal calls for collective action based on the convergence of different perspectives and views in order to help visualise the world we want to create. To do this, over these past few years the reduction of partial struggles and push towards the adoption of a collective policy have been essential. However, we should never forget that the matrix of social domination, or in simpler terms the oppressive enemy, is always the same but under many disguises. This same challenge was presented by Boaventura de Sousa (2014) in his letter to young men and women in Mexico, in response to the 43 disappeared students in Ayotzinapa. He challenges them to show that collaboration and solidarity, a world in which each and every person says *I am because you are*, is still possible.

3. *Somos andando: Learning in the everyday transformation*

However, back at the IV Conference, we asked ourselves: How can we put this into daily practice? Paulo Freire (1989) would give us a clear response: "in the simple acts of daily life". Indeed, his idea of *somos andando* invites us to recover the commonplace aspects of our existence. It is not about big heroic gestures, but rather about making changes in day-to-day life. A passionate move to *politicize everyday life* by making the daily struggles and practices of educators more visible and by recognising the rebellious potential behind them. Reclaiming this everydayness goes hand in hand with a constructive model of education based on the development of critical thought and emotional skills; a far cry from authoritarian and punitive education that promotes blame over responsibility. Education to develop responsibility and not victimisation or blame is crucial if we understand education as a means to

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equip men and women to critically assess not just the world around them but also themselves. In this respect, emotional education is an essential tool for breaking down the hierarchism between the rational and the emotional and for creating a new image where showing vulnerability is not seen as a sign of weakness but rather the exact opposite: as a sign of strength and transformation.

4. The re-politicization of the educational process

Lastly, all the above led us to question and break away from the traditional role of educational institutions, creating intercultural processes based on difference and reclaiming the role of teachers as key agents in education for change. The politicization of educational processes means expanding the formal spaces associated with learning and fostering a closer link between the street and the classroom. It calls for a greater connection between theory and practice and the design of education projects that promote processes over results and products.

In an education system where what you know -the content- is no longer the most important thing, but rather if what you know is useful to the neo-liberal system -competencies-, the development of critical thought becomes essential in order to multiply and not reduce points of view and to fill classrooms with dreams and potential. Taking up and adapting that Zapatista slogan which turned the world upside down, today "another education is possible". To turn this possibility into a reality, we have to transform the education system from its very roots to prevent the creation of "incompetent conformists" and to nurture the "rebellious consciousness" of all students, equipping them to (re)learn and redefine democracy, redistribute shared property and to reinforce quality of life and social bonds as tools to defend human dignity and to build a fairer more equal world.

The words of a fellow university lecturer come to mind: "*My aim each morning when I step into the classroom is that none of my students leave quite the same as when they came in*". I believe that such a challenge can only be overcome through united action. The educational community needs to join together, form "packs" and create spaces for reflection and for mutual support and assistance. Spaces like the Conference on Development Education, which are so important because they give us the chance to create new forms of feeling, thinking and acting together. As it became more than clear at that meeting in Vitoria, the challenge is not to create alternatives to the education system in place but rather to create an alternative system. I hope that the conferences to come will see overwhelming participation and contributions from the entire educational community... we are all invited. ☺

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