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Heras Monner Sans, Ana Inés.

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Towards emancipatory education across nations

Ana I. Heras, Ph.D. IRICE-CONICET and Instituto por la Inclusión Social y el Desarrollo Humano, Argentina

In dialogue with Pablo Imen, member of the Latin American Educational Emancipatory Network

The Cooperative Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, has taken an initiative a few years ago: networking to construct a common agenda around emancipatory educational practices.

Building upon the work of several different educational groups composed by principals, teachers, and other educational workers, this initiative has taken the form of an exchange network through which colleagues from several different Latin American countries meet periodically and discuss the central issues concerning emancipatory education. This network has chosen the concept of *nuestro-americana* to refer to their work. Roughly translated, signifies that (Latin) American countries have something specific that is ours to offer.

[Pablo Imen](#) is one of the coordinators of this network. In dialogue with him, he comments on the origin of the network and the way in which the exchange is taking form currently.

Asked about the origin of the network, Imen comments: “we first started by contacting colleagues from Venezuela, Colombia and Uruguay, with whom we had already been working on what is specific about emancipatory Latin American education. We were later able to establish contact with professionals from México, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Cuba.”

In helping understand why the network has followed this geographical pattern, Imen highlights that in Venezuela, Colombia and Uruguay existed educational movements that had a long historical tradition from the perspective of autonomous, sovereign and national pedagogical perspectives, and provides the names of important teachers and teacher-educators during the XX century: Jesualdo Sosa in Uruguay, Olga and Leticia Cossetini in Argentina, Paulo Freire in Brazil, for example.

Additionally, in Venezuela, as early as the beginning of the XIX century, we find the work of Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854) who worked on conceptualizing a public educational system that could provide all people with tools to emancipate their thinking and action. His original concern was with the educational forms that colonial pedagogical schooling imposed on society.

Rodríguez’s thinking and conceptual process broadened from specific educational matters to include a reflection on social, political and economic processes taking place in what at the time he called Hispano América. And such a perspective is later taken up as a legacy in its [emancipatory](#) key.

Forced by political exile, Rodríguez traveled and studied several different educational systems in Italy, France, Prussia, Germany, for example, during 20 years (1806-1826). His thinking was influenced by socialist European ideas, and yet during this long voyage he conceived the need for a Hispano American, non-colonial way of acting and thinking. He sustained that in order to provide educational tools effective in our countries it was in our countries that the educational methods and orientations should be created.

In this line of thought he emphasized the idea that “either we [create something anew] or we err [we miss the point altogether]”, to refer to the fact that any solution is contextually bound and should not be “imported”. He thus created different educational devices, which he applied in schools across countries of Latin America (because he spent time in Chile, Perú, Venezuela), and documented the results.

According to Pablo Imen, these ideas are at the core of many of the educational movements that nowadays seek to construct emancipatory educational patterns in Latin America.

Some of these current movements are:

- *Network of Studies About The Work of Teachers* and the *Federation of Secondary Education Teachers* (in Uruguay);
- *Pedagogical Movement in Lara and Aragua* (Venezuela),
- *Colombian Pedagogical Movement* (Colombia)

Imen explains: “two fellows from Colombia, who established themselves in Argentina, were very instrumental in deepening our networks since they participate in the activities we host at the Centro Cultural de la Cooperación and at IDELCOOP.” These activities bring together research (conducted by educators themselves), in service workshops and seminars coordinated by educators, and Conferences, such as the [Second Gathering Towards Emancipatory Pedagogy in Our America](#).

Imen also highlights that it is through the network that visibility and support to different processes taking place in each of the countries participating becomes possible. For example, in the Province of La Rioja, Argentina, the Association of Teachers and Professors (which brings together elementary, middle school and high school teachers) has been developing a series of studies to identify and analyze what is happening at the public schools, and how can the processes in place be supported, in defense of the public education system. Since the Association is one of the nodes participating in the Latin American Network, they were able to put together [a conference in 2013](#) in which, in turn, teachers from all over Latin America attended. These kinds of connections makes any local struggle become larger, that is, linked to other struggles to defend public education taking place in Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, México and Colombia, for example.

When asked about the relationship and contributions from anthropological educational research to the network, Imen states: “it is crucial that we link this kind of educational practice with its study, so that we are able to understand what we are doing, as educators. It is always a challenge for teachers to become researchers of their own practice. Yet we are finding that it is not only necessary and possible, but that it is crucial that we observe and interpret what we identify as emancipatory educational practices because it is not by stating that something is *emancipatory* that it becomes such, but by understanding how it actually is. For this reason we are organizing since 2012 what we call the [Emancipatory Education Expeditions](#), which are group visits across countries so that educators from different Latin American countries get to observe and reflect upon day-to-day educational processes taking place in a country other than their own. And that is also why we have hosted the [Educational Gatherings](#) for two consecutive years, and will continue to do so.”