



INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR VICTORIA KANDEL: HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA – GENDER, DEMOCRACY AND CURRICULUM DISPUTES

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Abstract

The interview with Professor Victoria Kandel, a faculty researcher at the National University of Lanús (Argentina) and current president of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Human Rights Education, offers a critical reflection on the challenges and tensions affecting human rights education processes in the region. Drawing from her academic and activist experience, Kandel discusses curricular disputes, the incorporation of a gender perspective in legal education, and the strategic role of schools and universities in defending democracy against the advance of neoliberal and anti-rights discourses. The dialogue also addresses the impacts of structural inequalities on teacher training, resistance to inclusion, and the urgent need to build pedagogical practices committed to social justice, equity, and the democratic transformation of educational systems. The interview invites a deep reflection on the inherent challenges of Human Rights Education in Latin America, especially within the school context, marked by tensions surrounding gender, democratic consolidation, and the curriculum as a site of power and a stage for resistance.

Keywords: Human Rights Education; Gender; Curricular justice; Latin american democracy.

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ENTREVISTA COM A PROFESSORA VICTORIA KANDEL: A EDUCAÇÃO EM DIREITOS HUMANOS NA AMÉRICA LATINA – GÊNERO, DEMOCRACIA E DISPUTAS CURRICULARES

Resumo: A entrevista com a professora Victoria Kandel, docente-pesquisadora da Universidade Nacional de Lanús (Argentina) e atual presidente da Rede Latino-Americana e Caribenha de Educação em Direitos Humanos, oferece uma reflexão crítica sobre os desafios e tensões que atravessam os processos educativos em direitos humanos na região. A partir de sua experiência acadêmica e militante, Kandel discute as disputas curriculares, a incorporação da perspectiva de gênero na formação jurídica e o papel estratégico da escola e da universidade na defesa da democracia frente ao avanço dos discursos neoliberais e antidereitos. O diálogo também aborda os impactos das desigualdades estruturais na formação docente, as resistências à inclusão e a urgência de construir práticas pedagógicas comprometidas com a justiça social, a equidade e a transformação democrática dos sistemas educativos. A entrevista convida a uma profunda reflexão sobre os desafios inerentes à Educação em Direitos Humanos na América Latina, especialmente no contexto escolar, marcado por tensões em torno do gênero, da consolidação democrática e da disputa do currículo como espaço de poder e terreno de resistência.

Palavras-chave: Educação em Direitos Humanos; Gênero; Justiça curricular; Democracia latino-americana.

ENTREVISTA CON LA PROFESORA VICTORIA KANDEL: LA EDUCACIÓN EN DERECHOS HUMANOS EN LATINOAMÉRICA - GÉNERO, DEMOCRACIA Y DISPUTAS POR EL CURRÍCULO

Resumén: La entrevista con la profesora Victoria Kandel, docente-investigadora de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús (Argentina) y actual presidenta de la Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Educación en Derechos Humanos, ofrece una reflexión crítica sobre los desafíos y tensiones que atraviesan los procesos educativos en derechos humanos en la región. A partir de su experiencia académica y militante, Kandel discute las disputas curriculares, la incorporación de la perspectiva de género en la formación jurídica y el papel estratégico de la escuela y la universidad en la defensa de la democracia frente a los avances de discursos neoliberales y antiderechos. El diálogo también aborda los impactos de las desigualdades estructurales en la formación docente, las resistencias a la inclusión y la urgencia de construir prácticas pedagógicas comprometidas con la justicia social, la equidad y la transformación democrática de los sistemas educativos. La entrevista invita a una profunda reflexión sobre los desafíos inherentes a la Educación en Derechos Humanos en Latinoamérica, especialmente en el contexto escolar, marcado por tensiones en torno al género, la consolidación democrática y la disputa del currículo como espacio de poder y escenario de resistencia.

Palavras chave: Educación en Derechos Humanos; Género; Justicia curricular; Democracia latinoamericana.

Introduction

This interview with Professor Victoria Kandel, a faculty researcher at the Institute of Justice and Human Rights of the National University of Lanús (UNLa), Argentina, and current president of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Human Rights Education, stems from her longstanding commitment to the study and promotion of Human Rights Education and the gender perspective within the university. Her academic trajectory reflects a continuous production focused on articulating human rights and citizenship education, teacher training and gender, as well as studies on the role of the university.

Within the research project “Classroom Practices and Legal Education from a Gender Perspective,” currently underway, Professor Kandel investigates how teaching practices in the Law program at the University of Buenos Aires can—critically and effectively—incorporate the gender perspective. The project engages in dialogue with previous research and aims to challenge hegemonic discourses still prevalent in classrooms. It also explores the concept of curricular justice and, based on it, debates how curricula and study programs are organized in some Argentine universities.

The interview proposes a deep dialogue on issues that are vital to contemporary Latin American education, addressing the role of schools in promoting human rights, the challenges of teacher education geared toward social justice, the impacts of neoliberalism on inclusive education, and the necessary dialogue between schools and social movements. It also discusses curricular strategies for consolidating a democratic and human rights-oriented culture in the school context, with particular attention to gender, diversity, and inclusion. This conversation offers an opportunity to reflect on possible paths toward building a critical, engaged, and transformative education.

The Latin American and Caribbean Network for Human Rights Education and the XI Colloquium in Costa Rica

Interviewers: Professor, as coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Human Rights Education, you have led significant initiatives to strengthen human rights education in the region. In this context, could you share with us the main lines of work and

objectives of the Network? Furthermore, the XI Latin American and Caribbean Colloquium on Human Rights Education was recently held at the National University – Omar Dengo Campus, in Heredia, Costa Rica. What were the central themes addressed during this meeting, and what significant contributions do you consider this colloquium has made toward advancing human rights education in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Professor Kandel: The Network has existed for nearly 20 years, and since its inception, one of its primary objectives has been to maintain a space for exchange and interaction among educators, academics, and activists from countries across the region. Over time, the Network has grown both in the number of participants and the number of member countries. This growth endows the Network with a strong capacity to create bonds and mobilize knowledge and experiences. Strengthening the Network, along with the possibility of distributing experiences, materials, and knowledge related to Human Rights Education (HRE), constitutes the main line of work. For this purpose, the Colloquia serve as fundamental “raw material.” She dedicates significant effort to organizing the colloquia, aiming to progressively involve more participants.

A second line of work concerns publications. We strive to produce materials that can be disseminated throughout the region. Currently, we are working on two editorial projects: 1) the publication of the proceedings of the XI Colloquium, encompassing all papers presented in May in Costa Rica; 2) the organization of a book on Human Rights and Higher Education, scheduled for publication in 2026. It should also be clarified that we already have other publications resulting from previous colloquia, all of which are accessible on the Network’s website.

Regarding the 2025 Colloquium, we continued to promote the Network’s and HRE’s classic themes, such as all topics related to methodologies, didactics, and teaching techniques. Also featured was work on “Pedagogies of Memory,” through which we address, transversally, educational policies for memory in various countries of the region. Another consistent line of work concerns the challenges posed by the inclusion of vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, migrants, members of Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, etc.). Moreover, this year we introduced a new axis on HRE and sustainable development, incorporating questions and discussions about environmental education and the international commitments undertaken by states regarding prevention, training, and environmental education. Education for peace was another frequently discussed and debated theme during the colloquium. Lastly, human mobility was addressed, encompassing both internal migration within countries and international migration. Discussions focused on the human right to migrate, the situation of migrants—

including individuals, groups, and children—and forced displacements caused by climate change, armed conflict, and other factors.

The challenges are substantial, and difficulties are increasing. Therefore, it is imperative to reinforce the commitment that states must assume in protecting human rights.

Challenges to the Effectiveness of Human Rights in Latin America

Interviewers: Professor, Latin America has historically faced multiple challenges related to human rights, marked by social inequalities, structural violence, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups. In recent years, social movements and public policies aimed at guaranteeing rights have contended for space amid democratic setbacks and institutional tensions. In this context, what are the main obstacles to the effectiveness of human rights in Latin America, considering the impacts of class, race, and gender inequalities?

Professor Kandel: This is a very difficult issue, which was widely discussed at the XI Colloquium and is part of current debates in Argentina, Latin America, and globally. What is the role of the state in the protection of human rights? Although since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights there seemed to be an “agreement” or “consensus” regarding state responsibility for guarantee, prevention, and also reparation, these consensuses appear to be breaking down. Political discourses seeking to dismantle the human rights paradigm have emerged worldwide. I believe this is the principal challenge we face as human rights educators: to affirm the role of the state, but also of society, in the struggle for equal rights and non-discrimination. The obstacles are many, such as the withdrawal of financial support for education or the promotion of rights.

However, I consider it important to mention that there are certain issues on which we have greater potential influence, given the position we hold as educators within our educational systems. In this regard, one concern is the declining trust in democracy in Latin America. For example, measurements by Latinobarómetro reveal increasing citizen indifference toward democracy and its defense. I believe this is where we have something important to do: to work with our students in building a democratic culture. The same applies to the culture of peace, which was another prominent theme at the XI Colloquium. The peaceful and dialogical resolution of conflicts (inherent to any society) is another task that we can assume as educators.

That is to say, we will not be able to change all the problems that afflict us as a society, but we can focus on how to influence from our spheres of work: the classroom, the neighborhood, the community. It is from these micromundos (micro-worlds) that we are challenged to promote a culture of peace and the protection of human rights.

Human Rights Education in Times of Neoliberalism

Interviewers: In our Latin American and Caribbean reality, neoliberalism has significantly impacted educational policies, revealing how the strengthening of the private sector has weakened the role of public schools as guarantors of social justice and inclusion. Against a backdrop marked by increasing privatization and policies prioritizing performance and competitiveness, the question arises: is it possible to build a human rights education process that includes all students, regardless of their social class, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic-racial origin? What tensions arise between neoliberal educational policies and the promotion of emancipatory and transformative human rights education?

Professor Kandel: The segmentation of educational systems is undoubtedly a major problem. We face differentiated circuits where we increasingly interact less with people and groups different from ourselves. Formerly, schools were places to “mix” and get to know others different from oneself. Universities still serve this role to some extent, at least in Argentina (although risks remain). I cannot provide a definitive answer to this question other than to invite us to promote encounters with others. Solidarity-based educational projects are an example and a possibility to enhance knowledge exchange among different social sectors.

Another issue I observe in relation to the advance of the neoliberal paradigm is the matter of individualism. Today’s world confronts us and younger generations with a paradigm that emphasizes individual aspects and burdens subjects with responsibility, while neglecting all reference to the collective and the structural conditions in which people live. In this sense, it is important to restore a collective reference within our educational communities, to learn to feel part of something larger and more supportive than ourselves. The collective, the group, forms part of the learning experience and is not merely a fact of school reality, as noted by one of the event’s special guests, Dr. Isabelino Siede.

One of neoliberalism's most persistent traits is its capacity to shape not only the economy but also forms of subjectivity. Neoliberal individualism should not be understood simply as the exaltation of the individual, but rather as a historical configuration of meaning in which subjects are called upon to see themselves as personal projects, entrepreneurs of themselves, and solely responsible for their own fate. We may agree that, in some ways, this is the case, insofar as we conceive ourselves as agents (*agenciamiento*), and pursue the agency of our students; yet it is equally important to recognize the structural, social, and communal dimensions that constitute us as subjects.

Individualism based on competition, self-improvement, and personal responsibility permeates daily life, culture, education, and social relations, eroding collective forms of solidarity. This subjective turn transforms how individuals face suffering: failures are no longer explained by unjust structures but by a lack of individual effort or adaptation. In response, educational spaces—both formal and non-formal—are privileged settings for recovering the experience of the collective. Restoring connection is thus a challenge in times of centrifugal forces. The pedagogy of encounter holds an emancipatory horizon, as proposed by the educator Paulo Freire.

Human Rights Education and Democracy

Interviewers: Over the past one hundred years, Latin America has experienced complex political contexts marked by coups d'état and military dictatorships that restricted individual and collective rights and guarantees, generating a scenario of authoritarianism, violence, censorship, and repression. In this context, what could be the pathways to build a culture of human rights, especially considering the fragile democratic tradition of the Latin American region?

Professor Kandel: Considerable reflection on this issue is taking place within the framework of the Pedagogy of Memory. We cannot be complacent merely transmitting information about the authoritarian past of countries in the region, as if the human rights violations that occurred during the dictatorships belonged solely to the past. It is essential to re-signify that past of violence, censorship, and repression—re-signify it by understanding that today the defense and care of democracy acquire a new meaning. A “formal democracy,” where every four years we exercise our right to vote, is not sufficient. It is important to consolidate a

democratic culture of respect and care towards others. Above all, we face the challenge of convincing new generations that this is a collective issue; democracy is not something external, a concern only for others or for the generations who lived through the dictatorships. It is imperative to reconstruct this democratic culture that allows us to live in society, coexist with those who think differently, and feel part of something greater than ourselves—that is, a community.

We must avoid consolidating the perception of education's instrumentality: there is an increasing demand for "usefulness" (our students ask, "what is this useful for?"), and the answer should be that education in general—and human rights education in particular—serves to make us freer, to think and act critically and autonomously.

Derechos Humanos y el papel de la escuela

Interviewers: Professor, you have spoken extensively about the importance of education in promoting human rights. Therefore, how can schools incorporate this perspective into the curriculum in a way that fosters a more inclusive and democratic environment that respects and values diversity? What are the main challenges in implementing a curriculum aimed at creating, promoting, and consolidating a culture of human rights within the school context?

Professor Kandel: I believe the most important thing is to return to the simplest things: teamwork, encountering others, exchanging ideas, and respecting differing opinions. "The construction of a world where many worlds can fit." I return to the issue of individualism and the loss of collective experience. Here I see a challenge, a great problem, but also an opportunity. The school is the place of encounter, exchange, and also argumentation. And I believe this is fundamental when consolidating a democracy capable of deliberating, arguing, and choosing to resolve conflicts through methods that distance us from violence.

Education and Social Movements

Interviewers: In Brazil, movements such as feminist, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, homeless and landless workers, student, environmentalist, among others, have sought to

emphasize the need for schools to address topics such as gender, cultural diversity, ethnic-racial issues, education and sexuality, the environment, and decent work. In this regard, how can schools connect with these movements to promote transformative and committed education from a curricular perspective that embraces these discussions?

Professor Kandel: One of the concepts I have been working on for some time is that of Curricular Justice. I first encountered it in a book by Raewyn Connell (1995), an Australian professor and activist. She speaks of Social Justice in schools.

The school curriculum is an arbitrary selection that canonizes certain knowledge and aspects of culture while excluding others. This is why Curricular Justice aims to:

a) Recover the voices, narratives, and knowledges of those who are habitually left out. This happens across various fields of knowledge: medicine, law, food production, environmental care. The curriculum has prioritized certain knowledges and excluded others, and Curricular Justice could reverse this. The same applies to groups who are habitually excluded or silenced (workers, sexual diversities, Indigenous peoples, marginalized groups);

b) Make people feel part of the institution, even those who have never felt included; make the university a place for them, even though it was not originally designed for them. A just curriculum includes the subjects who are present even though their voices have never been listened to. It includes their personhood and their worldview.

c) Review the responsibility of educational institutions in reproducing inequality.

These three points are what Curricular Justice entails, and I have no doubt that Human Rights Education is a practice of Curricular Justice. When we educate in human rights, we are promoting Curricular Justice.

Teacher Education and Social Justice

Interviewers: Professor, education is one of the main instruments to promote social justice and combat inequalities. However, for schools to fulfill this transformative role, it is essential that teachers be prepared not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as critical agents of social change. In this regard, what challenges would you highlight as the most relevant facing teachers today? And how can we prepare educators to become agents of social transformation?

Professor Kandel: Teacher education is one of the great challenges. A “just curriculum” should prepare teachers to face this challenge equipped with more tools.

An interesting point is to acknowledge that Human Rights Education (HRE) is not something one does only if they want to, if they have time, or if they are a committed person... HRE is part of the international commitments undertaken by states within the framework of the international human rights protection system. Thus, since the 1948 Universal Declaration and up to the World Programme for Human Rights Education (initiated in 2006 and still in force), states have assumed responsibility in the field of human rights education. Implementing it is not a matter of goodwill but of fulfilling agreed-upon commitments. Above all, it is about affirming a right: the right to receive education in human rights.

Gender Perspective in Human Rights Education

Interviewers: Professor, throughout your career you have conducted in-depth research on the inclusion of a gender perspective in human rights education processes, highlighting its importance for the construction of more just and egalitarian societies. In this regard, what role should the gender perspective occupy in educational policies and practices in our region? How can human rights education contribute to dismantling patriarchal structures that still strongly permeate school contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean?

Professor Kandel: Much progress has been made in this regard, seeking to dismantle patriarchal structures. Forms of teaching, ways of relating, and ways of thinking about ourselves have been deconstructed. We have learned to “denaturalize” gender roles. However, much remains to be done. In universities, for example, there still exist what in Argentina are called “feminized enrollments” and “masculinized enrollments,” referring to the fact that there are still fields of study and professions where the expectation is that women will perform (such as nursing), and the same occurs with men (for example, engineering). There is still much to be done in this regard. The same applies to positions of power and decision-making. While universities are places where access for women and men is fairly equitable in the early years (at least in Argentina and countries in the region), this is not the case for hierarchical positions in both teaching and research, where patriarchal structures persist with a majority presence of men in the highest ranks of the power structure. There are more male rectors, more male research team leaders, and more male full professors than female. We have not yet achieved an

egalitarian structure in these respects. Nonetheless, I consider that many advances have been made, always as a product of struggles, of course!

Returning to the previous questions, while very significant progress has been made, it is important to safeguard these achievements, as in times of advancing “anti-rights” culture we run the risk of setbacks in this area as well. There are many “fronts” open.

Challenges of Gender Movements in Latin America and the Path Toward Gender Justice

Interviewers: Finally, Professor, in various Latin American contexts, the implementation of sexual education proposals in schools has faced resistance, often due to challenging traditional social and cultural norms. Nonetheless, sexual education is recognized as a key tool to promote gender equality, respect for diversity, and the prevention of violence. From your perspective, what are the main contributions of sexual education to building a school committed to human rights? And what challenges do teachers face in incorporating this perspective in a critical, transversal, and transformative manner within the school curriculum?

Professor Kandel: In addition to everything previously mentioned, sexual education has been one of the great achievements, driven by those who fought for gender equality. In these times of backlash and distrust toward those struggles, I believe it is important to reaffirm our commitment and convey a clear message: sexual education is not gender ideology. Educating in human rights, in gender equality, and raising awareness about the dangers of racism and aporophobia is not an ideology; it is a commitment assumed by states to disseminate and promote a culture respectful of human rights.

We are experiencing setbacks in this regard. Beyond political leadership discourses, social media plays a fundamental role in spreading hate speech and defamation regarding this human rights education. Schools must fulfill their role in teaching how to dismantle hate speech.

Finally, returning to your initial questions about current challenges, exposure to screens, social media, and the retreat into individualism are matters that require urgent consideration. These spaces also disseminate ideas and build a culture that distrusts and even offends human rights. Yet, such messages propagate very effectively. We must remain vigilant and be creative in reacting as swiftly as possible to the advance of messages seeking to dismantle what we have built with such effort.

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