

# The Educational Policy of the New Mexican School Concerning Human Rights

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## Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the approaches and implementation process of the New Mexican School, a project that emerged from the government proposals of the Fourth Transformation. This new educational model integrates the principles of human rights into its philosophical, curricular, and pedagogical structure, as well as the challenges the State faces in ensuring its effective and adequate implementation in contexts marked for decades by inequality, exclusion, and unaddressed, even invisible, sociocultural diversity. The analysis is based on the five fundamental principles of human rights. Not only that, but also, from the principle of universality, it considers aspects of accessibility to education and aspects related to information and communication channels through digital tools, as well as educational inclusion, cultural plurality, and diversity, to develop a proposal for intercultural education, among other proposals included in this work. As part of the conclusions, we affirm that the New Mexican School represents an education with a humanistic, inclusive, and community-based approach. Its approach can potentially transform educational practices by generating a more equitable and fair system. Therefore, it represents a challenge for the State to provide adequate conditions and resources for quality education.

Keywords: human rights, basic education, New Mexican School

## Introduction

In recent years, Mexico has played a key role in promoting structural reforms in the education system to address inequalities and social problems that affect the right to quality education. One of the largest and most important transformations has been the creation of the New Mexican School (NEM), an educational policy promoted by then-President Andrés Manuel López Obrador through the 2019 constitutional reform. This model aims to reconfigure the education system based on a humanistic, intercultural, and critical approach, grounded in human rights principles such as inclusiveness, ethics, values, cultural diversity, comprehensive education, and free, secular education.

In this sense, and given that this educational project has only recently been implemented, it is necessary to analyze how the New Mexican School integrates human rights principles into its philosophical, curricular, and pedagogical structure, as well as the challenges it faces to ensure its effective and appropriate implementation in contexts that have been marked for decades by inequality, exclusion, and unaddressed, even invisible, sociocultural diversity.

The New Mexican School (NEM) emerged as a response to the need for structural change in the education system, based on a model that promotes social transformation, democratic participation, critical thinking, and education focused on community well-being (SEP, 2022). It is based on Article 3 of the Constitution, amended in 2019, which establishes the right to an inclusive, intercultural, comprehensive, and gender-sensitive education (DOF, 2019).

Having a curriculum policy, based on current educational needs, proposes an organization of knowledge based on educational fields that seek to integrate knowledge from an interdisciplinary and contextualized perspective, such as inclusion, critical thinking, gender equality, critical interculturality, healthy living, the arts, and socio-emotional education (SEP, 2022). Using community projects as an educational strategy not only links school curricula to real-world situations but also enhances the societal value of learning.

One of the main challenges in educational processes within schools is ensuring ongoing training consistent with the principles of the New Mexican School. Therefore, teachers must have comprehensive training that enables their participatory inclusion in the creation of their educational programs. According to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), gaps persist in teacher training, particularly in areas of inclusion, human rights, and interculturality (Ramírez, 2024). Therefore, as mentioned, teachers must have the necessary tools to create an accessible learning environment that addresses the needs faced by school communities.

Quality for teachers implies improved working conditions, professional and job stability, social security, and decent healthcare, in addition to both disciplinary and pedagogical updating processes, so that they have a strengthened and cared-for profession. This is because if teachers do not have the appropriate tools to carry out their work, education will not be of good quality. A university degree is not enough if the socio-psycho-pedagogical foundations are lacking for teachers to teach classes and develop quality educational activities. There must be ongoing advice and guidance, as well as internships and refresher courses in all areas of knowledge. In the current context, where there is extensive technological development and proliferation that leads to the frequent use of socio-digital networks and Artificial Intelligence (AI), it is necessary for teachers to also have the training and technological tools necessary for the development of their educational work, since we are increasingly getting closer to the digital, not only in the use of networks but also in the ways of working, submitting homework (UNESCO, 2023) or “simulation” in the construction of knowledge.

Likewise, we know that intergenerational digital divides exist because, as the technological paradigm, organized around information technologies (Castells, 2008), continues to grow exponentially, the number of cyber-illiterate generations will continue to grow. Therefore, the most appropriate approach is to provide support to those teachers who are unfamiliar with these technologies, as replacing old-school teachers with new, younger teachers would be a crude solution. In other words, both novice teachers with

new digital tools and experienced teachers are needed. Both can create strengthened learning environments, where teachers with more educational experience have thoroughly studied and learned the foundations of “traditional” education, in which they center their teaching on their students’ learning. This information can be complemented with information obtained from internet sources, networks, and AI, as well as strategies developed by novice teachers who are proficient in these types of practices. In this sense, it is important to consider that new technologies are not a danger today, as they offer opportunities to diversify information sources, even to learn how to participate in them, how to use them to our advantage, and how to live with them. Social media can be a great tool in school education.

According to studies conducted by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2019), previous educational reforms failed to reduce learning gaps, which shows that curricular changes must be accompanied by comprehensive public policies. Such policies must consider contextual foundations and identify the demands of today’s societies in their design and implementation to address their needs.

## Education as a human right

The right to education is established and recognized in both the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States and various international instruments signed by the Mexican State. In this regard, Article 3 of the Constitution establishes that everyone has the right to education and that it must be inclusive, free, equitable, and of excellence (DOF, 2019). These reforms to Mexican education policy incorporate, for the first time, an explicit human rights orientation, stating that education will promote respect for human dignity, awareness of international solidarity, justice, and a culture of peace—fundamental values for human beings, which constitute the values for democracy (Molina, 2021; Molina et al., 2023).

At the international level, Mexico has ratified several fundamental treaties, which establish the foundations of education as an inalienable right, fundamental to understanding the role of education in the human, social, and economic development of individuals and societies for all, and as a guideline for other fundamental rights, such as those established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ONU, 1948), a document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, in Paris. This document establishes a series of fundamental rights that must be guaranteed to all human beings for the development of international law regarding the protection of human rights.

The five human rights principles are vital to guaranteeing respect, dignity, and equality for all. These are (UNFPA, 2005):

1. Universality, meaning that they apply to all people regardless of race, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or any other condition. All human beings have the same rights and freedoms.
2. Non-discrimination establishes that all people have the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. No person may be excluded or treated unequally because of their origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, or disability.
3. Equality establishes that all people must be treated equally before the law and in the exercise of their rights. Equality implies not only non-discrimination but also equal access to resources and opportunities.

4. Indivisibility establishes that rights cannot be separated or ranked. All rights, whether civil, political, economic, social, and cultural, have equal importance and must be fully respected, protected, and guaranteed.
5. Participation and access to justice guarantees that all people have the right to participate in political and social decision-making that affects them, as well as access to justice mechanisms for the protection and defence of their human rights.

Despite the similarity between these principles and their characteristics, they must all be applied equally to and in all people, regardless of their conditions. To this end, international agreements and treaties are created with the primary objective of guaranteeing the enjoyment of a series of rights related to the economy, society, and culture, as addressed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ONU, 1966), a treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966, and which entered into force on January 3, 1976.

Similarly, there is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), which establishes education as an inalienable right. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989, and entered into force on September 2, 1990. The primary objective of this Convention is to protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents, as it guarantees that all children enjoy a dignified, healthy, and safe life, with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## Humanistic and social principles of the New Mexican School

The New Mexican School (NEM) embraces these principles, viewing them from a humanistic and transformative perspective. It is guided by a comprehensive approach to learning that recognizes students as subjects of rights, marking a turning point in the perspectives of Mexican education. In this sense, the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, 2022) proposes that the New Mexican School will promote the development of a more human-centered education by fostering values such as solidarity, inclusion, critical thinking, gender equity, and respect for diversity.

Basic education (primary and secondary) in Mexico, designed within the framework of the New Mexican School, establishes formative fields and articulating axes that promote a critical and social vision of learning, thereby strengthening inclusion and educational equity in access to education. It aims to ensure that all children, regardless of their social, cultural, and economic background, have access to quality education, reducing the inequality gaps that exist in urban and rural areas, as well as in indigenous communities and communities of people with disabilities, who have long been neglected.

These approaches seek to promote accessibility for all and the incorporation of intercultural approaches that recognize and respect the languages and customs of indigenous peoples. In turn, they seek to educate students who are not only competent in specific areas but also develop as responsible, critical, participatory, and active citizens by fostering their emotional and psychological well-being, which also contributes to their social development and their ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships. Therefore, promoting values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, social justice, and equity allows for the development of citizens committed to their community and their country, and to themselves (Molina et al., 2023).

Another key and fundamental aspect of the New Mexican School is intercultural education, given that Mexico is a country with great cultural and linguistic diversity, in

which the richness of the different cultures that coexist within the country must be recognized. Within this type of education, it is important to promote a multicultural education that includes the knowledge, languages, and traditions of indigenous peoples (UNESCO, 2015), as well as their integration and applicability in the concepts and practices of Western thought. This education always seeks access for all levels and contributes to promoting and understanding students' cultural diversity and fostering respect for this diversity.

On the other hand, environmental education is proposed to raise awareness among students about the importance of sustainability and environmental stewardship (UNESCO, 2015). In a context where ecological challenges are increasingly urgent, children and young people are encouraged to understand the relationship between human activities and the natural environment and become agents of change for the care of their communities.

These approaches take on particular relevance because eco-social problems refer to challenges and conflicts that arise from tensions between the environment and society (Gutiérrez, 2022). Climate change, pollution, the depletion or scarcity of natural resources, among others, have consequences for quality of life, health, food security, and equitable access to basic services such as water. Thus, we can describe the current eco-social crises as "crises of knowing and being in the world" (Agundez, 2023, pp. 6, 10-13). They are crises that result from educational systems that prioritize market needs (Meira, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2011) over the needs of a good living (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011).

These conditions invite reflection on the meaning of being in the world, considering an eco-dependent and interdependent perspective, in which the importance of placing life at the center is recognized, through what has been called the development of ecocitizenship, which is "centered on living here together, which implies a collective responsibility for the life systems of which we are a part" (Sauvé, 2014, p. 14).

From a formative perspective, this includes promoting ecological values, teaching about climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability, as well as actively engaging students in projects that promote the responsible use of natural resources and environmental preservation. They also implement tasks that contribute to these goals, such as recycling materials, shifting toward responsible consumption, developing ecocitizen activities through the use of libraries, and all those actions that, even small ones, make a significant difference in everyday life.

The promotion of quality education, which is not limited solely to academic content but also values the pedagogical autonomy of teachers, becomes a fundamental component because, as Freire (2022) states, there is no teaching without a methodical approach that includes students in taking responsibility for their learning processes. In this process, teachers are influential to students, who need to be positive in their response to receive a good education and subsequently put it into practice, both at home with homework and in their daily lives. Educators are expected to be active in the design and implementation of school content, adapting teaching strategies to the needs of their students.

Teacher professional development is needed, seeking ongoing training that allows teachers to improve their pedagogical skills and their ability to innovate in the classroom. Teachers are essential to improving and achieving the much-desired quality of education sought in Mexico.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, the use of technologies in education encourages students and teachers to take advantage of digital tools to improve learning, as long as it is done responsibly and effectively integrated into educational processes, without replacing the mechanisms considered part of traditional teaching.

Digital education and distance learning are areas of opportunity offered by the New Mexican School, which seeks to strengthen students' preparation for functioning in a digital age through an approach that promotes equity in access to technologies. Thus, the active participation of the educational community promotes a democratic educational model in which students, parents, teachers, and educational authorities work together to improve the quality of education. In general terms, it is a pedagogical model that encourages student participation in decision-making regarding aspects affecting their education and the construction of a school environment that fosters collaboration, mutual respect, and the exercise of human rights, with an intercultural focus, sustainable development, and supported by socio-digital technologies.

Teacher training with a focus on human rights involves the development of ethical competencies, supported by methodologies that allow for the construction of school environments free from violence, discrimination, and exclusion. According to reports from the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, 2023; 2024), there is still a significant gap in teacher training on topics such as human rights, sexual diversity, disability, interculturality, and gender perspective. Therefore, for educational policy to have a real impact, it is necessary to guarantee ongoing training processes, pedagogical support, strengthen teacher participation in curricular decision-making, and participate in extracurricular activities that also ensure they learn about the new education system.

Although the advantages and purposes of the New Mexican School have already been discussed, it faces problems and challenges for its effective implementation with a rights-based focus, such as social and territorial inequality, as many rural and indigenous communities lack the basic conditions to exercise the right to education (CONEVAL, 2024). Likewise, there is a lack of pedagogical clarity, as few educators have adequate academic training that is reflected in the classroom and among students. This is in addition to a lack of resources, as education requires sustained investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, materials, and training.

Guaranteeing rights in schools involves not only modifying content but also adding and transforming pedagogical relationships, assessment practices, and institutional dynamics. When implemented, these can help generate new forms of education. This represents a great opportunity to build public education with a humanistic, critical, and transformative approach.

The alignment with human rights strengthens its legitimacy as an educational policy oriented toward equity and social justice. Its effective implementation requires coherence in words and actions: in pedagogical practices, teacher training, and public policies. Only in this way will it be possible to guarantee an education that not only teaches about human rights, but also ensures that these rights are exercised and respected daily in Mexican classrooms.

## Conclusion

The educational policy of the New Mexican School represents an education with a humanistic, inclusive, and communitarian spirit. Its approach has the potential to

transform educational practices and generate a more equitable and just system. However, its success will depend on the State's ability to support the implementation process, providing adequate resources, quality teacher training, the creation and promotion of spaces for social participation for both students and teachers, and a pedagogical vision consistent with the realities facing the country. Under these conditions for implementing educational policy, a truly transformative and democratic school can be built. This requires a profound and long-term transformation of the Mexican education system—a system that promotes an education that is not only high-quality but also inclusive, pluricultural, and intercultural. By emphasizing respect for diversity, the comprehensive education of students, and the development of a citizenry committed to the common good, it has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of a more just, equitable, and sustainable society in Mexico. The educational programs, based on the New Mexican School approach, include content on human rights, social justice, gender equality, democracy, and peace. In this way, students will not only learn about their rights but will also learn to recognize, respect, and defend their human rights and those of others around them, developing responsible, conscious, and participatory citizens.

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