

# Letter from the director

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With opportunity to the last presidential election and in subsequent speeches, President Santos has referred to the issue of education. The compendium of his projects in this area was the promise that in 2025 “Colombia will be the most educated country in Latin America.” And to this end a budget of 26 billion pesos is appropriated...

But when the speech is lowered to the realities, there are a number of almost insurmountable difficulties - to achieve the proposed objective. Let us start with the most simple: double shifts in school. What classrooms will accommodate the two shifts that exist today? Are there curricula for use of added time, signifying a true intellectual and practical development of children? As for teachers, Unesco estimates that “in fifteen years it would take 145,700 primary teachers” in the country: are they being prepared? What institutions are preparing them? This simple questions should be a thorough and systematic work of the Ministry of Education, -as a national guide- and, after the first term of Santos-Parody government it has not been released.

In addition, paraphrasing Cervantes “with Fecode we stumbled, Sancho”. So where are our memories, one of the last major disagreements between the teachers’ union and the Ministry of Education, consisted in the negative, with strike included, against the assessment that the Ministry intended to do, on educators’ knowledge and methods of teaching. You cannot ignore that Fecode is a major barrier to any positive modification that is attempted to improve national education. And as the great battle against the State should demand higher wages, maybe a policy of “jam” can overcome its immemorial intransigence.

But in our view, there are still deeper problems. A generalization on this matter would be blurred, but it is clear that there is not a critical mass in the country’s teaching concerning constructive learning methods. Memorization and the keynote lecture are still retaining a supremacy that makes the mental development sterile of thousands of students and prevents any hint of creativity, or at least of an analytical capacity to teach them to tackle intellectual problems of innovation and to make their own formative journey: intellectual autonomy. And that problem is common to all types of education, from kindergarten through not a few graduates.

Certainly there are universities, both private and public, of excellence, but not the bulk. If we get out of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and maybe Barranquilla, we show a dominant mediocrity in higher education, which leaves the Colombian province plunged in low levels of development. And politicization, if not corruption, in numerous universities, not only in small towns but even in

the big cities, prevents peace of mind, an irreplaceable foundation of intellectual endeavor. For just one example, how can we expect a serious and profound training of teachers in universities such as Pedagógica Nacional, where almost every month is spent in riots, stone-throwing and disrupting public order?

The scholarship program certainly is a progress, but how many scholarships will be required to create a critical mass of bright graduates who can transform the profile of education in Colombia? We understand that scholarships can be an effective tool for a populist individual aid, rather than to achieve a conversion of education in Colombia for us to be able to state that “it is the most educated country in Latin America”.

The overall structure of education is at stake. Moreover, we would say that what needs to change is a national culture on education. And to overcome a tradition of centuries, it is extremely meager a period of 11 years to achieve it, with the danger of squandering billions of pesos in pursuing utopias.