

Interview with Jeffrey Puryear: A Life Dedicated to Latin America

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Biography



Jeffrey Puryear is a senior fellow in the [Education Program](#) at the [Inter-American Dialogue](#) in Washington, DC. Until 2014, he was vice president for social policy, and co-directed (with Marcela Gajardo of Chile) the Program for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL), which has had a major impact on education policies in the region. Puryear's work in Latin America extends back many years: he was previously director of the Ford Foundation's regional office for the Andes and Southern Cone in Lima.

These and other activities related to education and the role of intellectuals in Chilean politics have made Puryear a highly regarded person in several Latin American countries. Thus it is important to understand his career path. Why did Puryear become interested in the role of intellectuals and in education policy in Latin America? What is his academic background? What are his interests in and connections to our region?

Puryear studied in a small rural public primary school near Lansing, the state capital of Michigan in the United States, and in a public secondary in Eaton Rapids. Perhaps none of his teachers from that period imagined that young Jeff would grow up to have, as a fundamental concern in his life, trying to improve the quality of education.

As a youth, he completed his bachelor's degree (BA) in Social Sciences in one of the universities of his state—Michigan State University. He then moved to Durham, North Carolina to do his master's (MA) in Sociology at Duke University, an important private university founded by Methodists.

Several years later he completed a doctorate in comparative education at the University of Chicago, which had one of the leading centers of work in that area. Even later he was a "Research Scholar" at two other prestigious universities--New York University and Stanford University.

It's fair to say that Puryear has lived a multicultural life. He was born in the United States, but has worked in Peru, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. He is married to a Chilean, has a Chilean daughter, an Indian son-in-law and a Jack Russell Terrier puppy. Among his favorite pleasures are tasting good wine and skiing in Colorado. He lives in Washington, DC and has a lovely cabin on Lake Michigan, with a study in the woods—ideal for writing his memoirs. We expect those memoirs to develop what in this interview is just a preamble.

() Carmen García Guadilla is the former director of the Center for Development Studies (CENDES), Central University of Venezuela. She has been for many years an international consultant at UNESCO / IESALC. She founded the Andres Bello Chair in Comparative Higher Education at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA-Brasil) and coordinated the UNESCO Chair in Latin American University Thought. She has written numerous books on comparative higher education in Latin America. Her academic blog: www.carmengarciaguadilla.com*

Interview

Carmen Garcia Guadilla (CGG): As someone who is knowledgeable about education, we would like to know what memories you have of your experience in primary and secondary school in the city of Lansing, where you were born.

Jeffrey Puryear (JP): I find it difficult to comment on the training I received in primary and secondary school so long ago, and even more difficult to generalize from my personal experience. But in general I have positive memories. Regarding quality, it must have been good because it enabled me to enter and be successful in college. So I find it hard to believe that there were major problems.

It's worth noting that I studied in a rural public primary school with one classroom, one teacher, seven grades (kindergarten through sixth) and about thirty students. The teacher had to be well organized to attend to that many students in different grades. And each student had to do a lot of individual work via workbooks for each subject. The main emphasis was on language (reading and writing) and arithmetic, but there was also some geography and history. The teacher briefly explained each lesson and then we worked alone while she was attending to other students. In my opinion the teacher understood the subject matter and taught diligently. One virtue of this method of teaching was that students had to take some responsibility for their learning and had to respond daily on each subject. A particularly interesting aspect was that the older students helped younger students with their lessons. The school had a small library which I found fascinating. There was plenty of social interaction, especially through sports and games. Occasionally there were social events (student theater and /or meals) involving parents. If I remember correctly, a neighborhood committee was responsible for hiring the teacher, which established a close relationship between her and the parents. The school's funding depended on local taxes plus a subsidy from the state of Michigan. There was neither funding from nor supervision by the national government. I lived almost two miles from school, and usually walked back and forth with my brother. I do not remember there being problems; and I feel I got an education that was good enough to enable me to continue on to high school.

I studied at a public high school in Eaton Rapids, about five miles from my house. As is common in the United States, the school was managed locally by a Board of Education which hired the principal, who was responsible for hiring the teachers. A municipal school bus collected us in the morning and took us home in the afternoon. It was a small town (approximately 4,000 inhabitants) with students who were moderately diverse socio-economically, but relatively homogeneous ethnically and racially. Most completed high school but only a minority continued on to college. For me, leaving my rural neighborhood to study in the town was a welcome and important change.

The public high school offered the same basic education for all (math, language arts, science, history and social studies). Students could then choose between a vocational track that included classes in auto mechanics, construction, accounting, and typing, and a college prep track that emphasized literature, history, social studies Spanish or French, algebra, geometry, biology, chemistry and physics. In general, the teachers were able, and some were first-rate. Most lived in or near the town, and were part of the community.

The school introduced me to literature, science and mathematics. I realized I had, and enjoyed, some intellectual ability. I met many new people with backgrounds and horizons that were different from mine. There was lots of social life via school clubs, sports and dances. The social dimension was especially

important for me because it connected me with new social networks. The school also introduced me to student politics. To my surprise some teachers suggested me as a candidate for the presidency of the senior class, and I won. It's worth noting that I did not meet anyone in the town who went to a private high school (although decades later I learned of one). Families with money (there were several) generally sent their children to the public school. Overall I think that the school gave me an adequate combination of intellectual and social skills. I find it hard to be critical. I learned what I needed to continue on to the university.

CGG: At Michigan State University, your first contact with higher education, what experiences do you remember as being most significant?

JP: There were quite a few. Perhaps the most significant was the contrast between my rural family life and college life. Despite being close to home (15 miles), going to college (a public university with some 18,000 students) was like entering another world (or perhaps the world).

First, I lived in a dorm with other students, so I left my family and never lived with them again. It was a kind of personal liberation. I met students from across the country (and some from other countries) with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Several introduced me to ideas and perspectives that were new to me. It was, for example, my first contact with Jews, who I had previously encountered only in the Bible. And to my surprise I got involved in student politics, and realized that I could relate comfortably with leaders at that level. I had a small scholarship covering my tuition, but worked part-time to help my family pay the cost of room and board.

Second, the university environment put me in direct contact with a new and broad intellectual world. I had professors who had studied in the best universities. I took classes in areas that were new to me, like philosophy and political science. There was a serious library, and time dedicated to studying. It was an opportunity that I embraced enthusiastically. The university offered students up to two years of general studies, requiring a choice of major (at the latest) at the beginning of the third year. Everyone had to take two introductory courses (American Thought and Language and Natural Science) during the first year, and could choose other courses according to their preferences. Since I had no idea what I wanted to specialize in, I took whatever courses I thought might be interesting. That was important. It allowed me to sample and experiment.

Also important was the fact that, because I got good grades during the first quarter, I was invited to join the "[Honors College](#)"—which offered special orientation to the most talented students. The director of the Honors College suggested I take several courses, including analytical geometry for math majors, and modern philosophy. The goal was to broaden my horizons and help me discover what really interested me. The geometry course was a disaster, but a useful experience. We were also allowed to take special courses designed for Honors College students (among others, a course on contemporary theoretical physics, which we dubbed "physics for poets"). Some of those courses significantly influenced my thinking and subsequent career decisions. For me it was important that the university did not require selecting a major right away. At the end of my second year, I opted for a broad major (social sciences) that is common within the "liberal arts" tradition in U.S. higher education. I graduated from college with few specific skills, but with a broad education that has served me well.

CGG: Despite beginning doctoral studies in Sociology at Duke University, you decided to leave the program upon completing your master's degree, and enter the Peace Corps in Colombia. Why?

JP: I began doctoral studies immediately after completing my bachelor's degree, and soon realized that I was not ready to take on such an important professional commitment. I felt that my studies were very theoretical, and not much connected with the real world or with my own immediate interests. I felt that "my feet were not on the ground" and that I needed to leave the academic world and get some experience in the real world. This was during the Vietnam War, and people like me were likely to be drafted if they left school. Thus the consequences of dropping out could be serious. But then I realized that [Peace Corps](#) volunteers were rarely drafted. Since I aspired to an international career, joining the Peace Corps seemed like the ideal choice. Originally I wanted to serve somewhere in Southeast Asia (ideally, Indonesia) and I had zero interest in Latin America. However the Peace Corps offered me a position in Niger which, after I looked it up in the library, did not seem like the right place for me. We began discussing several countries—Nigeria, Honduras and Colombia—along with Niger. After researching these countries I decided that Colombia was the most interesting. So, despite having no interest whatsoever in Latin America, I agreed to go there. That decision fundamentally changed my professional life. I spent two years in Colombia, learned Spanish and, since then, have spent my entire professional life working on Latin America.

I want to make clear, however, that my studies at Duke, particularly in sociological theory (Durkheim, Weber and others) and research methods, were important and have helped me throughout my professional life.

CGG: Why did you choose the University of Chicago for your doctorate in comparative education?

JP: Primarily because the University of Chicago has a long tradition and great prestige in the social sciences. While at Michigan State, I had taken a course (in the Honors College) on 'classic works in sociology' taught by a professor who had recently graduated from the University of Chicago, and was very impressed. I decided that what was most important was to study with the best minds, and that the discipline did not matter much, as long as it was in the social sciences.

I had decided (based on my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia) to concentrate on social development in Latin America. I had no interest or experience in education, but by chance met a student who was doing his thesis research in Colombia for a doctorate in comparative education at the University of Chicago, and he strongly recommended the program. I decided to apply, even though my other applications were for programs in international relations and development. Subsequently Chicago was the only program that offered me a full fellowship. I decided to accept, despite having no particular interest in education, because Chicago was one of the best universities in the world. That turned out to be my ticket into the top of the academic world, and I have never regretted the decision. I finally had direct contact with some of the world's most distinguished thinkers. And it was there that I discovered economics, which became my specialization in comparative education. Chicago also put me in touch with the Ford Foundation's network, which later led to a job that lasted 17 years.

(It is of course ironic that, despite having no interest in Latin America or in education, much of my professional life has been dedicated to education in Latin America.)

CGG: What was your experience like as a "Research Scholar" at Stanford University?

JP: I spent a sabbatical year (1978-9) at Stanford University (back then, the Ford Foundation still offered sabbaticals to some of its staff). I had spent almost four years working in Chile (and also in Argentina, Peru and Uruguay), and wanted to write about those experiences. In addition I wanted to update my knowledge in economics and education. The Stanford International Development Education Center

(SIDEAC) was one of the world's leading programs in comparative education and had an emphasis on Latin America, which complemented my experience in Chicago. I sat in on several courses and met some extraordinary professors and students. I was able to explore some new topics (e.g. leadership) and spend time in the library browsing books that looked interesting (it was there that I discovered Hirschman). And I managed to write an article, which was later published in an academic journal, on the response of the Ford Foundation to the repressive regimes that emerged in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in the seventies. Stanford not only met my expectations, it gave me two surprises. I was given an office between a student who later became president of his country and a student who later became my wife. So overall my year at Stanford was intellectually and emotionally productive.

CGG: How was your experience as a "Research Scholar" at New York University?

JP: I went to New York University in 1992 to write a book about the role of intellectuals in the transition to democracy in Chile. I had left my position at the Ford Foundation and sought a quiet place to write, and access to a good library. New York University gave me exactly what I sought and needed, and organized a couple of seminars so I could present my analysis. I was so deeply focused on writing the book that I did not try to take advantage of the many other resources at New York University.

CGG: Your book *Thinking Politics: Intellectuals and Democracy in Chile, 1973-1988*, received a lot of recognition. Why did you become interested in this topic? What were your main findings?

JP: Like many authors, I became interested in the topic for having lived it. I arrived in Chile in 1973, two months after the military coup, to work with the Ford Foundation, originally in education, but then in other fields. Faced with the rapid and radical changes that emerged in Chile, especially the restrictions on intellectual and academic freedom, we felt we needed to establish a new program that would respond to the challenges of a repressive regime. After much discussion, we decided to try to support talented social scientists who, for political reasons, had been excluded from positions in universities and government. Beginning in 1973, and for the next seventeen years, I was involved, to a greater or lesser extent, and from Santiago, Lima and New York, with the efforts of the Ford Foundation to support the social sciences in Chile and to promote a return to democracy. I established friendships and professional relationships with many of the scholars (and politicians) who played key roles in the transition to democracy. It was a unique experience, and upon leaving the Ford Foundation it seemed important to write about it. I was struck by the observation of Abe Lowenthal, founding director of the Inter-American Dialogue, that I might be the only person who combined the knowledge of what had happened with the time to write about it. So I spent two years at New York University, with funding from the Ford Foundation, writing the book.

As for results, the book documents and analyzes the fundamental and positive role played by intellectuals (most of them social scientists) in the transition to democracy. It also documents the role played by the Ford Foundation (and other foreign donors) in maintaining active, within the repressive regime, academics who later played key roles in promoting a successful and peaceful transition to democracy, and who took leadership positions in the democratic regime that emerged after 1990.

The Chilean case was notable in part because, in most such transitions around the world, intellectuals had not played an important role. Chile was an exception and it was important to understand why. A combination of factors explains the Chilean case. Most important were a highly ideological political culture (intellectuals have a comparative advantage in working with ideas); the strong repression of political activity by the military regime (which left the field of politics almost entirely to intellectuals); and investments during nearly 30 years to establish and develop modern social sciences in Chile (almost all intellectuals who played key roles were social scientists).

The book also draws more general conclusions regarding the relationship between intellectuals (or at least, social scientists) and politics. An important observation was that intellectuals do not have to give up their academic perspectives and rules to have an impact on politics. In fact, maintaining some independence from politics may be key to enabling an intellectual have an impact on politics. It is more important to establish a strong relationship between intellectuals and politicians, than to leave the academic profession for a career in politics.

Another observation is that intellectuals can choose from a multitude of possible roles—even more than the five that sociologist Louis Coser suggests in his book *Men of Ideas*. During periods of fundamental social change, the potential of intellectuals to influence politics can expand significantly.

Finally, the book emphasizes the positive role that networks of modern and talented intellectuals can play in their countries, and the importance of establishing such networks even when their precise impact cannot be determined in advance. They constitute a kind of intellectual infrastructure. Intellectuals (at least social scientists) offer a capacity for creation and leadership that can be a formidable resource in moving from dictatorship to democracy.

The book has circulated widely. It is used in courses in Latin America, the United States and Europe, and continues to be cited in academic work. A Spanish version is underway, and scheduled for publication in late 2016.

CGG: You worked for 17 years with the Ford Foundation during a time of much turbulence in Latin America. What were the principal outcomes?

JP: That could be the topic of another book. I applied to work at the Ford Foundation because I understood that it had high standards and top quality staff. I never felt disappointed. From the beginning I worked with people like Peter Bell and Peter Hakim in Santiago de Chile, and Bill Carmichael, Dick Dye and Kalman Silvert in New York. I felt I was part of a highly professional and demanding institution. I continued to feel that way for most of my 17 years. One of my conclusions is that the quality of an institution depends heavily on its leadership, its staff and the responsibility it gives them. The Ford Foundation benefited from the leadership of an extraordinary president, McGeorge Bundy, recruited highly capable staff, and gave them lots of responsibility. It was a privilege to work under those conditions. I learned a lot in many different areas. For example, how to relate to academic and political elites, ask good questions, address transcendent issues, write briefly and well, analyze personalities and solve problems. I learned not only to see reality more clearly but also, in a way I find difficult to explain, to define reality. I learned to think big. The Ford Foundation introduced me to levels and networks that were totally beyond my personal experience. It helped me accumulate an important social capital. It provided me with experience and knowledge that were immensely valuable.

At the program level, we emphasized principally the social sciences. When I started, the Foundation was completing more than a decade of efforts to establish and/or strengthen modern social sciences in selected countries. Subsequently we designed a new program to deal with the challenges posed by the repressive regimes that emerged in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay in the mid-1970s. Later we tried to build capacity and promote activities in new areas such as human rights, civil-military relations, international relations and governance. But we always worked in the social sciences, and with academic and intellectual elites. There was an assumption, more implicit than explicit, that sooner or later these elites would play an important role in national affairs and that it was crucial to promote a corps of elites that was capable, informed and up-to-date. And in fact, in many countries the social scientists that we

supported later became presidents, ministers, vice ministers, political party leaders, advisors, prominent journalists, university presidents, professors and respected analysts. What was originally academic capital became political and economic capital.

CGG: After working for a long time at the Ford Foundation, your next institution was the Inter-American Dialogue. What was that change like?

JP: After nearly 15 years with the Ford Foundation, I began to feel that I had stopped growing intellectually and professionally. The tasks and challenges began to seem repetitive, and I began talking to friends, all of them former Ford colleagues, about possible future directions. Of course, it was difficult to consider leaving such a privileged position with prestige and a good income. But the Ford Foundation was also changing. It had new management with less commitment to academic activities and more commitment to social movements ("grass roots"). I felt that the Foundation was in different hands, and that my expertise was of lower priority in light of the institution's new objectives. It is also important to note that the Ford Foundation did not offer the kind of long-term employment that is common in governments and international organizations. Employment was based on fixed-term contracts, and the assumption was always that non-administrative staff would sooner or later leave the Foundation to work elsewhere. So it became increasingly clear that the time to change was arriving. Since I had spent so many years with the Foundation, the new leadership offered to consider some transitional funding if I could come up with a suitable project. They accepted my proposal to write a book about the role of intellectuals in Chile's transition to democracy, and made a grant to New York University to finance it.

But New York University was only a bridge. For various reasons, and despite my attachment to intellectual work, I never aspired to be a university professor. And I always thought that, because of its international focus and policy emphasis, Washington would be my eventual destination. I decided to look for a job in Washington—without having any clear idea of which institution might be appropriate.

I had a history with the Inter-American Dialogue, which was based in Washington. I knew its founding director, Abe Lowenthal, and in the early eighties had put together the first Ford Foundation grant to establish the Dialogue. I had a long professional and personal relationship with Peter Hakim, who was already working at the Dialogue. And I knew its second director, Richard Feinberg. In addition, the Dialogue maintained the high standards that had originally attracted me to the Ford Foundation.

While finishing my book, Peter Hakim asked me if I would prepare a proposal for a program on education at the Dialogue. I said I doubted that a program on education had much of a future, but would gladly prepare a proposal. Hakim managed to get funding (from the governments of Canada and the U.S.) for 12 months and offered me the job, which I accepted.

CGG: When you became part of Inter-American Dialogue, you promoted the idea of founding [PREAL](#) (Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas). Tell us about this program, which this year celebrates twenty years since its founding.

JP: PREAL's predecessor was founded in 1995 by the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington and the Corporation for Development Research (CINDE) in Santiago de Chile. Its aim was to improve the quality and equity of education in Latin America. The idea was to work with public and private organizations throughout the hemisphere to promote informed debate on education policy, and to identify, disseminate and monitor best educational practices. At the outset I invited José Joaquín Brunner (a distinguished Chilean social scientist) to work with me, and we commissioned a series of thematic studies and national reports. Education policy was given little attention in the region and the debate was relatively poor, but

Brunner had played a key role in a report by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) that broke new ground on the issue. We organized a conference and published, with the Organization of American States (OAS), the papers we had commissioned. We learned a lot and began to develop a modern vision of the status of education and possible priorities for reform. A recurring question was "What should we do?" I remember Brunner's very wise response: "We should try to create a visible, new and updated regional consensus on education policy."

While developing activities, we prepared a proposal to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for a larger project dedicated to promoting education reform in the region, based on working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in several countries to promote informed debate on the state of education and education policy. As part of the proposal to the IDB, we formally established a joint project of the Inter-American Dialogue and CINDE. In the same week that the IDB approved funding for the expanded project, the president-elect of Chile, Eduardo Frei, invited Brunner to join his cabinet. Working together, CINDE and the Inter-American Dialogue evaluated potential candidates to replace Brunner. As a result of that process Marcela Gajardo was selected as co-director of the project and we began work.

At this stage the program was not yet called PREAL and we had not developed a comprehensive vision of education reform. Our emphasis was on working with NGOs in various countries in activities designed to promote informed debate on education policy and education reform, involve civil society in analyzing education conditions and seek bases for intellectual and technical agreement on improving the quality, equity and efficiency of education.

Shortly thereafter, the United States Agency for Development (USAID) asked us to prepare a proposal for activities in the same general areas, allowing us to add new features such as Education Report Cards, several regional working groups, a program of best practices, a working papers series, regional conferences and a website. The proposal was approved in early 1996. We expanded activities, recruited more institutional partners, and adopted a new name: the Program for Educational Reform in Latin America (PREAL). With the first report card ("[A Future at Stake](#)") in 1998, which was based in part on several previous reports, we established the basic elements of our vision regarding the state of education, and education reform, in the region—a vision that got a positive response from many analysts and specialists working in Latin American education. Four years after starting work, we had established a vision, a name, an agenda, credibility and a regional network of talented and respected partners. During the next 15 years we secured more financial support, expanded our activities and expanded our network of collaborators.

CGG: What is the legacy of 20 years of PREAL?

JP: In my opinion PREAL has succeeded, to a greater or lesser degree, in:

- drawing attention to the low quality of education throughout the region, and its implications for economic growth and social progress;
- making education reform a central issue on national political agendas ;
- changing and updating the discourse on key issues (e.g. standards, assessment, accountability) in education policy;
- putting learning at the center of the debate on education;
- helping NGOs that collaborated with PREAL increase their knowledge of education policy and provide information and advice to those responsible for education in their countries;
- monitoring, from an independent and informed perspective, the performance of governments in providing quality education;

- demonstrating the key role that civil society can play in the debate on educational reform.
- establishing "a visible, new and updated regional consensus on education policy."

PREAL's success has been demonstrated in part by the decision of the Inter-American Dialogue's board, and its president, Michael Shifter, to maintain it as a central program despite the termination of USAID funding in 2013. Several years ago we prepared a [document](#) that describes briefly what we believe are 14 lessons on how to identify, adopt and implement educational policy in Latin America, based on PREAL's experience.

CGG: Based on PREAL's studies, which countries worldwide currently have the most appropriate model of education?

JP: PREAL has focused entirely on macro policy rather than on micro issues such as pedagogy. Its assumption has been that without adequate policies and effective institutions at the macro level, it is very difficult to establish and maintain successful teaching practices. That said, it is clear that several countries (or jurisdictions) worldwide have been more successful, as measured by standardized test scores. Among them are Singapore, South Korea, Canada, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Finland. The discussion of their learning models is almost entirely focused on aspects of macro policy. And rather than a single model, there appear to be several. The reality is that there is no single solution.

CGG: Which Latin American countries are closest to the education model that is most appropriate for the region?

JP: No country in Latin America comes close (as measured by standardized test scores or policies adopted) to the world's most successful countries. Measured by student test scores, Cuba has been by far the most successful country in the region. But the comparative data that we have is old, and the current situation is not clear. Overall, Latin America lags far behind.

CGG: What do you see as the central characteristics of an appropriate education model for Latin America?

JP: There is a broad (and often controversial) debate on the virtues of one or another model. The only clear agreement is that well-trained teachers are essential. That implies recruiting, training and managing teachers well. But there is less agreement on how to do that, or on other issues like finance, decentralization and the role of teachers' unions.

PREAL has emphasized:

- learning as the center of education policy;
- emphasis on systemic change (here, teacher policy is fundamental);
- strengthening the demand for quality education;
- measuring learning (especially in reading and math) and widely disseminating the results;
- forming broad coalitions of parents, political and business leaders, and civil society actors who can exert the political pressure necessary to force difficult systemic changes.

CGG: What do you think are the obstacles facing the countries that lag furthest behind in adopting this model in Latin America?

JP: In my opinion, the most important obstacle is the lack of effective demand for quality education. Most public school parents are poor, have little political influence and are happy if their children just get more

years of education than they did. They do not demand quality. Middle and upper class parents, who have political influence, tend to send their children to private schools and thus do not directly feel the shortcomings of public schools. In addition, the institutions that provide public education (ministries and departments of education) tend to be weak and incompetent. Without effective institutions it is difficult to provide good services. Finally, teachers' unions, which are generally large, well-organized and strong, give priority to wages and job stability, and resist changes that could increase the quality of education.

CGG: Do the countries of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (ALBA) differ in terms of educational outcomes?

JP: I find it difficult to argue that they are different. ALBA member countries have education policies and outcomes that are just as diverse as non-members.

CGG: How do you see the situation in Latin America compared to other regions of the world?

JP: Latin American countries clearly lag behind in international student achievement tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). They tend, unfortunately, to rank in the bottom third in reading, math and science. But what is positive is that recognition of the problem, and discussion about possible solutions, has grown significantly. There is currently much more debate and experimentation than before, and several countries are beginning to improve their scores on these tests. That is very positive, and we all hope it continues.

CGG: After a successful career, what advice would you offer young intellectuals who wish to influence education in Latin America?

JP: I would like to offer some more general advice:

- recognize your own ideological positions, and respect those of others;
- seek out and learn from those who are most capable;
- take your intuition seriously;
- give priority to what is ethical and moral;
- prefer quality work over getting ahead;
- give without expecting anything in return;
- write about what you see, think and feel;
- Do not neglect your personal life.