



Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada)

**FOURTH MEETING OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AUGUST 10–12, 2005
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
SCARBOROUGH, TOBAGO**

REPORT OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

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1. Ministers of education in the Americas held their fourth meeting from August 10 to 12, 2005, in Scarborough, Tobago. The Canadian delegation was led by the Honourable Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba.
2. Documentation related to this meeting is available upon request from the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). A report of the meeting discussions will be prepared by the Organization of American States (OAS), Department of Integral Development, and will be available upon request from the CMEC Secretariat.
3. The Fourth Meeting was preceded (August 10, 2005) by a meeting of the authorities of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) with the objective of reviewing the agenda of the ministerial meeting and creating a working group on the drafting of the *Declaration of Tobago*.
4. The Fourth Meeting was also preceded by a ministerial seminar exploring the topic “Education for Democratic Citizenship in the Americas.” The purpose of the event was for ministers to reflect on the relationship among education, the development of democratic institutions, and the active participation of citizens in the civic life of their communities and countries.
5. The seminar was divided into two parts: *What Do People Think and Know About Democracy?* and *From Civic Education to Citizenship Education*.
6. Ministers heard presentations from representatives from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other experts. Ministers participated in a dialogue following these presentations. Among the points raised were the following:
 - The IDB is one of the largest sources of external capital for the education sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.
 - The loans to support education in the hemisphere reflect the education policy priorities defined by the countries that the bank serves.
 - Education occupies a prominent place in the bank’s activities, as it is considered critical for development and indispensable for the reduction of poverty and income inequalities.
 - Over time, there has been a major growth in support of institutional strengthening and capacity building, assessment and evolution, and the training of teachers and administrators.
 - In the 1980s, a shift took place that directed the bank’s attention toward the expansion of basic education.
 - There has been an increasing interest in citizenship education in both the national and international contexts.
 - While education for citizenship and democracy is a subject that has been present since the origins of public education systems in Latin America, in today’s world, education faces an unprecedented challenge posed by complex demands. On the one hand, the development of our societies requires active, participatory citizenship. On the other, it seems that the great

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- majority of young people is apathetic and uncommitted to participating in the processes inherent in democracies.
- According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) opinion survey (2002), less than half (43 per cent) of respondents have democratic orientations and opinions; 26.5 per cent were classified as not democratic, and 30.5 per cent as ambivalent. Fifty-five per cent of those surveyed would support an autocratic government “... if it could resolve economic problems.” A similar proportion (56 per cent) felt that “... economic development is more important than democracy.”
 - Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are undergoing processes of unprecedented social, economic, and political change that are having an impact on institutions and traditional forms of social cohesion. New problems and challenges proliferate.
7. It is recognized that there is a need to promote and facilitate cooperation and coordination between all of the different actors involved in the many aspects of education for democracy to promote fundamental values and practices, such as active citizen participation, justice, liberty, tolerance, respect for human rights, minority and gender equality, and peaceful conflict resolution.
 8. Colombia is leading a plan of action for an Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices, which was to be discussed during the plenary session of the ministers’ meeting.
 9. During the preliminary portion of the ministers’ meeting, Trinidad and Tobago was elected president/chair of the meeting, and Colombia was elected vice-chair.
 10. Reports on the work of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) and the Technical Secretariat, and Dialogue with Civil Society were presented and tabled.
 11. Following presentation by the ministers from Mexico and the Director of the OAS Education and Culture Division (OEST) on the theme of *Progress on Mandates of Summit and Ministerial Meetings, and Current Hemispheric Initiatives*, the following points were raised:
 - the importance of 12 years of compulsory education, the need to broaden preschool programs, and the importance of focusing on the issue of literacy (Chile)
 - the need to develop a hemispheric program on a common framework of teacher competencies (Venezuela)
 - more efficiency in the use of education resources and the need for common definitions for student assessment (USA)
 - need for preschool information in the OAS indicator program, the importance of compulsory preschool (initial) education, and the need to persuade the heads of states to set a new goal for the Summit of the Americas in this regard (Mexico)

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12. During the Second Plenary Session, presentations were made by Brazil and St. Kitts and Nevis on the theme *Providing Quality Education for a Democratic and Productive Citizenry*. The head of the Canadian delegation spoke to how Canadian education authorities view the concept of the right to quality education for all. He emphasized that ministers responsible for education in Canada hold a vision that embraces holistic development, creates knowledge, prepares individuals for a changing job market and world, and respects sustainable development. He stressed the importance of commitment and the engagement of parents, students, teachers, administrators, businesses, and labour in the process. Minister Bjornson provided Canadian examples to illustrate his points, making special mention of challenges related to the education of our Aboriginal population.
 13. During the presentations and the subsequent dialogue, the issues of *Debt for Education Swap* (Brazil) and the agreement achieved among Commonwealth countries to address issues regarding teacher recruitment and retention through the *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol* (St. Kitts and Nevis) received considerable attention
 14. Minister Bjornson's intervention, referred to in paragraph 11, elicited several comments during the dialogue session and in corridor discussions, particularly with respect to youth engagement initiatives and in-service teacher training models.
 15. The ministers from Colombia and Venezuela presented on the theme *Providing Quality Education for a Democratic and Productive Society*. This theme provided an opportunity to reflect, in concrete terms, on the discussion held during the pre-meeting seminar referred to in paragraphs 3 to 7 above.
 16. The outcome of the discussion was approval of a resolution in support of *The Inter-American Programs on Education for Democratic Values and Practices* as proposed by Colombia. The program has the following objectives:
 - to promote research, analysis, and debate to strengthen a democratic culture through education, both formal and non-formal, and to facilitate the dissemination of the findings of these activities
 - to promote the development and strengthening of curricula, pedagogy, materials, and evaluation systems to assist in the teaching and learning of democratic values and practices, both within and outside of the school system
 - to promote dialogue and cooperation among different international, national, and local institutions and actors working in education for democratic values and practices, encouraging linkages where appropriate between formal and non-formal education sectors
 17. The CIE has been charged with the development of a work plan and budget for this initiative. It is critical to note that the program will require funding primarily from sources external to the regular budget of the OAS.

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18. For the Third Plenary Session, the head of the Canadian delegation was a lead-off presenter along with the minister from Argentina on the topic *A Shared Vision for the Future of Education*.
 19. In the presentation, Minister Bjornson reaffirmed the support of ministers of education of the provinces and territories for the Action Plan of the Third Summit of the Americas, which recognizes a central role for education in the Americas. In addressing the issue of how education can contribute to the upcoming summit's priorities of job creation, decreased levels of poverty, and the strengthening of democratic governance, he drew on Canadian experiences with a particular reference to initiatives in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Quebec.
 20. He made special references to examples that demonstrated how students, communities, employers, and educators participate in the design of learning and the creation of pathways to employment.
 21. On the issue of equitable access to learning, he drew examples from provincial and territorial efforts with respect to indigenous people and made reference to the contribution of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), among others, to work in the Americas through CIDA's Indigenous Peoples Partnership Program.
 22. He concluded his remarks by making mention of the contribution of lead countries in furthering the hemispheric agenda and stressed the importance of hemispheric cooperation in areas such as indicator work and the assessment of student achievement. He urged ministers to continue work to support rural and remote populations, and to share experiences and expertise in the use of information technology.
 23. Ministers concluded the meeting by endorsing the *Declaration of Scarborough and Commitments for Action* (attached), a blueprint for education-related activities in the Americas until the next meeting of ministers of education scheduled for 2007. Agreement was also reached on a text on education for inclusion in the Declaration from the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina (November 2005). In addition, ministers supported a resolution presented by the host government on Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights.
 24. Brazilian authorities tabled the statement *Partnership Through Development: Education is an Investment*, in which a case was made for a mechanism of *Debt for Education Swap* (as a means to mobilize national and international financing for public and private investments in education). In this regard, it was noted, and recognized, by ministers of education that decisions related to such a mechanism would be made by the ministers responsible for foreign affairs and finance.
 25. It was noted that the next meeting of the CIE would be held in the week of November 14, 2005, in Washington.
 26. Members of the Canadian delegation wish to note the extraordinary contribution of Patrice Lafleur in promoting the interests of Canadian authorities in the work of the CIE and in the

preparation for the Fourth Meeting of Ministers of Education. Mr. Lafleur represented the Canadian delegation on the Drafting Group for the meeting and was instrumental in finding the common ground to ensure that the declaration received the support of all delegations in its final form.

27. From discussions during the plenary sessions and in follow-up discussions during the course of the meeting, it was evident that there is considerable demand and potential for a contribution by Canadian education authorities in the education-related initiatives of the OAS in such fields as

- large-scale assessment and the development of education indicators of achievement
- teaching of English and other languages
- teacher training and in-service
- the use of information technology and portal development
- technical and vocational education
- health and education
- education for indigenous populations
- the sharing of best practices