

## ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

### **Mr. President, Honorable Members of the World Council of Culture, Fellow Award Winners**

It a great honour to accept the 2022 Jose Vasconcelos World Award of Education. I of course accept it in recognition of so many others: young people, teachers, and other social researchers around the world with whom I have had the good fortune to work on many projects and initiatives.

Education is so much about the social: fundamentally the social construction of knowledge and in recognition of what I often refer to as the co- production of knowledge , but also social in relation to responsibilities and action in order to address the vast range of social inequities that continue to exist.

From what I have come to learn about Jose Vasconcelos, it is this very social responsibility that epitomized his work, and how he saw the role of education in the classroom and in the street, and not just for children but for the entire community. Teachers were (and are) in this way cultural workers, and education itself very much about the social and cultural.

I see these as key concerns now more than ever as a result of one of most significantly telling experiments in the history of education: School as we knew it came to an end in March 2020, regardless of whether it was in a well equipped classroom or under a tree. The experiment of coping with this altered the way we might think about education in many ways. The problems and possibilities of using technology are well known. However, it made us think again about how parents, most often mothers, had to become ‘teachers’ alongside everything else thy were doing. For the millions of girls and young women in many lower and middle income countries, it meant lockdown but it also meant the absence of school [sometimes the only safe space girls have] when historically so many countries were just ‘getting there’ in ensuring that girls could go to school in the first place. It meant huge increases in gender based violence and intimate partner violence, and massive increases in teen pregnancy that often meant that many girls would never return to school.

We will be experiencing the impact of this experiment for decades to come, and in the meantime—teachers, social researchers, and policy makers in education must continue to play a key role in ensuring the very existence of our planet as we know it.

I thank my students and colleagues throughout the years, the many international NGOs with which I have worked, and the girls and young women whose courageous work has led to change. My thanks to McGill University. The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Dilson Rassier, the Associate Dean of Research and Innovation Dr. Martha Crago, and the amazing staff of the Office of Sponsored Research. I thank my staff and graduate students in the Participatory Cultures Lab. Finally, thanks to my partner Dr. Ann Smith, a scholar in her own right who is here today.

In accepting this award, I pay tribute to teachers and teacher educators around the world and leave you with the words of another social researcher, Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Claudia Mitchell

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