



# Intercambio

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## New forms of privatization and education commodification

México | Ecuador | Honduras | Argentina | Canadá | Perú | Brasil | Estados Unidos

Edgar Isch López • Larry Kuehn • Miguel Duhalde • Myriam Feldfeber  
• Guadalupe Ibeth Luquin • Diego Morales Alarcón • Hamer Villena •  
• Ronnie Huete Salgado •

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# PRESENTATION

## New forms of privatization and commercialization in education

There is a new wave of privatization hitting the Americas, which is making public education become alert of the new attacks. The offensive comes hand in hand with the strengthening of neoliberal positions, as well as with the return of right-wing governments in several Latin American countries

Privatizing and commoditizing tendencies once again proliferate in the field of education, becoming stronger at a continental and world-wide level. That is the reason why IDEA Network/Red SEPA seeks to contribute with a regional reflection on their processes and trends in the Americas; as well as of their different expressions in various nations.

With multi-faceted and combined strategies, the capital is increasingly deploying its policies to take over the educational systems. It is not only a business for them, but a way in which progressively imposing the logic of the private property of knowledge and its commoditization.

The reader will find in this issue eight articles that offer an exploration of the different ways in which the privatizing tendencies are taking place at different levels, be them at elementary or higher education; as well as on a regional scale.

The kick-off is an article by Edgar Isch from Equator, which presents a regional perspective of privatizing trends. It highlights how it has been one of the most evil components of the neoliberal “reform”; which is nothing but a destructive counter-reform against social progress. The opening of education to the private sector has had a special strategic importance, since it represents a large market and a place for the large capitals to exert ideological control.

Larry Kuehn from Canada describes the strategic role technology plays in advancing privatization, by changing school curricula and eroding labor conditions for teachers. “The State has played the historical primary role of defining the contents of education.

But now, it is the corporations involved in the fields of education and technology who are exerting pressure on the State to step aside, so that the corporate interests rule over the classrooms, a frequent yet invisible change in power.”

With the same regional view, we acknowledge that in the Argentinian case, presented by Myriam Feldefeber y Miguel Duhalde, there has been important progress made in the expansion of rights that oppose privatization of education and the growth of private school enrollment. The situation had been complicated due to a conservative restoration in the region.

Larry Kuehn also shares the US experience, where the most extreme examples of privatization are seen in charter schools. “The Trump regimen is attempting to replicate them all throughout the US. The failure of New Orleans children will double if Trump and the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, succeed. In a nutshell, charter schools are private schools, financed with public funds, but without the accountability of public officials.”

Guadalupe Luquin shares the Mexican experience, with the continuous intervention of entrepreneurs to guarantee the compliance of the Educational Reform with the

program “The school at the center.” It is a new model that strengthens privatization and opens the door to private investment; aside from aiding the transference of public moneys to the financial capital.

As far as Equator is concerned, Diego Morales shows the erosion of the higher education system facing restrictions to free admission, the control of university autonomy, a co-government and a state-induced budgetary reduction. Thus, a social right is now offered to benefit private companies, be them public or private, who are thrilled to see the vertiginous growth of school enrolment, the corresponding economic percentage and in some cases, the increase of State allocations to the private sector.

Hamer Villena analyzes one of the core concepts to understand the participation of private companies in the public sector that is shaking the region: PPP (Private-Public Partnerships) and their impact in the privatization of education in Peru.

To conclude, we include an article of the Honduras scenario with the conflict at the National Autonomous University of Honduras, which places center stage of the resistance the defense of the public university.

# Privatization:

## the threat to the right to education

**Edgar Isch L.\***

Public education is under attack. The names given to this war against the guarantee to the right to education are varied, even though it is contained in the description of the Global Education Reform (the acronym in English is GERM, because of its malignant and disease-ridden character) (Gawain, 2015). The right to education, in itself, is threatened in various ways. As are characteristics that speak to the reach of this right, such as accessible, free, secular, state responsibility, social benefit, among others.

Privatization is one of the most perverse components of the neoliberal “reform”. It is, in reality, a counter-reform destructive of multiple social gains, all of which have been the result of years and decades of struggles by people to win their rights. The term reform is all the more deceiving, more perverse, because it’s sold as a desirable product under offers of “quality”, of “meritocracy” (an elegant manner to call social Darwinism),

of self-improvement through “competition” and, lastly, of achieving an education that solves social problems. But they have not been able to show that privatization improves educational quality, whatever the concept it has of itself (Waslander et al., 2010). Meanwhile, on the contrary, it can be proven that the superiority of private education isn’t more than a myth constructed by very clear interests (CLADE, 2012).

Latin America, of course, is the stage for this war. Teachers, students and parents in our countries have recently struggled to defend public education and to demand funding and liberation in the face of international reforms and mechanisms of subjugation of education systems like the PISA exams.

There are few studies of a regional character on the topic, despite the growing concern that is being generated in each country. One of them, carried out in 2012 by the Campaign—CLADE—, draws on the record of the “Seminar on Privatization of Education in Latin America.” The multiple faces that this process could reach are highlighted, alerting that:

Beyond the explicit mechanism of privatization,

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whether it be through the direct intervention of private actors in the provision of education, through the provision of private goods and services within the public system, or the acceptance of private corporate criteria in the parameters of public policy, what is at stake in these tendencies is the possibility of exercising education within a democracy (page 16).

Let's not forget that many of these processes have been carried out due to illegitimate external debts taken on by governments without consulting with their people (Isch, 2008).

Education International (EI), a global federation of teachers' unions, presented two studies on the topic, carried out by researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The first document (EI, 2017a), titled "*Educational privatization in Latin America: A cartography of policies, tendencies and trajectories*", presents the results of a systematization of the different trajectories of educational privatization documented in the region in the last decades, while the second (EI, 2017b) is a *Manual for the Study of Privatization*.

Even though it is not able to look at all countries in an in-depth manner, which is very difficult due to the existence of limited documentation in some of them, the study concludes that there has been a transfer of education to the private sector through different ways. It is not always carried out in a direct manner, since the necessities of a private business does not rule out taking advantage of the state through public-private partnerships, charter schools, educational bonuses, grants or even international commercialization by taking advantage of the WTO agreements. The trajectories towards privatization that the study identifies are:

Educational privatization as part of the state's structural reform. Chile is the main showcase of its application in the framework of neoliberal policies, but without a doubt, it is a continental process that goes beyond the example highlighted in the study.

Educational privatization as incremental reform. Colombia and Brazil are examples of countries with decentralized education. They combine the sum of

reforms of education and the emergence of a middle class with greater purchasing power, elements that private education aims for.

Privatization "by default". Countries like the Dominican Republic, Peru or Jamaica, where there is limited state capacity to respond. On our part, we dared to highlight that this lack of capacity is also the result of intentional decisions in this direction. Neoliberalism leads to a so-called "weakening" of the state in the social sector precisely to demonstrate its thesis of the state's "inefficiency" and the necessity of private enterprise. The defunding mechanism and the precariousness of the public system are often used as factors that lead to disaster conditions. Here, we can speak about the different ways the crisis and delegitimization of public education is provoked within a disaster situation.

Historic public-private alliances. These exist, for example, in Argentina and partially in the Dominican Republic. Public-private alliances are highlighted as one of the ways through which the state allies with the church (with only one of the multiple ones present). This happens in countries that define secularism as an educational principle.

Privatization through disaster. Central American countries and Haiti are examples of where the situation of emergency has been the path to privatization.

Latent privatization. The example is of Uruguay, where private education has played a marginal role, but the discussion that favours privatization grows as does initial processes of public-private alliances.

The consequence is that, regardless of the path, privatization advances in Latin America and brings with it a greater educational gap between the rich and the poor. All paths lead to crushing a human right of all in order to allow benefits for the private sector.

We still need to analyze, in a more in-depth manner, the indirect path to privatization, which is how the corporate sector and the dominant classes take advantage of the public education system, while continuing to remain in state hands. An indirect path is one that the repetitive slogan allows business people to state how the



resumenlatinoamericano.org

university should function, promotes university research being attached to corporate contracts, holds entrance exams that indebt parents in order to expand private enrolment. Indirect paths are also ones that generate a variety of public policies from society's dominant classes, namely, the 1% that has been denounced in the Occupy protests throughout the world.

CLADE (2014) refers to this method as the “corporate governance of the education system”, that is expressed in the incidence of public policies, the presence of corporate representatives in public posts and private education programs that are part of governmental public policy.

For the **Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas** (IDEA), a related topic that has serious consequences is that of the promotion of standardized exams that are already serious, which take on a new characteristic in the privatization of PISA exams carried out by the OECD, the body that brings together the most developed powers of the world (Kuehn, 2016). In this year, together with more than 200 signatory organizations and celebrities, IDEA sent out a “Manifesto against PISA and the standardizing logic of education in the world”, in which it states that, “*Presently the OECD, that applies the PISA exam, has contracted a transnational education corporation, the Pearson Corporation, to develop its 2018 version.*” If the controlling evaluation has been converted into the real way to direct education, this is where we will find a global privatizing line that has a strong impact on the region's countries.

With things as they are, we must prepare for struggles in each country as well as at the continental level so that we can defend the right to

education and the way that public education should be carried out. The protest days against the FTAA and its educational plans are a good example of what we cannot forget.

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# Education Technology

## as a Trojan Horse for Privatization

Larry Kuehn\*

Favorite words of technology entrepreneurs are “break,” “disruptive innovation” and “creative destruction.” For example, Uber replaces taxis; Spotify breaks owning music collections; and, Amazon hopes to creatively destroy personal shopping for groceries as it already has for everything from books to appliances to almost any commodity.

The Holy Grail of education technology entrepreneurs is to be the Uber of education - to become the platform that disrupts traditional face-to-face education and replaces it with a technology that dominates learning. Since this search for the singular platform is being carried out in capitalist economies, profit is the major end, rather than seeking solutions to the inequalities exacerbated by the domination of monopolies in day-to-day, technology-driven living. The major technology corporations are in a race to become the basic education platform.

Education technology has developed in ways that reinforce individualization within a competitive en-

vironment, responding to and reinforcing neo-liberal patterns, creating the neo-liberal person. Widespread adoption of education built on this kind of individualization produces a form of privatization within the public education system, one that is based on preparing students for employment in a technological, corporate-dominated system, not on preparing them for citizenship as a collective responsibility.

This presents challenges for critical educators who recognize that ignoring technology is not an option, but who want to find or create space for alternative approaches that support social justice and pursue pedagogy based on critical and social constructivist approaches.

Developing critical alternatives requires first an analysis of the approaches currently being taken by education technology entrepreneurs, then seeking spaces within these technologies that can be used to promote social goals, not just private, individual gain. This article is only a beginning of that type of analysis.

The current education technology landscape falls into at least four different strategies: digital content, learning management systems, education apps, and universal platforms.

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\* Research Technology Director for the British Columbia Teachers.

## Providing content digitally

One system that is being disrupted is textbooks. Historically, this print technology has dominated in providing content in schools, but the challenge now is what will replace the physical, hard-copy textbook.

The textbook industry as content-providers has been going through consolidation, leaving only two major content-providers of the textbook publisher type in the English-speaking world—the British transnational Pearson PLC and the US-based McGraw-Hill. Pearson has adopted a strategy of offering content digitally and on a global basis as a way of surviving in the new context. However, it has not been entirely successful. The corporation has been losing money to such an extent that it recently had to sell off other forms of publishing--the *Economist* magazine, and its book publishing arm, Penguin Random House.

One of the potential challenges to the Pearson model is open publishing. Groups of authors join together to develop online resources for classroom use. They may be offered at a small cost (teacherspayteachers.com) or made available under a Creative Commons license to anyone who wants to use them in teaching. A major part of the cost of the print textbook is not payments to authors, but the marketing and distribution. Digital distribution reduces the entry costs to compete with the traditional textbook publishers.

## Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Learning Management Systems are online versions of the structure of classroom education. They have content loaded onto them; they have areas for discussion, both with a teacher and with other students; they include the ability to give tests to the student; and they provide the capacity to report, both marks and other data. LMSs are used extensively in online learning, but also in face-to-face classrooms, particularly in “blended learning,” a combination of in person and online learning.

As in other areas of technology, many systems were developed, but only a few businesses survive as smaller ones are bought out and consolidated into fewer, near monopoly corporations. The major LMSs still standing are Blackboard and Canvas, with Desire2Learn, a Canadian LMS with a narrower market reach. One open source system, free to use, is Moodle, which has a large user-base.

Interestingly, Pearson sold its LMS, saying that they only work effectively on desktop or laptop computers, not on smart phones. The future market, they say, is in smartphones as billions of people have access, but many fewer have desktops or laptops. For mobiles, Pearson says, apps that have a specific purpose will dominate.

## Education Apps

Thousands of apps for education have already been created. Development costs are often covered by venture capitalists. They invest in development of these apps, with the hope that future profits based on a particular app will pay off with a return on investment when it captures a significant number of users. In many cases, the return is based on the data about the teachers and students using the app that is then turned in to revenue. It is the users who are the source of profits when data is sold.

An example of one of these apps is *FreshGrade*, an e-portfolio system developed in British Columbia, Canada. The student and teacher upload work being done by the student, particularly photos, videos and audio. The parent has access to the e-portfolio of their child. The claim for these portfolio systems is that they engage parents by giving more access to what their child is doing in school.

Special purpose apps have been a hot item in the education technology area, with education app venture capital investments of more than \$4 billion in 2015 and about half that in 2016.



Amauta Magazine

## **Universal platforms—Google Suite, Microsoft Office 365 Education and Facebook**

The behemoths of technology don't require any venture capital for their ventures into education technology. They have huge research sections that can work on projects without announcing them to anyone until they are ready.

The descriptor "universal platforms" reflects that they are a base on which many different elements can be built. They are not intending to develop content, expecting others will do that and find it convenient to use their platform as a way of making it available to others, bringing both creators and users of content into their environment. They prosper when they are the go-to place for any online activity. Education is attractive because it's a mass of folks--more than 30 million teachers and hundreds of millions of students globally - and Google, Microsoft and Facebook all have global reach.

This description of Google's G Suite makes clear the comprehensive make up of the platform that is on offer:

G Suite is a package of cloud-based services that can provide your company or school with a whole new way to work together online—not just using email and chat, but over video conferences, social media, real-time document collaborations, and more....You and your team can begin using Gmail, Calendar, Drive, and other core G Suite services, as well as additional services like Google+, Hangouts, Blogger and more.

Google's strategy for attracting teachers is to use a friend and collaborator approach. It offers training to selected teachers who then encourage colleagues and their districts to adopt G Suite. These teachers offer (often free) workshops for teachers, encouraging the expanded use of G Suite.

Google presented itself as an education platform before Microsoft moved in to compete. Its move to focus on cloud-based services is part of its strategy for competing to be **the** platform for education services.



Illustration: Manrique. Contralínea

Microsoft has announced that teachers and students can use “Office 365 Education” for free. It also offers a free online course for teachers to introduce them to Microsoft education services. Preparing students as workers is made clear when its sales pitch to teachers says it “allows students to create products as if they were already in the workforce.”

Not surprisingly, Facebook is not to be left out. The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative has been supplied with \$45 billion for projects that include education. Facebook is also developing a platform for online education.

## **Understanding corporate influence on education through education technology**

A *New York Times* report identified the nature of the Trojan Horse inserted into public education:

The involvement by some of the wealthiest and most influential titans of the 21st century amounts to a singular experiment in education, with millions of students serving as de facto beta testers for their ideas. Some tech leaders believe that applying an engineering mind-set can improve just about any system, and that their business acumen qualifies them to rethink American education. (“The Silicon Valley Billionaires

Remaking America’s Schools by Natasha Singer,” NYT, June 6, 2017)

Historically, the state has had the primary role in defining the purpose and content of education. Edtech corporations are now pushing the state aside, bringing corporate purposes directly into the classroom -an often invisible shift in power. The aim of these technological forms of privatization is not to create private schools. Rather, they seek profits by integrating into public education. Those seeking to dominate platforms take the longer view on profits, and hope to train students to continue to use their platform when they move into life and work after school.

Audrey Watters, a researcher who tracks corporate and foundation influence in education through technology says of corporately funded foundations delving into education--and it applies to the corporations whose profits have built the foundations - “These extra-governmental organizations have an inordinate influence on politics and policies.”

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2. To develop a deeper understanding of the influence of foundations and of corporations on education technology, follow Audrey Watter’s reports published on [hackededucation.com](http://hackededucation.com).

# Privatizing Trends

## both “in” and “of” Education in **Argentina**<sup>1</sup>

**Miguel Duhalde\* y Myriam Feldfeber\*\***  
(translation Carl Rosenberg)

Over the last few decades, privatization “of” and “in” education has proliferated and gained ground on a regional and world scale by means of a strategy that presents itself with various faces, ranging from the most subtle and “discreet”—such as those that philanthropists propose—to the most shameless and bloody initiatives of business commercialization that go hand in hand with the “conservative shift.”

In general terms, the deepening of this trend has unfolded in the context of tensions, disputes and conditions of possibility specific to the fields of politics, economics, culture and education. In this framework one can identify certain tendencies that, with various shades, define this complex phenomenon.

In the case of Argentina, until the mid-70s the concept that the state must be the guarantor of the right to education for all citizens predominated. With the crisis of the welfare state, other conceptions of the role of the state in providing public services prevailed and education came to be considered a public service, rather than a right. These changes implied a new division of responsibilities, the assumption on the part of the state of a newly minted appraisive function and the introduction of new ideas regarding public services, adopting the principles of private business management (Pedro, 1993).

In the decades of the 80s and 90s, state reform was implemented based on the “diagnosis,” extensively spread

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1. This article is based on research carried out recently on this topic by CTERA (Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic), in the context of the regional project coordinated by the Education International for Latin America, study privatization trends in education from the perspective of the union organizations gathered for this purpose. In this framework, CTERA, CNTA (National Confederation of Education Workers, Brazil), FECODE (Colombian Federation of Educators) and the College of Professors (Chile) met with the general objective of carrying out research allowing us to sketch a panorama of these trends today in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Chile re-

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spectively. In the case of Argentina, the CTERA carried out the research from its “Marina Vilte” Institute of Pedagogic Research in the Education Secretariat.

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by the hegemonic bloc, that the state had proven itself to be inefficient and that it had interfered in activities that are “suited” to the market. In that context, it was imperative to reduce the size of the state and apply to its residual apparatus the logic of private business management. Furthermore, the implementation of neoliberal and neoconservative policies of structural adjustment contributed not only to the consolidation of the capitalist market economy, but also to the installation of the idea of the “market society”: a society with its own rules of the game that tends to commodify all social relations. The ties between the public and private spheres were reconfigured: the public sphere began to be more and more determined by the market and less by political definitions of the state, transforming the citizen into a consumer. The public sphere was blurred as a space of the citizenry, while the market acquired a public character, and its criteria (competitiveness, productivity, efficiency) were established as the measure of public relations (Lechner, 1996). These transformations called into question not only education as a public matter but also the role of the state in the definition of the educational agenda. The reduction of educational policy to the application of “reforms” and the primacy of a technical rationality based on principles of the market reflect these transformations (Feldfeber, 2007).

With the turn of the century, the rise of popular-democratic governments in the region brought in their wake important transformations. Starting by questioning market-driven policies and recovering the centrality of the state, various governments (including Argentina) began to implement policies to realize and extend rights.

With the assumption to power of President Néstor Kircher in 2003, there was a rise in educational investment and a development of policies dedicated to extending mandatory attendance and incorporating sectors traditionally excluded from the system. And in the face of increased commercialization of education, in 2005 the Ministers of Education of Argentina and Brazil signed the Declaration of Brasilia for the exclusion of education from Free Trade treaties. In



“The fight for the free education and against the privatization of education regains strength in Latin America”.

Photo: El país

the case of Argentina, the Law of National Education included Article 10, which established that the national state would not subscribe to bilateral or multinational free-trade treaties that implied the conception of education as a profitable service or that encouraged any form of commodification of public education.

Nevertheless, while we recognize advances have been made in the expansion of rights, today the question arises of whether or not the measures implemented managed to reverse the advance of privatization in education and the increased enrolment in the private sector, which have regained momentum since the recent conservative restoration in the region and the coming to power in various countries (by democratic means or through “soft coups”) of neoliberal governments that are rapidly reversing all the advances in redistributive terms and recognition of rights realized in the previous decade.

In the educational field, we observe that the process of privatization has at least two central dimensions: exogenous privatization, or privatization “of” education, carried out by means of opening up participation to the private sector; and privatization “in” education, which corresponds to an endogenous tendency, tied to the importation of ideas, methods and practices of

the private sector with the goal of making the public sector function like a business (Ball and Youdell, 2007). Therefore, privatizing trends can be linked as much to the transfer of lending and/or financing of educational services to the private sector as to the introduction of the logic of the market and its values to public education.

In the case of Argentina, we have observed, since the mid-20th century, a sustained growth of enrolment in the private sector (Morduchowicz, 2001)<sup>2</sup>, with important differences between the provinces which has generated various interpretations of the causes of this phenomenon. Some recent explanations refer to the improvement in conditions of life and the economic situation of families, or else the choices made by families, which would include considerations regarding a guaranteed number of class days (Narodowski, *et al.*, 2013). Here one cannot fail to mention the lack of seats in the state public system in some jurisdictions of the country. In any case, there are diverse factors that may come into play to explain the growth of enrolment in private education from the point of view of demand: ideological or religious preferences; the search for more specific educational offerings or a school with a complete school day (more frequent in the private sector); the search for an establishment that, as parents point out in some studies, offers greater order or predictability in the school calendar (Bottinelli, 2013). One must also point out that in Argentina private education has been subsidized since 1947 and that the growth of enrolment in this sector has been accompanied by the growth of subsidies that a great many educational establishments receive in various proportions (Morduchowicz, A. and Iglesias, G., 2011).

Another area of increasing privatization can be seen in the utilization of public state funds to sustain and subsidize the private sector to develop some kind of work or activity in the educational field. We observe an ever greater presence of businesses and foundations directed toward the educational field, with the goal of

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2. This trend began to decelerate in 2010.

obtaining profit and/or spreading market values in the educational system.

One very illustrative case of this phenomenon is that of the Varkey Foundation. This is a non-profit organization, created “to improve the educational standards of the children least favoured in all the world,” according to its own definition. For three years, it has implemented the “Global Teaching Prize” that awards one million dollars to an “exceptional teacher, who has made an outstanding contribution to their profession.” The Varkey Foundation has been working in Argentina since October 2016 to implement the Program “Leadership & Innovation,” designed together with provincial and federal ministries of education and sports. To this end, it is opening Centres of Educational Leadership and Innovation that have begun to function in some provinces. In these centres intensive programs are offered on themes such as: educational leadership for organizational development and school reform; management of technological integration; leadership and apprenticeship management; creativity and curricular innovation; leadership in quality assurance for improving the results of teaching and apprenticeship; leadership of professional teaching development; leadership and development of community relations.

Examples such as the Varkey Foundation are linked to the endogamous tendency of privatization. We see a strong impulse to introduce the principles of the New Public Management (NPM)<sup>3</sup> in education, identified in forms that assume the management of the public sphere, the importation of pedagogical forms, in public-private alliances and in models of education leadership peculiar to the business-management model. This is done with ideas, techniques and practices that the private sector

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3. The concept of New Public Management arises from the foundational study of Christopher Hood (1991), “A Public Management For All Seasons?” Generally speaking, the “paradigm” of NPM alludes to the introduction into the public sector of the mechanisms peculiar to private business and the market as a solution to the problems of state bureaucracies.



Reference: [juridicointernacional.wordpress](http://juridicointernacional.wordpress.com)

foments in order to import and incorporate goals so that schools are more and more similar to businesses, linked to the ideals of entrepreneurship and meritocracy that foment the neoconservative project in our country and impose subjectivity, Aleman's terms (2017), in relation to competency, rivalry and managing life itself like a business.

The central aspects of the educational agenda of the NPM are: teaching professionalization and educational leadership, definition of indicators of quality linked to educational success, external evaluation of results and school performance, school autonomy, subsidies to private education, per capita financing, publishing results of schools in standardized tests, flexibility, business styles of management, financing based on results and remuneration of teachers in accord with criteria of merit (Verger and Normand, 2015).

Since the change of government in 2015 in Argentina, we have been witness to a process of conservative restoration that is highly disquieting as it challenges the concept of the public space as a space of realization of social rights and construction of citizenship. These

transformations call into question not only education as a public matter, but also the role of the state in the generation of conditions that guarantee the right to education from an integral perspective.

The expansion of privatization in the education field reconfigures the right to education by individualizing and commercializing the social sphere, together with broader conceptions that sustain a view of the state as at the service of private interests, committed to the generation of conditions for businesses and private and foreign investments.

In this context, and under the declared objective of modernizing the state to resolve "the problems of the people" promoted by the Ministry of Modernization, the public sector in Argentina has been the object of a series of reforms that, as of this moment, are expressed in firings, non-renewal of contracts, early retirements, and in the closing or emptying of certain areas that had as their goal the implementation of socio-educational policies.

Another way in which this reform is expressed is the growing participation of the private sector in areas that the previous government had reserved as priorities

for the state. Of course, these reforms include the area of educational policy and significantly affect the right to education. The perspectives that regard education as being at the service of an economic model, together with those who manage the government—the CEOs<sup>4</sup> of businesses and middle-management in the private sector—seek to manage public policies based on a business model.

The policies that, even with all their limitations, represented an advance in understanding education as a social right in the region during the last long decade are today being challenged by those who question any policies implemented by the governments in the region called “progressive” and “populist.” And in the name of that challenge they revert to “old” and “new” forms of privatization “of” and “in” education as the only way of finding solutions to the problems that our educational systems present.

These forms of commercialization and privatization “of” and “in” education manifest themselves in various ways which is why today various strategies of resistance that seek to halt the advance of neoliberalism and consolidate and democratize public education are being recreated. The research done by the CTERA is offered as a contribution to this work.

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4. CEO: Chief Executive Officer.

# Privatization of education in the United States

## making life safe for the billionaire class

**Larry Kuehn\***

The extreme example of privatization in the United States is New Orleans, where only four public schools now exist. All others are Charter schools. This is what the Trump regime intends to create throughout the United States. The failures for children in New Orleans will be duplicated if Trump and his Education Secretary Betty DeVos are successful.

Charter schools are essentially state-funded private schools, but without accountability to the public funders.

School vouchers are another form of state-funded privatization in the USA. The vouchers are payments by the state to any school chosen by the parents, even

those run as religious schools. Both systems are aimed at destroying the public schools.

Voucher proposals had been around for decades before there was much take up in the U.S. They grew out of a proposal by Milton Friedman from the University of Chicago School of Economics in his 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Friedman argued that competition between schools in a market will produce better education. In fact, a major result has been more inequality in society and more opportunities for corruption.

The first national application of vouchers took place in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. Naomi Klein points to this as an example of the “shock doctrine,” where a crisis or disaster is manipulated to impose policies that serve capital rather than social interests. The voucher system heightened inequalities in Chilean education. Even now, unequal education is a source of

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1. Charter schools are private institutions financed with public funds, with their own operating norms and autonomous in the hiring of personnel and setting standards.



“No charter school in Puerto Rico” Photo: Indymedia Puerto Rico

ongoing conflict as Chilean student movements have struggled for equity in education at all levels, from elementary to university.

Increased inequality has been a result in New Orleans, as well. The shock there was Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the city in 2005. Authorities took advantage of the destruction to break up New Orleans’s public school system, replacing it with Charters. This also enabled them to fire the unionized teachers, the majority of whom were female African-American teachers, only some of whom were rehired when they had to reapply for their jobs.

Mia Rotondo, a New Orleans teacher who has worked in both Charter schools and now one of the remaining public schools, was interviewed at the Free Minds, Free People conference in July of 2017.

Rotondo confirmed that she has seen increases in inequality resulting from the domination of Charters –separation by economic status as well as by race. She said that some of the people with long term experience teaching in New Orleans say that racial separation in education is now greater than in the days of legal segregation.

The school as a community has been destroyed, as

parents must enter their top ten choices on a smart phone app and students may end up anywhere in the city. Siblings may attend different schools and commuting across the city is common. Transportation is one of the major budget items. This break between schools and community means that parent involvement lags and after school activities disappear. Advertising and marketing becomes central to ensuring that the Charter gets students, some even hire billboards to build recognition.

Selective enrolment is used by some of the Charters. A Huffington Post story pointed out that “One select New Orleans charter school, Lusher, reported that its student body was 53% white, 21% economically disadvantaged and 4% special education in comparison to the overall system which is 7% white, 85% economically disadvantaged and 11% special education.”

The NAACP, an African-American advocacy organization, held a hearing in New Orleans in April of 2017 that displayed many of the problems of Charters. The organization has called for a moratorium on Charter schools until problems with accountability and transparency are addressed.



“Teachers from Chicago point out the importance of public education in the USA”.

Photo: AP-La Jornada

The school as community is also weakened by replacement of long-term, unionized African-American teachers with primarily white short-termers from the NGO Teach for America and other certification alternatives that do not require teacher education. The annual teacher turnover in many Charters is as high as 50%. With no union support and yearly contracts, teachers are particularly vulnerable to whims of administration or job loss because standardized test scores have not risen. Limited experience often means a lack of critical perspective on the larger issues, Rotondo noted.

Getting rid of teacher unions is one of the motivations for Charters and vouchers. The two U.S. national teacher unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), are among the few unions that still represent a significant share of workers in any segment of an occupation in the U.S..

In a growing number of states, teachers are excluded from entering into collective bargaining. This makes it more difficult to attract teachers to join the union when it has little power to protect them from arbitrary and unfair decisions--or bargain for salaries. Increasing the number of Charter schools adds another tool to weaken the unions and labour rights of teachers and other education employees.

The approach of the AFT is to try to unionize Charter school teachers. However, negotiating contracts one school at a time is expensive and lacks the critical mass often required to achieve a positive result from bargaining.

The NEA at its July 2017 meeting said: “As educators we believe that ‘public education is the cornerstone of our social, economic, and political structure’.” They joined the NAACP in calling for a moratorium on more Charter schools until they can be held publicly accountable.

The opponents of Charters face a formidable challenge. The Trump regime is pushing Charters and vouchers because of the political space already created by billionaires wanting to destroy public education and the critical perspectives that a quality public education produces. The New Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is only one of the billionaires trying to wreak havoc on public schools. The Koch brothers, influential oil tycoons, have put multi-millions into campaigns for Charters and in training future education leaders. Microsoft magnate Bill Gates put millions into campaigns in Washington state aimed at creating a law that would allow Charters.

Ultimately, Charters and vouchers are aimed at destroying the institutions that represent the public interest and the 99%. They aim to ensure that the power of the 1% is not successfully challenged.

Unfortunately, the scandals surrounding president Trump and his online bad behavior are distracting attention away from the offensive to privatize education, which the U.S. has long considered a fundamental institution of democracy.

# The School at the Center:

## the privatization of education

**Guadalupe Ibeth Luquin Montaña\***

With the rise of Betty DeVos to the position of Minister of Education for the Trump Administration in the US, the intention of privatizing the social right to an education at a worldwide level has become very evident. She comes from a family dedicated to catalog sales of beauty, health and wellbeing products (Amway). Amway has an international presence because of the novel way in which it promotes its services, offering the promise of financial gain for “sales leaders” who become, in effect, financially dependent.

The business woman/minister of education is determined to strengthen Charter Schools<sup>1</sup> –a public financing program managed by private companies. That is where Mrs. DeVos will do what she knows how to do best –manage private networks (now in the field

of education), as she does with her own company. In the meantime, she will also be tampering with school curricula to make certain she will have the type of labor force and consumers her business model requires.

In the United States, schools will be presented in a catalogue style, so that parents can choose, as consumers, the type of teachers they prefer for their children. It sounds incredible, but this is the reality that schools and teachers will be facing in our neighboring country. But children will be experiencing worse conditions, because racism and social exclusion will be increased for those who cannot afford the price of education.

With the rise of a figure who has never been involved in either politics or education, we see how plans to privatize education are materializing. Negotiators are now deciding the direction of schools. We can see how financial and cognitive capital are poised, with the same plan of expanding their cultural “anti-values” in order to (mal)form citizens, thus threatening the future of education at a global level.

Mexico is no exception, with the business sector insisting on the implementation of reforms aimed at privatizing education through a program called “The

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1. About the devastating effects on public education of Charter Schools in the US, read “Privatization of education in the United States –making life safe for the billionaire class” by Larry Kuehn.



Illustration: Daniel Carreon

School at the Center,” the backbone of the new education model. With the implementation of the model, other programs have been announced to further privatization: “Escuelas al CIEN<sup>2</sup>” and “Aprende 2.0”. All of this has opened the door to large amounts of private investment, and it has contributed to the transference of public funds to financial and cognitive capital.

“School at the center” is yet another way in which teachers are being robbed of their job security. They will be showcased on virtual sideboards, classified by their assessment ranking, so that parents/consumers can choose the highest value for their children. If you are curious, I invite you to check out websites such as “un maestro en casa” (home teacher), which are hiring agencies where pseudo- teachers offer online classes, and the students pay for them at a convenience store called OXXO<sup>3</sup>. In our consumption-driven society, teachers are not seen as human beings, but as disposable items.

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2. Escuelas al CIEN is a government program that is seeking to offer Stock Exchange Bonds for the construction of school infrastructure. It is estimated that the Peña Nieto Administration will earn 53 million pesos through them. The capital and the interest will be paid to the investors over a period of 10 years, using the Federal Budget that is allocated for the building of provincial school infrastructure.

More evidence of privatization is the disappearance of rural schools. The rules of the new educational model state that schools have to be close to supervision centers. So the first step has been taken to close rural schools and concentrate students in selected locations. The question is: what will happen with the schools that are far away from the supervisors or that are located in a place that is difficult to access?

Furthermore, there is still an insistence on appointing supervisors and directors as leaders to strengthen school technical and community councils. They will also be in charge of “administrative autonomy”, which means they can now resort to public or private sources to ask for the financial support the schools will require.

It is clear that the reason the federal government refuses to have a dialog with the democratic teachers and society as a whole, to analyze school problems and find solutions for them, is that they have a commitment to private investors. The government has put itself

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3. OXXO is a chain of convenience stores owned by one of the big financial groups in Mexico (Grupo Monterrey). They have stores throughout the country, which are open 24/7 and which have transformed the communities where they operate by eradicating small shops, since they cannot compete with the product mix they carry (it even includes financial services).

between a rock and a hard place because researchers and teachers have proven how unsuccessful privatizing educational reform has been. There have been four failed attempts to impose punitive assessment in the state of Michoacán. The law is not being complied with not only because it is flawed, but also because teachers refuse to abide by it.

The true intentions of the entrepreneurs are being unmasked. Even though this has been a victory for the teachers, they should not take it for granted. They must remain alert and resist privatization programs for public education like “School at the Center”, since they threaten the right of children to a public education. The business organization called Mexicanos Primero still thinks of this as a priority and the departure of their founding president Claudio X Gonzales is no guarantee of a definite victory. On the contrary, the war against education, teachers, and all thing public will escalate on a different front.

As a final reflection, we consider that the educational model that will come into effect for the next school year in 2018 is putting business people at the center, not the schools. Students ought to be the main focus and the teaching-learning process should be the priority. If that were the case, we would be making sure that the future of society did not lie in the hands of entrepreneurs, but in those of conscious citizens who are capable of dealing with the problems of the 21st century in a collective and well-organized way.

Educational workers must keep on fighting to defend public education, along with parents and social organizations. International cooperation is also required, to collectively resist privatization and to make certain that education will remain a universal right for children and young people as world institutions have proclaimed and as is demanded by peoples from all continents.



“Protest against educational reform 2016”.

Photo: Prensa latina

# Post-secondary education in Ecuador:

## Privatized and Elitist

**Diego Morales Alarcón\***

In 2008 in Ecuador, after the approval of a new magna carta for the country, there was debate over the government's willingness to create a new law that regulates post-secondary education. Many teachers and students from the universities as well as public servants from various sectors proposed that this new law be regulated based on the government's constitution. Respect for university autonomy, co-government and a real and viable budget as well as free post-secondary education were presented as the basis for the proposed regulation. The student movement achieved free post-secondary education only after many days of struggle in the streets. This after the pretense and proposals of many people and intellectuals from post-secondary education and also the corporate sector, that later appeared in strategic posts in the universities, only to deny this right.

This intention to set these bases for the law was shortlived. To the outside world, it appeared that the law was being debated within the four walls of the

university. However, the group of intellectuals connected to the new law were actually from the government. They had worked on this law and were the same people that belonged to the National Planning Secretary, SENPLADES, a body that established a Plan of Good Living for Ecuador. This plan held developmentalist positions and, above all, the intent to privatize that were hidden under the cloak of the new era, new period or modern Left. It sought to demobilize the university sectors that, months before, had struggled in the streets, 90 years from Cordoba, for the tenets of the reform, namely, autonomy, co-government, in defense of public university.

In June 2010, the government's project of the Constitutional Law of Post-Secondary Education was directly debated in the National Assembly without the presence of the university actors. It would be understood with its approval and official publication in October 2010 that it received different critiques: first of all because of its disastrous prior debate, and secondly for not having the participation of those who really know public post-secondary education in the country. This new law brought us several things including evaluation and

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categorization models for the university. This included those copied word for word from countries like Spain, Mexico, Argentina and Chile; an entrance and access system to the university based on an exam that can only be taken once upon finishing high school. With paying a fine, however, students could take the exam up to three times. Finally, they established exams of knowledge that were generated by a phenomenal market for the private sector. Dozens of exam preparation centres approached high school students to attend seminars, workshops or levelling out courses that would cost between \$300-600 and were two months long. These were the students who benefitted most from this admission system.

Various government agencies were created even though they were not included in the Constitution. The National Secretary for Post-Secondary Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, SENESCYT, a ministerial body, was established. To date this office designs the post-secondary education public policies, administers the entrance to public universities, establishes evaluation parameters, fines institutions and officials, passing through students, teachers and public servants, until it reaches the limit of generating legal mandatory fulfillment of post-secondary education in Ecuador. These are examples of how it oversteps the role for which it was created. It ends up being a supra ministry of post-secondary education with infinite power. This ministry ended a few months ago under the leadership of a terrible person for post-secondary education, Rene Ramírez Gallegos. This man was denounced dozens of times for various transgressions including nepotism, a salary that overcompensated his wife in a public university, the creation of universities without planning, public policies that benefited the private education sector and for the amount of staff that entered this unconstitutional body. The structure also maintains two offices: the Council of Post-Secondary Education (CES) and the Council of Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CEAACES) that only has a specific sphere of action that it cannot surpass. It is, of course, directed by people close to the current regime (they are elected

by the National Electoral Council among supposedly well-known academics) and has no problem during times of electoral campaigns publishing favouritism for the government in power. These pronouncements lack leadership and decision in the face of the rest of the agencies that are dependent on the executive.

This has been the trajectory of post-secondary education in Ecuador these past almost seven years. The most reprehensible part of it has been the elimination of a fundamental right and principle of the Latin America and global alma mater, namely, the autonomous university. Contradicting the constitutional mandates they labelled it as responsible autonomy, with which they changed the aspect of post-secondary education. Firstly this allowed the revision, control, persecution and submission of Ecuadorian universities through its officials. Later, it permitted the inclusion of legislation (laws that regulate university actors from their entrance up to their evaluation) that lessens any indication of respect for autonomy which is the *raison d'être* of the university. Interventions are carried out in different post-secondary institutions that are critical or create social or scientific research that contradicts the government rhetoric of “growth”, with which they create a supposed fear or worry of university protest or critique.

The privatization of public post-secondary education in Ecuador, through the different legal reforms can be seen through the creation of four universities that are supposedly public. These universities receive funding from the state but are not publically accountable for their advances and development. They have the functionality of a public company, but actually operate according to their own statutes. They allow the entrance of high school students through different ways, give exorbitant salaries to their officials, and finally, enjoy a rigid and personal autonomy that does not allow the public to know what it really does as a post-secondary institution. These four universities are YACHAY, IKIAM University, University of the Arts, and University of Education. They receive close to \$1.2 billion dollars which is the same budget allotted to Ecuador's 36 public universities. While their

websites describe some of their activities, they are not transparent about their budgets nor the law orders. They are managed in the style of a company. The other commercialization of post-secondary education is the permanent handing over of public funds to private universities or so-called co-financed private ones. These universities obtain funds from student enrolment that in some cases surpasses \$1,000 dollars per month. They then also receive funds directly from the state through the so-called pre-allocations and the permanent fund for university and polytechnic development, FOPEDEUPO, which was created in 1998. The goal of the state is to allocate resources through the economic excess from taxes and of the main export product which is national oil. Unfortunately these allocations have not changed, nor will they change. The public institutions are considered the same as the co-financed ones in this fund allocation which diminishes the total value that they receive each year. Above all this violates the constitutional and legal mandate. For more than two years, the budget has not increased in line with GDP. This has suffocated various public post-secondary institutions.

This budget restriction also translates into the same allocation for the quota for thousands of high school students that apply, the lack of training to the university classes and the low growth in infrastructure and technology that is very necessary for the development of scientific research.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador (INEC), the enrolment rate in post-secondary institutions has decreased by almost 4 percentage points between 2012 and 2016, going from 30% to 26.6%. By contrast, the enrolment rate in private universities or co-financed ones has increased to 39% since 2012. Hence, the majority of high school students that do not enter public university enrol in private institutions, as long as they have enough money to do so. The costs can range from \$700 USD per semester up to \$2300 USD in some universities. For example, one private university, called the University of the Americas, UDLA, went from 4000 students in 2010 to close to 11,000 students in 2016. This increase is all the more dramatic when compared with the more than 600,000 high school students that, in 10 years, have



“Students manifest their refusal to privatize higher education”.

Photo: John Guevara. El telégrafo



“Slogan to stop the increase in the transportation rate”. Photo Amparito Rosero. El Universo

not succeeded in entering post-secondary education. Each year, between 120,000 and 125,000 high school students apply for the university “quota” through the entrance exam. The Ecuadorian university offers only 57,000 to 60,000 entrance spots. This means that each semester half of the high school student applicants are left out. These numbers indicate that in these last seven years since Ecuador’s new Post-Secondary Education Law (LOES), a fundamental right to free access to free post-secondary education has actually been reduced.

## Final Reflection

I believe that if important changes or reforms are not carried out to the LOES, the situation of public post-secondary education in Ecuador will face a great setback. This would allow for the growth of the elitism that impacts university entrance or access, mobility, finishing school, distribution of resources, free education, and above all of autonomy. These fundamental principles have been infringed upon since the creation of the legal norms that generated this process. These are different

from the government’s proposals in these years. Of course there have been changes but these are directed from a commercial point of view and lead to the privatization of Ecuador’s post-secondary education. For example, when it comes to the categorization of universities, the private ones are in first place in the academic ranking that were created by the government. There are easier ways to enter private education than public education as there are more obstacles to entering public education and the enrolment rate is lower. Finally, it seems fateful to review the dozens of youth that without entering public universities have to look for work or face under-employment which has super high rates in Ecuador. At the same time, this generates an environment of passiveness in academia and of the Ecuadorian University. Instead of being critical and a generator of solutions to Ecuador’s great social and economic problems, academia ends up being one more body of the state’s structure, submitted to the designs of the government in power.

# The Oxl and APP Initiatives: new forms of privatizing and commodifying education in Peru

**Hamer Villena Zúñiga\***

## **Summary**

In this article, I describe the consequences of the neoliberal policies that the Peruvian government has been implementing and that have resulted in the rapid privatization of the K-12 and post-secondary education systems to such an extent that now, the private sector prevails. With the implementation of the Public-Private Associations (APP) and Works for Taxes (OxI) initiatives, not only are private companies now involved in the development of school infrastructure, but they have actual control over school services, and the overall future of the sector.

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## **Our reality**

The succession of neoliberal administrations has given continuity to neoliberal policies. As a result, free and high quality public education has been damaged. Nowadays, 50% of basic education and 80% of higher education (university-based or otherwise) have been privatized.

This has also been facilitated through the imposition of policies by the International Monetary Fund, which are contained in the book "Peru at the Threshold of a New Era". The text presents an alleged diagnosis of the Peruvian situation that only partially reflects reality and still makes recommendations for different sectors. And we say "alleged" because the book uses indicators that do not match reality, like the poverty reduction indexes (according to Cesar Hilderant, investigation

journalist) and others, which I will not dwell on since they are not the focus of this article.

As far as education is concerned, the diagnosis was biased towards implementing the IMF recommendations in Peru, which is what is now happening.

However, this infrastructure analysis has been used as a way to open the door to national and international private investors into the education sector. In 2014, the Ollanta Humala Administration, disregarding electoral promises and letting voters down, decided to consolidate the privatization of education. Using a private sector “movement” (originated by the former Education Minister himself, Jaime Saavedra), greater private engagement was encouraged and facilitated through the Public-Private Associations (APP) for the construction of school infrastructure and through the “Works for Taxes” policy (OxI).

As a consequence, the current and previous Administrations have abandoned the National Education Project (PEN) and its main objective of offering “Equal and High Quality Education”. The Ministry of Education is promoting the IMF policy of increasing working hours for teachers (40 teaching hours, everyone has been increased to 30) under the assumption that such an action will improve education on its own, but without providing the right set of conditions for it to function correctly (wage increases, new policies to match the current context, a national educational project, new curricula, school breakfasts and lunches, etc.). The sole intention of the government has been to set the stage for the Public-Private Partnerships and OxI. Thus, it has diluted public education in Peru by neglecting the objective of quality and equality, since only a small number of institutions have benefited.

More specifically, what the Ministry of Education has done is to create the legal standards and mechanisms for private capital to participate in the creation and maintenance of Educational Infrastructure (INFE) of a public nature through, the APP for investment and management projects of a greater scale and the (OxI) initiative in which a type of Income Tax “advance pay-

ment” is accepted in the form of infrastructure projects at lower amounts and terms.

Between February 2014 and January 2015, both private investment mechanisms were defined, in terms of their regulation and organization, through:

**Legislative Decree N° 1012**, approved on May 12, 2008, **Law N° 29230** passed on May 19 2008, **Law N° 30167** of March 1st 2014, **Supreme Decree N° 004**, May 30th 2014, **Law N° 30264** accepted on November 2014, **Supreme Decree N° 006-2015-EF**, of January 23 2015, **Supreme Decree N° 001**, January 30, 2015.

In order to allow private companies to participate, new school categories were created in Peru: JEC Educational Institutions (30 classroom hours a week), the COAR Schools (High Performance Schools), Emblematic Educational Institutions and at the bottom of the list now lie the Pedagogical Institutes.

The first selection criteria the government used for applying the APP was choosing the biggest schools of each region to either revamp them or use their space to construct new infrastructure. Those are now called the Emblematic Schools. Then there is the Full-Time Educational Institutions (JEC) where the IMF recommendations were implemented (30 hours). Finally, the High Performance Schools (COAR) were reserved for the elite students and they got new infrastructure in different regions.

The “supply” of these products by the government and Ministry of Education (terms used by them) is the following:

#### **COAR Schools**

13 COAR schools will be created in 3 groups in the Northern, Central and Southern areas.

Private investors will be in charge of building the infrastructure and they will be responsible for their management, staffing, food, health and laundry services, according to the standards.

#### **JEC Schools**

There are from 10 to 16 groups prepared for the capital of Peru, Lima, and for other 22 regions. But there are strict requirements to be chosen for investment. The



Photo: *Ideele* revista

schools ought to meet the following criteria::

Schools of over 1000 students that require more than a 50% construction of infrastructure (INFE). The land has to be cleared beforehand.

Since they need to protect their investment for the future (they will be managing the food and other services), they only focus on large-scale schools.

## **Post-Secondary Technological Institutes**

The APP and OxI projects will be implemented in different places: 2 in Lima, 1 in Arequipa and 1 in Trujillo. Those are regions of high competitiveness, a large number of students, an emblematic character and a land that is ready for construction.

Brothers and sisters, for all of the previously mentioned reasons, we are concerned about the advance of neoliberal policies in the Peruvian education system;

especially now, with their intervention in infrastructure and their intention of further controlling the management of certain school-related services.

## **Conclusion**

In Peru we are still the process of resisting neoliberalism, unlike countries like Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil where such policies have been discarded for quite some time now, We have not been able to stop it; on the contrary, it has worsened with the implementation of the APP and OxI initiatives, which are having serious consequences for our public education system.

The only thing that is left to do is keep on fighting through our union, SUTEP, and with other sectors to try and stop the privatization “progress” so as not to lose free and high quality education as a fundamental human right and as a government policy.

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"Hi we've come to do a little remodeling". Illustration: privatización. Blog Hans Mejía

# The National University “penitentiary” in Honduras

**Ronnie Huete Salgado\***

The institution of higher learning in Honduras, the National Autonomous University, resembles a battlefield laboratory of torture and persecution. It is here that the National Police or military enters when the academic officials so decide. They intimidate, repress and persecute students that study there as though it were a prison.

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\* Honduran journalist, correspondent for various national and international agencies.



Photo: Ronnie Huete

Tyranny is present in the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH). Among other repressive measures, the state security bodies issue arrest warrants for university students. There is a total of 30 students accused of the crimes of usurpation, kidnapping and damage who are waiting for a legal hearing.

Despite the intervention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, Alta Soledad Pazo, who, with her international work team, condemned all of this, university authorities are not willing to dialogue with this international body.

Among the accused is the international journalist and correspondent, Ronnie Huete. As a journalist, Huete covered the events of May 24, 2017 as students were protesting in the University's administrative office against the prosecution of three university students. These three students had been going through this legal process for three years and had by that time received a sentence.<sup>1</sup>

1. Cesario Padilla, Sergio Ulloa and Moisés Cáceres. In addition, hearings have been initiated against students Génesis Aracely Andino Vásquez, Karen Giselle Reyes Pineda,

The May 24th episode unleashed a wave of repressive and violent actions against the student movement. It started with an arrest warrant for 19 students, and was followed by abuses by the UNAH's private security company towards the journalist and the university students.

In the face of these events, various international organizations have condemned this excessive use of power by university authorities; however, there has been no lessening of the legal persecution faced by these students.

There have been various mechanisms of power that academic authorities of this house of higher learning use against those who oppose their tyranny. These include: persecution using unknown and threatening vehicles, harrassment by the Bajo Aguan Private Security Company (ESPA), illegal detention using the state apparatus in order to persecute them, and death threats.

Since 2003 university students have had neither a

Tiffani Nicolle Zúniga Reyes, Gloria Sarahí Mejía Pacheco, Any Raquel Blanco Navarro and Tony Jossel Barahona Cruz, which is added to the list of students that have been expelled from the UNAH for 5 years.

voice nor a vote in the UNAH's decisions. It is quite alarming that in a university with a student population of 80,000 that students are excluded from being represented on university government bodies. Hence, students have decided to call this a dictatorship.

This is the reason why UNAH students, organized in the University Student Movement (MEU), continue an unstoppable protest, which has lasted over a month.

On June 27, 2017 a hungerstrike started at the UNAH's main entrance where five university students risked their lives in order to have their demands heard. The administration has ignored the strike.

The MEU organizes informational assemblies daily in each of the UNAH's faculty and degree programs. They stop classes to protest the deaf ears of the authorities.

The ESPA private security guards conduct their patrols as though it were a prison and not a house of higher learning. Students that oppose this regime are treated in some media, where the defense of hate is very present, as though they are delinquents. The university authorities refer to the university students as vandals and delinquents. In short, authorities use adjectives in defense of hate and a communications mechanism that was used by the fascist governments of the 20th century.

During the dawn of June 23, 2017 Roberto Gómez, a father of one of the students facing a hearing by the UNAH university authorities, was assassinated. Mr. Gomez made strong declarations against the UNAH's tyranny. This parent wanted the best for his son and the university community and asked for quality public education. Although the Honduran Minister of Security issued a communique committing itself to an investigation in this case, the impunity continues regarding his murder. The state of Honduras assigns 6% of its budget to this university body. Hence, the UNAH started its functions for 2017 with a budget of 5.5 million lempiras (230 million dollars). According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), Honduras is the second poorest country in Latin American. However, this economic fact doesn't influence the juicy salaries of the UNAH's

authorities who are paid as though they were in Paris or London.

This is the case of the UNAH's president, Julieta Castellanos. She receives a monthly salary of more than 106,000 lempiras (4,500 dollars) in a country where, according to the CEPAL, most people are unemployed, live in poverty and survive on a dollar a day. This is one of the great differences that unites those living in misery in this Latin American country.

A large part of the university student population is poor. They subsist with some type of activity that allows them to feed and transport themselves, and with luck obtain study books and notebooks. The UNAH administration does not designate any budget for the needs of the majority of their students.

With a budget of approximately 550 million lempiras (22 million dollars), university authorities constructed an administrative building to house the large number of employees that make up the apparatus for the UNAH's bureaucracy. However, despite these massive investments, there is a notorious absence of teachers. Students start each period without anyone to teach their university courses. There is often no physical classroom in which to receive this teaching, much less a desk to sit on.

Similarly, as the MEU highlights in its demands, the quality of education in the academy cannot be compared with the rest of the universities of the world since they still use study plans written in the 70s.

For this reason, the university students propose a University Constituent Student Assembly, a draft bill that would allow the participation of students in all of the UNAH's government bodies, as well as the creation and organization of all degree programs through student associations.<sup>2</sup>

Since the universal declaration of human rights

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2. Bill of the Law of Mechanisms of Citizenship Participation. Presented at the National Congress of the Republic July 19, 2017. They propose the installation of a Provisional Government and the suspension of the UNAH president Julieta Castellanos from her role.



Photo: María Trejos

establishes protest as a universal right, the goal of this draft bill is to eliminate all legal accusations against the university students as well as to stop the student persecution. University students, as well as the defenders of life, social, human and environmental rights face repression and danger, and confront a disturbing future. They need the world to focus its gaze on Honduras now.

Prison or death are the options that the tyranny has wanted to impose for those who dare to defy it. For example, in July when Armando Velásquez, a university student who was facing a hearing, was intercepted by National Police members while he was on public transit. He was forced off the bus and detained like a common criminal for not carrying his papers. Two hours later, thanks to the intervention of non-governmental human rights organizations, he was released.

Meanwhile the state of Honduras will face the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva on July 6, 2017 to account for all these actions.

However, these events of international significance don't seem to matter to the university authorities who have answered the correspondence from accredited

international organizations in Honduras in an aggressive manner.

The UNAH crisis continues in the midst of physical and legal repression and various elements that mold a dictatorship in the style of 20th century South America.

August 25, 2017 will be the hearing against 19 university students and one journalist who will appear before a tribunal judge for the final verdict and sentencing. All of these acts have made the UNAH an epicentre of continuous violations of human rights where death squads are ready and willing to attack upon the order of the highest in command.

It is essential that international human rights organizations remain vigilant of this crisis in the UNAH since the lives of those that denounce these acts are in constant danger.

Human life should be cared for under any circumstance and at any moment because social interaction depends on this in healthy human civilization and harmony. In a similar manner, the defense of the Public University is vital, and from Honduras, university students will continue to take on this fight.

## What is the IDEA?

The Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA) Network is a flexible network that brings together organizations in the Americas that share a commitment to protecting and improving public education, seen as essential to democratic development and the protection of human rights.

The network works with other civil society organizations concerned about the impact of "free" trade agreements and other transnational neoliberal policies on social rights. While the idea for a hemispheric network emerged from a meeting of teachers and students in Mexico City in November, 1998, IDEA's structure was broadened and formalized at the Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas conference held in October 1999 in Quito, Ecuador.

## What does IDEA do?

The IDEA network carries out research, sets up communication networks, publishes documents and organizes conferences and seminars related to neoliberalism, trade agreements and the defense and democratic transformation of public education. It also organizes hemispheric campaigns to defend public education and the defenders of public education.

The objective of these activities is to lay the groundwork for an understanding of the impact of neoliberal policies on education in the Americas and to develop alternatives to ensure inclusive, democratic and quality public education.

## IDEA also has two hemispheric subnetworks: an education researchers' network and an Indigenous Educators' network

The researchers' network involves researchers working with educator, student and parent organizations in collaborative work that enables us to produce studies that analyze and compare similar situations and policies in a range of American countries.

The indigenous educators' network enables First Nations educators to communicate with their counterparts in other countries of the Americas and to share strategies and ideas related to defending culture and autonomy within a publicly funded education system.

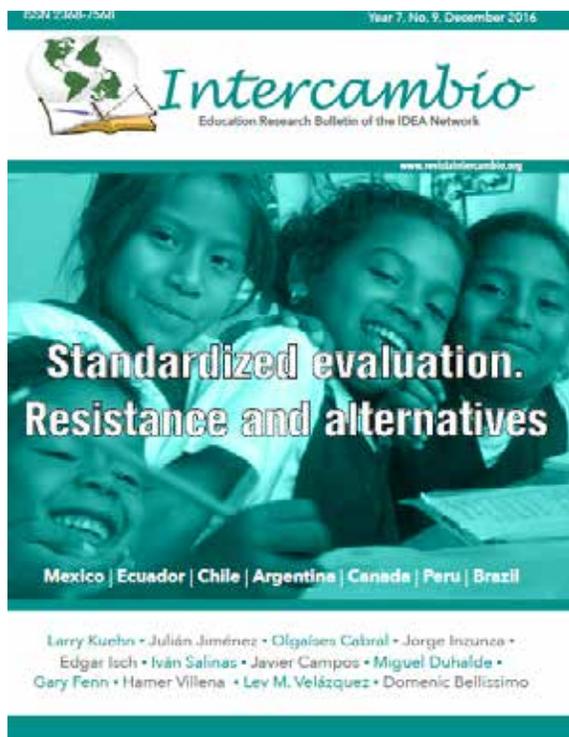
## Coordinating Committee

The work of IDEA is directed by a Hemispheric Coordinating Committee made up of representatives of the following organizations:

- National Union of Educators (UNE/Ecuador)
- Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic (CTERA)
- Federation of Central American Teachers' Organizations (FOMCA)
- National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE/Brasil)
- Caribbean Union of Teachers (CUT)
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF/Canada)
- Latin American and Caribbean Students' Organization (OCLAE)
- Steve Stewart. Secretario Técnico

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The IDEA Network makes available to teachers, students and the academic community of our continent, the electronic portal of the magazine Exchange, in which they will find various studies on public education and its defense, as well as calls to publish in future issues.

[www.revistaintercambio.org](http://www.revistaintercambio.org)



Bilingual magazine of public  
education studies in the Americas

## Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA Network)



Intercambio will attempt to cover the following themes: the right to education and the neoliberal threat; the public school of our times; educational quality; responsibilities and rights of teachers, other education workers, and students; the education-society relationship, and democratic initiatives and proposals for the transformation of education.

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