



# Intercambio

Education Research Bulletin of the IDEA Network

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## Public Education in Times of Pandemic

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# INTRODUCTION

## Public Education in Times of Pandemic

In 2020, the Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA Network) hosted a series of webinars called “Public Education in Times of Pandemic” with the objective of analyzing the impact of the crisis on public education. We also wanted to contribute to a discussion on alternatives to the changes that COVID-19 has produced and that have had a serious impact on education. We hoped to make space for reflection on the kind of public education that we will need in a post-pandemic world.

Our first area of analysis was to look at two aspects of contemporary capitalism - disaster capitalism and platform capitalism. This allowed us to recognize the dominant role of corporations and international organizations which, when educational authorities decided to change to distance or virtual learning, received large transfers of public money. On the other hand, the move to online learning-teaching meant a transformation of the working conditions of families, affecting both students and teachers. This led us to analyze the risks of normalizing online education as the solution for many of the problems facing public education. How-

ever, that debate is yet to be resolved and the dilemma continues in the face of the ongoing health crisis. Understanding the implications of seeing health and education as a right led us to a dialogue on some positive collective bargaining experiences, where favourable working conditions for teachers, including infrastructure, have been negotiated.

The final webinar looked at the big questions like “What will education be like in the new period?” After the pandemic (or maybe between pandemics), and in the middle of a new economic crisis, “What is next for public schools?” “What type of public education does society need?” “What kind of teachers and students do we require in this new period?”

In this edition, the reader will find contributions with diverse perspectives that locate the state of public education in the Americas in the context of the increased involvement of corporations in education. In virtual platforms these companies have found a new way to exploit work, a space in which to control content and an opportunity to advance the privatization and commercialization of education. However,

resistance and emerging actions are brewing on the continent in defense of education and labour rights in a post-pandemic world.

The first article looks at “Key Geopolitical Issues Before, During and After the Covid 19 Pandemic.” The author, Alejandro Álvarez Béjar, shows how the great technological powers set the course for the main geopolitical strategies in the techno-commercial war, whose main global competitors are the United States and China. Larry Kuehn, in his article “Platform Capitalism Colonizes Education,” looks at the dominance that technology has over a large part of our lives and how digital platforms represent a tool that not only generates profits for corporations, but also allows them to enter into the debates over education. Along similar lines, André Gacoin’s article “Transforming Education During a Pandemic: Global trends and spaces of resistance” analyzes the implications of education as a contested field and looks at where the OECD has managed to influence, with the advancement of technologies, what is taught and how it is taught.

In this fight for education, pedagogical subjects play a leading role in seeking to defend education as a human right, which in turn requires reflection on “The Public Education that We Need in the New Period.” Here Adriana Puiggrós suggests the need to design a new kind of education that synthesizes the experiences and learning that have taken place in the context of the pandemic. At the same time, it is necessary to continue fighting the various forms of privatization and the control of technology companies over education.

In the section Teaching Work, Attacks on Education and Resistance during the Pandemic,

we identify trends in the fight to defend public education. Five different experiences reveal inequalities before and during the pandemic. María de la Luz Arriaga warns about “The Dangers of Institutionalizing Online Education: The impact on teaching work.” Her analysis looks at how the closure of schools and the move to education through online platforms and television reinforced privatization processes that were already underway. Noemí Tejada looks at this same context and shares the Argentinean experience of a collective bargaining process that reached important agreements for teachers across the country, allowing for the regulation of teaching work in the virtual context.

We then return to an analysis of “Disaster Capitalism: Puerto Rico’s experience with public education” by Mercedes Martínez who tells how the tragedy was used to implement privatization measures in public education in Puerto Rico. In “COVID-19 and Online Learning in Ontario, Canada,” Gary Fenn explains how conservative authorities responded to the pandemic by imposing a plan for remote teaching of “continuing education” which basically became an emergency measure that sought greater control of education and teachers. We close with “Defending Public Education in Times of Pandemic: The experience of teachers in Los Angeles, California,” in which Cecily Myart Cruz has an important message about what it means for communities to defend public education, especially in a country where there are no guarantees and the dismantling of public education and health takes a devastating toll. Nevertheless, paths of resistance have been opened up that will lead to further struggle.

# Key geopolitical issues before, during and after the Covid 19 pandemic

**Alejandro Álvarez Béjar\***

**Summary:** Over the last three decades, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have gained strength, increasing the complexity of the trend to dismantle and privatize. As a result, the major technological powers are setting the course of geopolitics within the framework of a technological trade war. The main global competitors are the USA and China.

As far as education is concerned, ICTs have entered the field with the strength of technological giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Pearson and Microsoft, among others. They have found fertile ground and have taken advantage of the pandemic to expand their power and reach.

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\* Research Professor at the Faculty of Economics, UNAM, Mexico.

1. Paper presented on May 28, 2020 at the webinar series "Public Education in Times of the Pandemic," organized by the Red SEPA/IDEA Network.

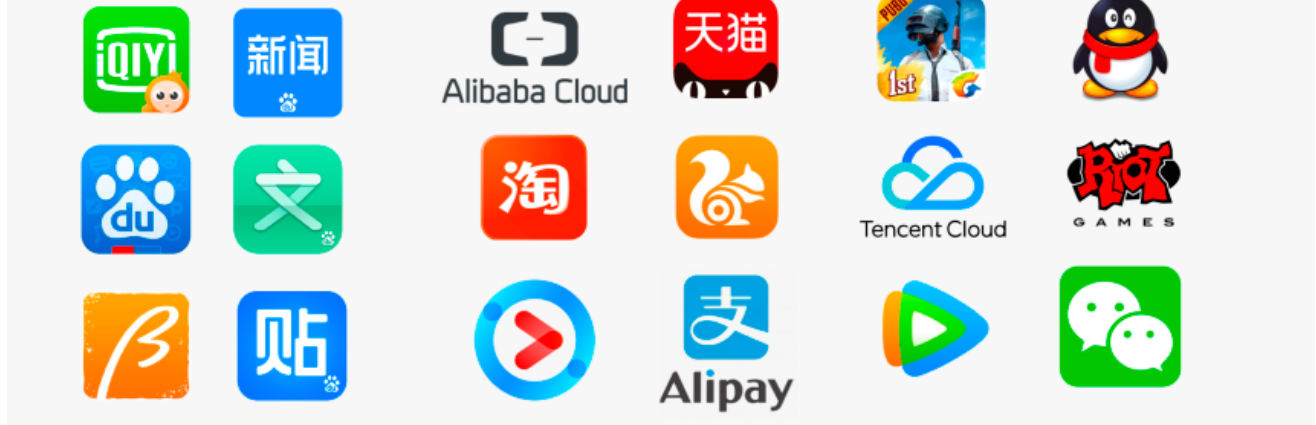
## Introduction

I have organized my ideas in a very simple and straightforward way by listing the key geopolitical issues that existed before, during and after the pandemic. The purpose is to convey where we were and how some, but not all, of the fundamental trends have developed.

### I

I start from the fact that before the pandemic, we were already experiencing a global crisis caused by the neoliberal economic model. It was seen in the establishment of far-right electoral coalitions in several large and powerful countries, in the use of force against dissident demographic groups and in the loss of credibility of the basic neoliberal recipe: open, deregulate and privatize.

Neoliberalism has focused on dismantling the welfare state in developed countries (public education and health, solidarity-based social security and unemplo-



ymment insurance). The same has happened in emerging and developing countries, where there was barely an "incomplete welfare state". Over three decades of neoliberalism the change was guided by the "minimal state" theory. Thus, we arrived at: a health crisis with a precarious and saturated health system; elementary, secondary and post-secondary education systems dominated by bureaucrats with corporate visions who opposed any participation of teachers and students in defining the course of education; no unemployment insurance and our social security funds in the hands of private investment funds.

The central hypothesis of this work is that now, with the strength of information and communication technologies and the momentum the current health crisis has given them, the dismantling process will become more complex, aggressive and exclusionary. Thus, we need to respond with our own proposals in defense of face-to-face public education.

During the large expansion of the US economy between 2009 and 2019, there was a massive channeling of funds into two major areas: energy, to promote the exploitation of "shale gas" and "tight oil"<sup>2</sup>; and a wave of investment into ICTs in order to increase control over society, save labour costs, impose corporate-social values and create larger companies. The competition for global hegemony is being fought between the Uni-

ted States and China. That is the main aspect of the current global economic reality. The central dispute is a technological one.

William Robinson of California has drawn attention to how "Investment in the tech sector went from \$17 billion in 1970 to \$65 billion in 1980. Then it grew to \$175 billion in 1990, to \$496 billion in 2000, and to \$654 billion in 2016."

A handful of American high-tech companies soaked up huge amounts of cash: In 2017, Apple had accumulated \$262 billion in reserves, while Microsoft recorded a total of \$133 billion, Alphabet (Google's parent company) had \$95 billion, and Oracle had \$66 billion, and so on and so forth<sup>3</sup>.

Global economic restructuring has been underway for quite some time now, increasing the significance and weight of oligopolies through mergers and acquisitions (or takeovers) of competitors. But above all, it is seen in the increased accumulation of their Intellectual Property Assets (which already constituted 84% of the S&P 500 companies' value)<sup>4</sup>. This is evident in the high-tech industries (with the leading US companies known as GAFAM: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft), but it is also present in agriculture, hospitality, the automotive industry, the energy sector and others.

So let's look at the key geopolitical issues, keeping in mind that the two great technological powers are setting the course for everyone.

2. Shale gas is also known as shale oil, and tight oil is also a crude that is trapped in formations with very low permeability, such as sands or clays.

3. See William I. Robinson, "The Next Economic Crisis? Digital Capitalism and the Global Police State," in ALAI. 20/11/2017, <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/189343>

Since the first decade of the 21st century, the world economy has been going through a "Great Transition"<sup>5</sup> in which the following key geopolitical trends stood out: a dispute for global hegemony between two major world economic powers, the US and China, against the backdrop of an environmental crisis and the increase in global warming and a downward trend in global economic growth. We were already in the midst of serious financial, social, political and environmental risks that were headed towards a global recession in 2020-21 due to the decline in international trade. This was due to multiple causes such as an increase in protectionism and trade wars, a drop in investment because of lower profits and asymmetries in regional performance, the growing weight of debt for countries, companies, households and individuals as well as deep structural misalignments in the global economy.

The impact of the crisis also facilitated the vertiginous rise of the winners, mainly high-tech companies (which are also concentrated in China, where giants such as BAIDU, TENCENT and ALIBABA stand out). That is why the close technological-commercial competition between China and the US is so important, because it is the driving force of an accelerated global scientific-technical change characterized by the OECD as the "4th Industrial Revolution". This technological-trade war is being played out in four strategic areas: 5G technology for mobile telecommunications infrastructure, smartphones, cars and renewable energies.<sup>6</sup>

People speak of a new Industrial Revolution because this scientific-technical change has deepened and complicated the impact of digital technologies through its interaction with other sciences such as: Data-driven Production, Artificial Intelligence (which

paved the way for the "Revolution of Algorithms", i.e., mathematical procedures that have a self-learning component) and Synthetic Biology (which combines molecular and systems biology, using engineering to obtain biofuels, vaccines and the cloning processes of living beings). Likewise, there has been an interaction with other technologies such as 3D printing, the Internet of Things and Advanced Robotics as well as the use of other materials (biotechnological and nano-technological). The current crisis will accelerate and deepen this Industrial Revolution.

## II.

The key geopolitical trends observed during the pandemic lead to two observations. First, the big technology companies are taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the pandemic to expand their power and reach. Naomi Klein has shown how, in the case of New York, companies -through a clever twist in political emphasis- first claimed to need public money as a matter of national security and to compete against China, and now are offering themselves as the foundation for "protecting the lives of the population" in the face of the pandemic.

Secondly, it is important to look at what has been going on in China. At the beginning of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, cell phone manufacturers and suppliers were affected (to the point that in mid-February 2020, Apple sold 500,000 fewer smartphones). But in March, there was an explosive increase in sales as Chinese families flocked to buy them to help their children with online education, depleting iPad stocks.

It should be noted that during the lockdown of February 2020, smartphone users in China made a dramatic shift in their preferences. There was an increase in video games amounting to 67% of the total while educational apps doubled in comparison to 2019, reaching 20%.

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4. See Rohinton P. Medhora y Taylor Owen, "A Post COVID19 Digital Bretton Woods", in Project Syndicate-On Point, Apr. 17, 2020, p.2.

5. The primary ideas were developed in the paper presented at SEPLA- Mexico, Alejandro Alvarez Béjar, "La Gran Transición del Capitalismo Contemporáneo y las vulnerabilidades actuales de América Latina y México", paper for the III Encuentro de SEPLA, November 2019, Mexico, UAM-A.

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6. These ideas were developed in depth in Alejandro Alvarez Béjar, "El Contexto Nacional e Internacional y su Influencia en la Educación Superior Pública", Keynote presentation, UPIIC-SA-IPN, January 2020.

In line with this expansion, the share value of New Oriental Education (China's largest education company) also increased, enabling the free availability of digital tools for 140,000 schools and 2.9 million classes. That amounts to approximately 120 million students<sup>7</sup>. In China, unlike the US, digital technology is perceived by large sectors of the population as a protective bubble for those affected by the coronavirus, as it is allowing them to continue with their activities in the midst of confinement<sup>8</sup>.

After the pandemic is formally over and given the evolution, we have seen, the return to "normality" will be anything but linear and simultaneous, not even within a single country. But two other crucial facts must be mentioned. Firstly, the number of daily users of "ZOOM Video Communications" has skyrocketed in recent months, from 10 million in December 2019 to 300 million in April 2020. That has pushed ZOOM's market capitalization to \$48.8 billion in May, despite having reported revenues of only \$623 million in 2019. It is now worth more than the 7 largest airline companies combined, namely: Lufthansa, Air France, Southwestern Airlines, Delta Airlines, American Airlines, International Airlines Group and United Airlines<sup>9</sup>. In China, Tencent's market capitalization already exceeds 500 billion dollars. And it is in education that we can see the other side of this spectacular increase in capitalization by the technological giants.

These problems already existed in the US, Canada, China and, of course, Mexico: an increase in inequality of access to digital technologies between urban and rural sectors, the irregularity of signal strength for electronic devices (with higher costs for rural areas), network congestion, the notable expansion of band-width used by each user and the increased power of the large technology companies.

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7. See Analysis Group, CELC, *Ibidem*, p. 10.

8. See Analysis Group, CELC, *ibidem*, p.20.

9. See YCharts, as of May 25, 2020. Published by Santa Cruz Económico, <[sce.bo/zoom-ahora-vale-mas-que-las-7-aerolineas-mas-grandes-del-mundo/](https://sce.bo/zoom-ahora-vale-mas-que-las-7-aerolineas-mas-grandes-del-mundo/)>

In 2019 -and with a big thrust in 2020- ICTs strongly reinforced the process of complete and long-term privatization of health, education and public services in general.<sup>10</sup>

At the heart of the technological-commercial battle lies the deployment of 5G technology (use of mobile technologies in telecommunications), an area in which transnational corporations are using a variety of strategies to increase profits through the regional rendering of services. For example, TESLA is focused on a large platform to collect data, SAMSUNG on developing health-related applications, GOOGLE PLAY on organizing public transportation ticketing, AMAZON on developing analytical tools for professionals, patients and hospital<sup>11</sup>; ALPHABET is relying on the development of a catalogue of diseases, with their corresponding fees for medical treatments (while it is already trading in chains of medical products and goods) and MICROSOFT seeks to bring health professionals closer with SURFACE, while "Dr. Google" is already answering the questions of more than 70% of the 30 million Internet users in Argentina.<sup>12</sup> In Mexico, due to the COVID 19 crisis, some of these platforms are also being tested in the health sector.

The digitalization of the educational sector is driving and deepening a great ideological, pedagogical, occupational and technological divide that is worsening economic and social inequalities. It will reinforce the tendency to centrally control basic pedagogical guidelines.

Pearson, an English company that presents itself as a world leader in learning, started with "Penguin Books" and The Economist magazine. Since 2015, it has focused on education as its main source of revenue and profit. Its business goes from "exams" to "analysis" because digitalization is making "global harmonization" possi-

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10. For trends in services, see Kate Lappin, "Digital Public Services," in ALAInet, 23/07/20192019.

11. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jul/10/nhs-teams-up-with-amazon-to-bring-alexa-to-patients/>

12. Alfredo Moreno, "Politizar las TIC, las líneas del futuro en salud están mapeadas". 19/07/2019, ALAInet, América Latina en Movimiento.

ble, presenting us with the challenge of holding on to local and national concerns in the educational process.

The Gates Foundation (Microsoft) has spent millions on grants to change the face of education and is now focusing on teacher evaluation. It has decided that teachers should be involved in the process because they want "accountability" to be based on secondary school student testing.

The Pearson Foundation's "Curriculum and Standards", along with those of the Gates Foundation, played an important role in the creation of the "Common Core Curriculum" that was imposed in many US states and European countries. Furthermore, they are deploying multiple digital resources for developing countries: educational management systems, digital textbooks, on-line training for standardized tests, student information systems (demographics, grades, test scores, behavior surveillance) and teacher licensing tests. Along with Stanford University, they have developed a "teacher performance program" for universities to use in their teacher recruitment practices.

### III

The first thing to consider is that the large technological companies will do everything in their power to preserve all they have gained during the health crisis. Therefore, after the COVID 19 pandemic, a key geopolitical aspect is that "data" is now at the center of new technologies, and large technology companies want to privatize it and need to proclaim their absolute rights over it in free trade agreements. Meanwhile, ideas about turning data into public patrimony and to establish strong regulations on its access and management are underdeveloped, especially in the four critical areas of health, education, food and social security.

For instance, one of the major problems with the United States-Mexico-Canada Free Trade Agreement (USMCA), which was negotiated before the pandemic and is about to come into effect, is that it includes a whole chapter on electronic commerce with several articles that ensure the free international transfer of data. It

also bans the forced location of computer facilities in the country of origin and eliminates restrictions on the cross-border flow of data. Everything in this chapter favors the large technology monopolies or GAFAMs<sup>13</sup>.

Another geopolitical aspect of major relevance is that the public will only benefit from information and communication technologies if data is recognized as a public good. There should be a publicly regulated innovation system<sup>14</sup>.

Obtaining a COVID 19 vaccine requires a public-private and multilateral effort to get the free immunization that will lead us to the urgently needed "herd immunity". China and the EU are moving in this direction although the US is doing whatever it takes to obtain the vaccine for itself as a nation and through private laboratories.

Unemployment, which was already a nightmare throughout the world, will reach insane proportions with the pandemic and strongly affect the educational sector. Additionally, the geopolitics of hydrocarbon energy puts us at risk of the outbreak of regional wars with serious global implications: armed conflicts between the US and Iran, Venezuela or even China are examples. The "disconnect between the governance of intangible goods" (such as Intellectual Property Rights and Data Protection) is accentuating the geopolitical divisions between the United States, China and the European Union, with different standards and regulations, varying data rights regimes and competition policies and tensions between individual rights and incentives for innovation<sup>15</sup>.

Regionalization, which is now promoted for the benefit of the technological giants, presents the problem that the three main technological regions do not talk to one another so that none of them can be truly global. Meanwhile, the rest of the world has only two options: either to stick to one of the regions or make a

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This critique is summarized in Alejandro Alvarez Béjar, "Reflexiones en torno al T-MEC y el retorno a la incertidumbre global", Paper of the VI Encuentro de la Red de Estudios de América del Norte, UAM- X, September 12, 2019.

See Mariana Mazzucato & Els Torrelee, "How to Develop a COVID 19 Vaccine for All" in Project Syndicate, April 27, 2020.



# Platform capitalism colonizes education

**Larry Kuehn<sup>1</sup>**

None of us escape the platforms that dominate our 21st Century lives—whether as shoppers, travelers, consumers of most anything, and in our day to day communications. Most of us pay little critical attention to the underlying structure of the technology platforms that are integrated into many of our activities.

A “platform” when used in the technology field means a digital structure on which a range of services are built. We tend to pay attention to the particular services we are using, not the nature of the underlying structure that makes up the platform.

A critical view of the increasing role of technology platforms in education receives even less attention. Information about these are primarily published in “education industry” trade reports, not the every day reading of even the committed education technologist.

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1. British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Canada.

This article takes a critical look at the shape of “platform capitalism” and at how platforms have increasingly become the tools and providers of the content of education.

The largest of the platforms (in value of stocks) also happen to be focused on expanding in education: Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon and in some aspects, Facebook. There is also an extensive venture capital market of start-ups that hope to become an education platform themselves—or be acquired by one of the big platforms at great benefit to the tech entrepreneurs and investors.

## **What is “platform capitalism”?**

This analysis of the way this new form of capitalism is impacting education is based on the concepts in Nick Srnicek’s book Platform Capitalism. He describes the shift in how capitalist firms operate that provide the hardware and software platforms on which activities take

place. He identifies the characteristics that define which firms will dominate an industry, creating monopolies.

Monopolist winning features—the characteristics that allow the creation and maintenance of monopoly—are outlined by Srnicek: be the first to enter a particular niche; rapidly build a user base, worrying about monetizing after the base is built; utilize the data from users as the prime monetizing feature; build the data storage for lots of data; develop the analysis tools that use the data for artificial intelligence applications; control operating systems; protect their position by buying potential competitors; buy companies that allow for service areas to be expanded; cross-subsidize the development of new services that produce more data. The network effect is a key element—the more data you have, the more value there is to the data.

Since platforms are grounded upon the extraction of data and the generation of network effects, certain tendencies emerge from the competitive dynamics of these large platforms: expansion of extraction, positioning as a gatekeeper, convergence of markets, and enclosure of ecosystems. These tendencies then go on to be installed in our economic systems. (Srnicek, p. 98)

The largest platforms have built up significant cash gluts and frequently use tax havens which, Srnicek says, “has enabled these companies to build and expand an infrastructure of data extraction.”

These cash gluts also allow for the development of new areas of data capture and use, such as the autonomous, self-driving cars—and education.

### **Platforms can capture education data that can be monetized**

Education is an area rich in data. Every action of a student and interaction between student, teacher and other students is a potential data point, but the challenge is to collect the data and then how to monetize it.

One effort to accomplish this collection and monetizing illustrates a challenge in education—concerns about student privacy. InBloom was a project funded with \$100 million from the Gates Foundation aimed at

collecting data on students across the US. It was intended to provide data that would be used by school districts and by software developers who do not have access to mass data collections. InBloom was launched in 2013 and cancelled in 2014 because of public backlash and concern about student privacy. A case study by Data and Society contends that:

InBloom’s public failure to achieve its ambitions catalyzed discussions of student data privacy across the education ecosystem, resulting in student data privacy legislation, an industry pledge, and improved analysis of the risks and opportunities of student data use. (Bulger, et.al, 2017)

Concerns about privacy have not stopped development of education features by the dominant platforms. They have, though, at least shaped the way in which the dominant platforms have promoted their projects as a public service, not as a data-collection project.

### **The corporations that are “colonizing” education**

Let’s look at how the big five platforms are entering education, finishing with one project, Class Dojo, that is attempting to create a platform specific to education.

#### **Apple**

Apple should be the leader in education since it was by far the first into the field. The Apple II in the 1980s was the main computer being used in classrooms that had computers at all. It was, of course, pre-Internet and programs and content were moved using the big floppy disks that were indeed floppy and that disappeared long ago. Apple sponsored “Apple classrooms of the future” that explored the use of the computer in the classroom.

Apple abandoned the education computer when the Mac became its main project, and costs increased beyond what most schools were able to pay. The iPad brought them back into the education market with some districts buying class sets that could easily be moved between classes on carts. They were particularly adopted to provide a means of communication for students with

limitations on language expression who can use visual symbols to communicate.

Apple also lost its way with a high-profile project with the Los Angeles school district. It was a deal valued at a reported \$1.3 billion that was promoted as a model for what Apple could do in education. It was a joint project with Pearson, who produced curriculum content for the iPads.

It was a disaster and a symbol of what could go wrong. It was expensive and brought suspicions of corruption that ended the career of the district superintendent who made the deal, even though no criminal charges were laid. It also depended on content from the old dominant education platform—the textbook. Pearson was a major textbook publisher that has since largely abandoned the hardcopy textbook for services like testing, including a contract with the OECD and the PISA exam. The iPad also presented problems for students in standardized tests, a mainstay of US education. The keyboard covered part of the screen so students would see less of the content than students taking the same test on a computer with a separate keyboard.

Apple belatedly has produced an iPad specifically for education, at a lower price than the standard commercial product.

Apple has been a leader in the tendency to create products that funnel data extraction into what Srnicek calls a siloed platform “as it makes its services and devices all highly interdependent and closed off to alternatives.”

## Google

Other than the InBloom and Los Angeles disasters, the first mainstream attention to what is happening in platforms in education was when the New York Times in 2017 published an article headlined “How Google took over the classroom.” It took notice of the multi-level move by Google into education.

Not surprisingly, Google’s existing free tools were being offered to schools, starting with Gmail and including Google docs, Google Drive, Google Calendar, Google Hangouts, and more.

Google ran into privacy issues when it became known that it was scanning student emails and using the data for placing ads, the firm’s main source of income. Google then made a commitment not to scan education services for advertising purposes. This would apply to Gmail and other services signed up for through a school, but does not cover the use of other services. For example, if Google Translate is being used to translate a report being sent to a parent, the data is used the same way it is for general public use of the tool.

Google initially packaged its education services into Google Apps for Education, then shifting the name to Google Suite for Education. It then developed tools specific to education, including Classroom, essentially a learning management system that allows teachers to keep track of student attendance, assignments, assessments and marks—an expanding set of data points. The Suite can be used on any of the major operating systems—iOS, Windows and Android, as well as Chrome.

A Google representative claimed that 25 million students worldwide use Chromebooks, while 80 million people are using G Suite for Education. (Petroni, 2018)

Google’s moves into hardware and operating systems is an example of the way in which platform capitalism works most effectively by occupying all the key positions in the ecosystem. The Chromebook, licensed to a range of manufacturers, is the biggest selling computer for education in the US and Canada. It can be less expensive because it isn’t a full computer—its software and data are held in the cloud and accessed through the Internet. The software and data storage are free. A simple and easily replaced machine and maintenance of software and data by Google substantially reduces the cost to schools of all these features necessary to integrate technology into the classroom.

Google doesn’t provide education content, but its users do. It encourages its teacher users to develop and share resources. Google also encourages “evangelists” who promote its services and provide training on particular education uses of the tools. For example, a website called “Shake up Education” provides many examples



of the use of Google tools and offers online training in using them, all offered by teachers not employed by Google. The platform use of “free” labour is the source of significant value to the platform.

What does Google have to gain from its education services? At least some of its data is used in its AI development, such as the constant improvement in Google Translate. If it becomes the primary set of tools used in most classrooms, it will be less dependent on what the user base thinks is the appropriate and accepted use of the data. Like all the platforms, they are investing in the future, hoping that students who are comfortable

with the platform will continue to use it in their adult and working life.

### **Microsoft**

Microsoft is playing catchup in education with Microsoft Education 365.

Students and teachers are eligible for Office 365 Education, which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, and now Microsoft Teams, plus additional classroom tools. All you need to get started is a valid school email address. (<https://bit.ly/3ujWOTF>)

The basic services are free, but there are services that a

district would pay for: intelligent security management, advanced compliance, and analytics systems. These are tools for administration of a school district digital services and are marketed to the managers responsible for ensuring the operation of the district technology. The educators may have Microsoft imposed as a platform based on the decisions about the management of the system rather than the claimed educational value.

While Google is focused on grass-roots teachers encouraging colleagues to adopt their platform tools, Microsoft is more focused on making a pitch to management on the services they can buy. Having software and storage in the cloud offers outsourcing the software updates, device management and data storage—all of which are generally inadequate and a pain for management.

Microsoft is interested in increasing demand for its services and payment for services beyond the free minimum. It is also interested in students as future users of its products—its pitch, in particular, is that students will be comfortable in using the Microsoft tools when they move into jobs since Office is the most broadly used business software.

Microsoft, like Apple, has produced new hardware aimed at education that uses Windows and is more in the price range of the Chromebook.

While Google promotes Hangout as an audio-visual networking tool, Microsoft has Skype that it promotes as a way of students engaging with experts or classroom exchanges. Microsoft also owns Minecraft and promotes the education edition to “explore STEM with Minecraft.”

Teachers can become a “Microsoft Innovative Educator” by taking a number of online courses for which the teacher takes tests to earn badges, points and certificates. They can then become MIE Experts and Skype Master Teachers after submitting a CV and a description of how they use Microsoft Education and Skype and what students have learning that they could not learn using a textbook. The next step is to become a trainer, making a commitment to

Train/educate 100 educators per year (or educators

at your school) on using technology in teaching and learning, record each session in the Microsoft Training Tracker, and continue to explore Microsoft products and new Microsoft services and technologies. (<https://bit.ly/39zTRVA>)

The website also has a section to “find, create and share a lesson,” where the reward is the recognition by colleagues—the number of downloads and number of hearts indicate the value to other teachers.

All of these elements are aimed at funneling into what Srnicek calls “a siloed platform.” It uses social connections, genuine services and flattery as motivators for teachers to stay within the platform. For education managers, pressure to stay within the silo is created by the difficulty in transferring to another silo with different hardware, software, device management structures and data storage.

## **Amazon**

Amazon’s strategy is definitely as a silo. It bundles free delivery with a wide range of other services through its Prime service. It streams movies and music, as well as offers an unlimited range of books and most anything else that one could want to buy.

Amazon Prime Student gives free shipping of items, unlimited photo storage, unlimited streaming of movies, TV, and music as well as discounts on video games—all for free for six months and half the price of regular Prime after that. What more could a student want than to live in the Amazon silo?

One element of its offers is digital teaching resources:

Amazon Inspire is a service for the search, discovery and distribution of digital educational resources. Support the company’s commitment to making the connected classroom a reality, Amazon Inspire provides educators—regardless of funding or location—access to digital teaching resources with rich features such as search, discovery and peer reviews. (<https://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/?&docId=1000412651>)

Inspire is still described as beta, a reflection that the day after it introduced Inspire in 2016, it was pointed out that some of the resources listed were copyrighted.

One of the copyrighted lessons was sent as a screen shot in the media release sent out by Amazon.

Amazon, like Microsoft, is depending on teachers to create the value in the lesson exchange by having teachers voluntarily uploading the resources they develop for their own classrooms. One of the teacher Inspire users quoted on the website says “I love using Inspire because it is a repository for educational materials that is easy to use, in a format that most are familiar with... Amazon!”

This familiarity makes it easy to switch to the commercial elements of Amazon. The teacher can easily order felt pens, teaching supplies or anything else that they might want for the classroom, all with free delivery using Prime.

Amazon Education’s LMS integrated store allows faculty to “build course material lists from Amazon’s selection, then students shop for a format that fits their budget and study preference—print or digital, rent or buy.”

The most profitable part of Amazon is its cloud service which hosts a significant share of all the cloud services globally. Amazon claims to have 5000 educational institutions using its AWS cloud that helps “facilitate teaching and learning, launch student analytics initiatives, and manage IT operations.”

AWS Education offers free content, training and collaboration portals for students to develop skills for cloud employees.

## **Facebook**

Facebook is not so much a platform for education. Granted that its closed groups are used by some teachers to communicate with students. However, teacher disciplinary boards warn against teachers being “friends” of students and the ease of fluid boundaries in Facebook getting teachers in trouble.

The significance of Facebook is more in the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and its education division which has billions of dollars in Facebook stock for causes in “education, science and justice.”

## **As Education Week reports**

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative is structured as a limited liability corporation, rather than a traditional philanthropic foundation. That gives the organization the flexibility to make donations, invest in for-profit companies, lobby for favored policies and legislation and directly support candidates for elected office—all with minimal public-reporting requirements. (<https://bit.ly/3EUnkYP>)

One of the key projects of the CZI is Summit Public Schools, a charter network behind the Summit Learning Platform, personalized-learning software that is planned for wide distribution. The tremendous resources of CZI and the Gates Foundation have significant influence on the direction of public education. The profits made from these platforms provide policy-shaping activities possible.

Zuckerberg’s belief about the nature of education and expectations for future influence is reflected in these quotes from the annual 2017 letter about the CZI:

[W]e need an education system where all students receive the equivalent of an expert one-on-one tutor. That is what we mean when we refer to “personalized learning.” ...Research shows students will perform better if they can learn at their own pace, based on their own interests, and in a style that fits them.

But delivering this experience is only the first step. Scaling this approach to every classroom is an important challenge as well. There are multiple dimensions to this problem, but we believe any scalable approach will involve giving teachers and students better tools.

An example is the personalized learning tool for teachers I mentioned above that we’ve built with Summit Public Schools. We’re going to build tools that include other schools’ approaches too. There are 25,000 middle and high schools in the US, and our goal is to help many of them use these tools over the next decade. (<https://bit.ly/3CPpabE>)

Although Facebook is not seen as the silo for education, the resources of Facebook are intended by Zuckerberg and Chan to be used to create a silo of a particular view of education “personalization.”

## **Education-specific Platforms-ClassDojo**

The platforms operating in education dealt with so far are the major platforms for whom education is only a small part of its operation and dealt with only after it has been built for other purposes. Some specific aspects of education are the primary work of other corporations. These are primarily financed by venture capital and, in some cases, by providing specific data services paid for by school districts. Given the pattern of monopoly, one might expect that they will at some time be bought out or merged with the major platforms.

EdWeek Market Brief that follows the ed-tech market quotes a BMO Capital Market spokesperson saying “private equity loves this sector.” The love affair is based on total education expenditures of \$5 to \$6 billion globally, and only a small part of that is digital. (Molnar, 2018)

Venture capital is particularly active in some of the significant education niches. Administrative activities and testing and assessment are key areas. Pearson, for example, has moved away from the textbook business in which it formerly held a dominant role. It has defined its business focus on digital testing and assessment, services rather than the type of products that are vulnerable to platform competition.

Zuckerberg isn't the only tech person interested in bringing whole-student “social-emotional learning” into the technology ambit. The OECD education program is developing a 2019 assessment as part of its PISA program. ClassDojo already has a leading position, claiming to have more than 3 million teachers and 30 million students in 180 countries already using it for ‘character development’ and ‘growth mindsets.’

ClassDojo, one of the largest education-specific networked software projects, has built from being a behavior-tracking app to an education platform, according to Ben Williamson (2017):

The world's most successful educational technology is ClassDojo. Originally developed as a smartphone app for teachers to reward ‘positive behaviour’ in classrooms, it has recently extended significantly to become a communication channel between teachers and parents, a

school-wide reporting and communication platform, an educational video channel, and a platform for school-children to collect and present digital portfolios of their class work. (<https://codeactsineducation.wordpress.com/2016/09/02/assembling-classdojo/>)

The rapid increase in users, on a “free” basis, has created what is becoming a part of the infrastructure of public education, without serious critical examination of the impact.

The business plan for monetizing ClassDojo is to sell premium materials to schools and parents. It could deliver software and materials, either on the basis of purchases or subscription, like Netflix. The chief technology officer has described it as “a huge distribution platform to reach parents...to, in the long term, enable parents to be consumers for their child's education.”

Williamson (2017) identifies the very real dangers: “teachers are using ClassDojo content, guidance and shared resources to shape what they teach and say in the classroom and reproducing the particular educational vision of its Silicon Valley operators and investors.”

## **How do we protect the public interest related to platforms used in education?**

The first necessity is creating a public understanding of the nature of the power that is vested in these platforms. The information about the use of Facebook data by Cambridge Analytica has given some insight into how data can be used to manipulate and distort. It is essential that organizations that have a particular role in promoting the public interest devote resources to research and publicizing of the nature and impact of the growing power of platforms to affect society and economy.

Having a public understanding is particularly important in relationship to education. Uncritical use of the platforms produces a form of privatization that is unexamined and that turns over to those who design the technology the implementation of an educational vision. These are issues that seldom are raised in education conferences, and certainly not in the product

booths that provide sponsorships. One exception is the Education International We the Educators project (<https://wetheeducators.com/>)

However, even if we had wide understanding of the issues, it is unlikely that government would put up the resources to develop alternative platforms. A more likely approach would be some form of public regulation. Srnicek suggests that these platforms should be seen as utilities, much like the phone, electricity and water are. Utilities should be open to all, not just to those who own them. Regulation is probably the only way this is possible. Regulation of at least some aspects is not impossible, as seen with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. Even the Economist has suggested a couple of types of possible regulation: trustbusting when the titans move to buy smaller potential competitors and a "new set of laws to govern the ownership and exchange of data, with the aim of giving solid rights to individuals." (Economist, 2018, p. 11)

To counter worries about government oversight, Sabeel Rahman points out that

our economy and politics are already governed and already regulated. They are governed by the opaque judgments of Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Twitter—judgements that are not subject to the mechanisms for representation, participation, or accountability that we would expect of similarly empowered governmental bodies. (Rahman, 2017)

Having the impetus for regulation, though, depends on wide understanding of the reality and the dangers of platform capitalism.

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# “Transforming” education in a pandemic: **Global trends and spaces of resistance**

**Andree Gacoin<sup>1</sup>**

Education is, and has always been, a social struggle. The most visible aspect of this struggle often surrounds the content of education, or as Canadian Curriculum Scholar William Pinar (2015) frames it, “what knowledge is of most worth” (p. 32)? This is a question that is fundamentally about the aims of public education. The answer depends on a multitude of factors including how knowledge is conceptualized, what the role of the school is seen to be, and who decides these issues.

At the same time, what is taught is entwined with a second key question: how does teaching happen? Often, this question is posed instrumentally: how will

knowledge be linearly transmitted from teacher to learner? This framing guides the logic of educational reforms that seek to make teaching more “effective” in order to achieve pre-determined educational outcomes. The struggle, however, comes to the fore when pedagogy is understood as an “event in time” (Ellsworth, 2015, p. 4) in which teachers and students engage in the often messy work of making sense of knowledge within a particular place and time.

Looking at these two questions (What is taught? How teaching happens?) provides a framework for exploring current dominant global discourses about the “transformation” of education, as well as identifying potential spaces of resistance to the neo-liberal rationalities guiding this transformation.

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### **OECD and the transformation of public education**

It is not “new” to argue that the OECD approach to education is driven by a neoliberal rationality. Broadly, this approach takes education primarily as an instrument for national economic prosperity, and thus an important arena of global competition. The OECD agenda is formed through the demands of global knowledge economies (e.g. productive workers) and is based on, and further normalizes, the assumption that the standardization of education and teachers’ work is possible (and desirable) across cultures and languages (Kuehn, 1999, 2004). Perhaps the most visible example of this is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a test that began in 2000 and is administered to 15-year-olds around the world every three years. According to the OECD, the test is “designed to gauge how well the students master key subjects in order to be prepared for real-life situations in the adult world<sup>2</sup>.” The underlying aim is to define and shape educational policy across jurisdictions.

Looking at the expanding focus of PISA in recent years through the question “what is taught” provides an example of how neoliberalism as a political ideology extends a market rationale into “all aspects of thought

and activity” (Brown, 2003, para. 19). While PISA originally focused on mathematics, reading and science, the test has expanded in recent years to measure “complex problem solving” (in 2012), “collaborative problem solving” (in 2015) and “global competence” (in 2018). In these shifts, the “what” of education has expanded from traditional “content domains” to “other factors that play a vital role in making the most of the opportunities that schools provide” (Bertling, Borgonovi, & Almonte, 2016). These factors are broadly called “psychosocial skills.” While there is increasing recognition of the importance of social and emotional learning within educational research (Schonert-Reichl, 2017), the risk is that this learning is reduced to a transmittable set of skills to maintain the status quo, rather than skills that support students to critically engage with power and privilege. For instance, a recent analysis of “grit” as a universal “skill” argues that framing grit as an object to teach transforms students’ “inner thoughts” into something to be managed according to an implicit “cultural thesis about the ‘right’ kind of child” (Kirchgasler, 2018, p. 710). This object is given the appearance of being “neutral” as it is transformed into a quantifiable global measure, such as those assessed by PISA.

Alongside shifts to PISA, the OECD has explicitly connected “what is taught” with “how teaching happens” through the Education 2030 Initiative. Indeed, Education 2030 seeks to answer two questions: “What

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2. See “About Pisa” at <https://www.oecd.org/site/forum-world-education/>

knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will today's students need to thrive and shape their world?" and "How can instructional systems develop these knowledge, skills, attitudes and values effectively" (OECD, 2018a, p. 2). In a phased approach, the project has first sought to answer these questions by developing a global "learning framework" based on "international curriculum analysis" (OECD, 2018b, p.1). The second phase of the project, which launched in 2019, focuses on building "common ground on the principles and instructional designs that can effectively implement intended curricula" and developing "the types of competencies and profiles of teachers who can support all students to achieve desired outcome for their future success" (p. 1). In other words, while it may have been implicit before, the OECD is now explicitly interested in how teaching happens, and pedagogy is reduced to a set of universal skills that make up a (so-called) effective teacher.

Taken together, PISA and Education 2030 operate as governance tools aimed at shaping educational policy and practice within a neoliberal, and neo-colonial, logic of education. These tools may be adapted to the "local context," or be made "culturally relevant," but the core of "what is taught" and "how teaching happens" is ultimately assumed to be universal and measurable. Part of the power of this framing is how it masks its own underlying cultural assumptions and expectations within a new "common-sense" for education, one in which knowledge is standardized and the teaching profession is de-professionalized.<sup>3</sup>

### **The enabling conditions of the pandemic**

AS the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted schooling around the world, it has created conditions within which the OECD can further normalize and promote their agenda for education. A key response to the complex challenges of education during the pandemic has been

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3. In 2019, the BCTF held a forum focusing on how teacher experiences in BC disrupt the narrative guiding Education 2030. The report from that event is available here: <https://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=55269>

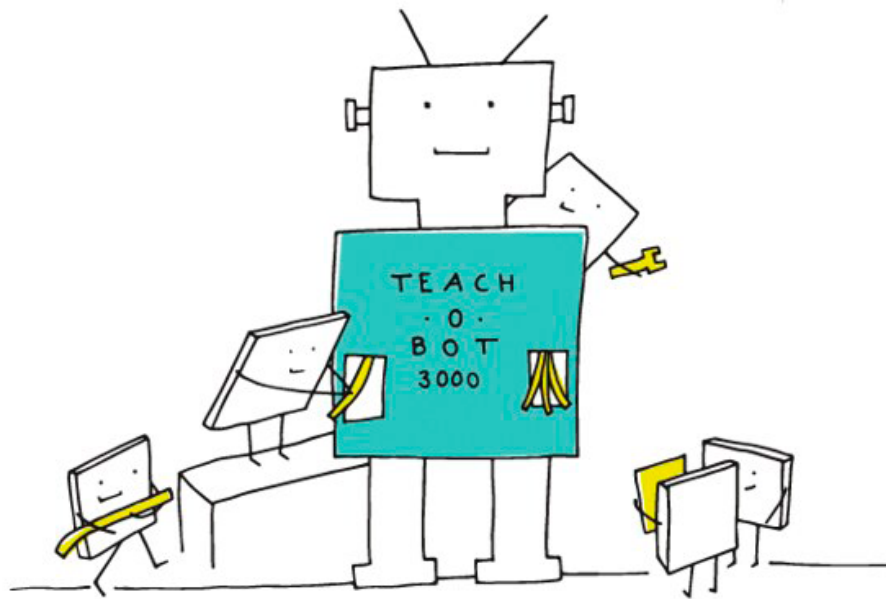
an increasing reliance on digital technologies. In many places, teaching and learning has happened remotely using these technologies, or in hybrid situations in order to limit in-person interactions. While these responses are necessary in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also critical to interrogate how this situation is being mobilized by the OECD to further extend their agenda into education.

Since schools first closed in many places around the world in March 2020, the OECD has been prolific in producing policy papers that seek to bring together "data, analysis and recommendations on a range of topics to address the emerging health, economic and societal crisis" (OECD, 2021). These papers, with titles such as "embracing digital learning and online collaboration," and "schooling disrupted, schooling rethought,"<sup>4</sup> are premised on the desirability of the standardization of both what is taught, as well as how teaching happens. Digital technologies, in turn, become the vehicle for these changes. For instance, one paper celebrates how "digital technology allows us to find entirely new answers to what people learn, how people learn, where people learn and when they learn" (OECD, 2020a, p. 1). What goes unstated is that these "answers" are premised on the possibility (and desirability) of autonomous independent learners (e.g. workers) guided by teachers who close the "productivity gap" by acting as "active agents for change" (OECD, 2020b, p. 8). While this may at first seem a laudable goal, the trope of teacher as facilitator, which also underpins the Education 2030 initiative, instrumentalises the work of teaching. Teaching is a script (that can be measured and evaluated) rather than a deeply relational practice that requires professional judgement.

Perhaps most insidious is how the framing of digital technologies as a neutral "solution" to the challenges facing education is in direct contradiction to how these

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4. As of February 2021, there were 16 papers specifically related to "school closures." See: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/policy-responses?keyword=school+closures>



technologies are extending private interests into public education. Indeed, the OECD is explicit that educational transformation necessitates an infrastructure for online learning to meet the “needs of the 21st century” (OECD, 2020b, p. 9). Hindered by limited public funding and inadequate infrastructure, governments should create an “innovation-friendly climate” guided by an “entrepreneurial culture in education” (p. 8) to meet these needs. Within the educational sphere, digital “innovation” is led by major corporations, including Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon and Facebook, and this Ed Tech industry contributes to the ongoing privatisation of public education (Weiner, 2020). While educational products may be “free” to teachers and students, “private human experience” (our data) becomes the “free raw material” available to these private companies (Zuboff, 2019). This data is then used to market and sell products, shaping our future behaviour. In other words, “what is taught” becomes a market product, whereby quantified learning and teaching are captured and sold back to education systems as content. In turn, “how teaching happens” is driven by the very design of the technological platforms. Following Larry Kuehn (2019), this can be seen as a new form of colonization, whereby the “uncritical use of the [digital] platforms produce a form of privatization that is unexamined and that places pedagogy in the hands of those who design said platforms.” (p. 8).

As an extension of the OECD policy agenda in education, the “tool” of technology is being mobilized as a mechanism to drive forward neoliberal rationalities for “what is taught” and “how teaching happens” in schools around the world. This is not a break from previous work, such as PISA and Education 2030, but rather an instrumentalization of their aims, a way to neatly package them for educational consumption and deployment through digital channels around the world.

### **Transformation for public education**

While the common sense of “transformation” during a global public health crisis may seem inevitable, it is precisely the experience of education during the pandemic that has the potential to disrupt a neoliberal rationality.

One key effect of the pandemic has been to reaffirm the vital role that a strong public sector plays in society. COVID-19 has starkly illustrated the fragility of neoliberalism and the inability of our current economic system to meet the needs of all. While it may be overly optimistic to herald the end of neoliberalism, the faltering of its logic is an opportunity to think differently about what is needed for society to flourish and thrive. Instead of focusing on developing certain kinds of global citizens (i.e. entrepreneurial teachers and students) what happens when true value is given to teaching and learning that is rooted in local communities? What happens when “skills” are un-tethered from the status

quo and used to critically engage with and challenge structures of power and privilege? What happens when meaningful relationships are centered in education, rather than business interests?

Teachers and their students are already grappling with these questions and issues everyday. Around the world, teachers have used their professional judgement to meet not only the academic needs of their students, but also unprecedented social and emotional needs. Untethered from physical school buildings, teachers and students have navigated new spaces of teaching and learning. Our school communities have had to work together to build connections and reliance in the face of unprecedented challenges. None of these experiences can be neatly packaged into a global toolkit, no matter how culturally relevant it claims to be.

The impossibility of the universal necessitates alternative visions for public education. Rather than answer the questions of what is taught and how teaching happens, how might these questions become fruitful spaces for engaging with the complexity of teaching and learning? How can we work together to mobilize and support local knowledges and places of learning? It is here where the global become a tool of resistance: building solidarity to challenge new spaces of global governance and promote transformation for more equitable and just societies.

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# The public education we need in the new period\*

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Translation: Carl Rosenberg

**Summary:** To answer the question “What kind of education is needed in the new period after the pandemic?”, it is necessary to recognize the active role teachers have played in education in the current context, helping students and working so that the pandemic does not deepen inequalities even further. To design this new education, we must draw on the experience and learning we have had in the context of the pandemic as we continue to combat various forms of privatization such as *tertiarization*, *charterization* and technological companies’ control of education and to recover the role of the state as the guarantor of the right to education.

We have learned from this pandemic that we are all being attacked by the same enemy. Going beyond social, cultural, ethnic and gender differences, it is clear that we are all part of the same overall whole, humanity. From this perspective, expanding coordination among teachers throughout the world is highly relevant. Issues of global importance also impact education, and we must take action.

Teachers are being expected by some governments to show up to schools without the necessary health and safety conditions, which are our right, being provided for. Nevertheless, teachers themselves have already taken the initiative of reaching out to the most vulnerable students in the midst of this pandemic, so that already-existing inequalities are not deepened.

This is our most important task. We must demand that governments ensure that the inequalities which

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already exist in our society are not deepened—both the great differences between countries and those between various sectors within countries. The pandemic must not become a new element of inequality. We must consider the differences in technological knowledge and its potential among various countries. For example, if we compare Silicon Valley with a community in the Argentine-Paraguay jungle, we will find enormous technological differences which must be taken into account.

We must work to ensure that virtual education reaches everyone. In Latin America, in order to develop virtual educational activities, connection networks need to be completed so that the whole of society has free access. It is often teachers who have been solving problems with the internet by purchasing computers and programs, among other expenses, and teachers have spontaneously learned an enormous amount about technology. It is now urgent that governments recognize and systematize the forms of knowledge that teachers have acquired through personal effort.

On the other hand, I want to emphasize how important it is that we teachers take control of technology and not the reverse. I want to highlight this point because several decades ago, large corporations discovered education as a potential market, one with an infinite clientele which reproduced by itself with enormous profits. In this sense, large corporations are not just interested in acquiring private schools, but also in penetrating the space of public education, which is dealt with for the most part by governments. Corporations seek to continue profiting in various ways, one of them being so-called *tertiarization*, that is to say, privatizing functions of the public education system.

Some foundations and NGOs, presenting themselves as if they had philanthropic goals, offer rapid courses for training “social leaders,” with the idea of substituting these for teachers trained in normal schools, teacher training colleges and universities. This rapid substitution is a powerful instrument: on one hand, teacher training is appropriated and on the other these “leaders” or “new” educators are used to ideologically penetrate public education and accustom society to the idea of teachers becoming simple tutors or mentors of an education based on technology.

Privatization takes many forms. With *tertiarization*, the administration of many public schools lies with companies, packages of contents or evaluations of students and teachers are purchased and management of digital platforms is ceded to business. Another well-known form of privatization is *charterization* which means that communities assume the costs of schools which should be the role of the government. There are many other privatization strategies. The damage is enormous since the state is the only authority which can guarantee the right to education, a right which belongs to the population as a whole as do the rights of teachers.

Nevertheless, we are learning a lot from the process that we are currently living through. We must be aware of what we’ve learned because when we return to school, when the moment is right, it will be with a new rhythm, combining in-person and virtual activities. We must strengthen ourselves as teachers. To achieve this, the role of unions is very important, synthesizing all these forms of learning, presenting proposals for a new education so that it is we who found the new schools which will be more just and less unequal.

# The Dangers of Institutionalizing Online Education:

## The impact on teaching work\*

**María de la Luz Arriaga<sup>1</sup>**

Translated by Wendy Santizo

**Summary:** This article addresses the dangers of the institutionalization of online education and its impact on teachers' work. Taking into consideration that what we are facing is a new reality, not a new normality, it is necessary to rethink education. In the context of the pandemic, governments and educational authorities imposed the closure of schools and virtual education through computer platforms or with the use of television, reinforcing the privatization processes that were already underway. They also gave rise to other types of privatization processes.

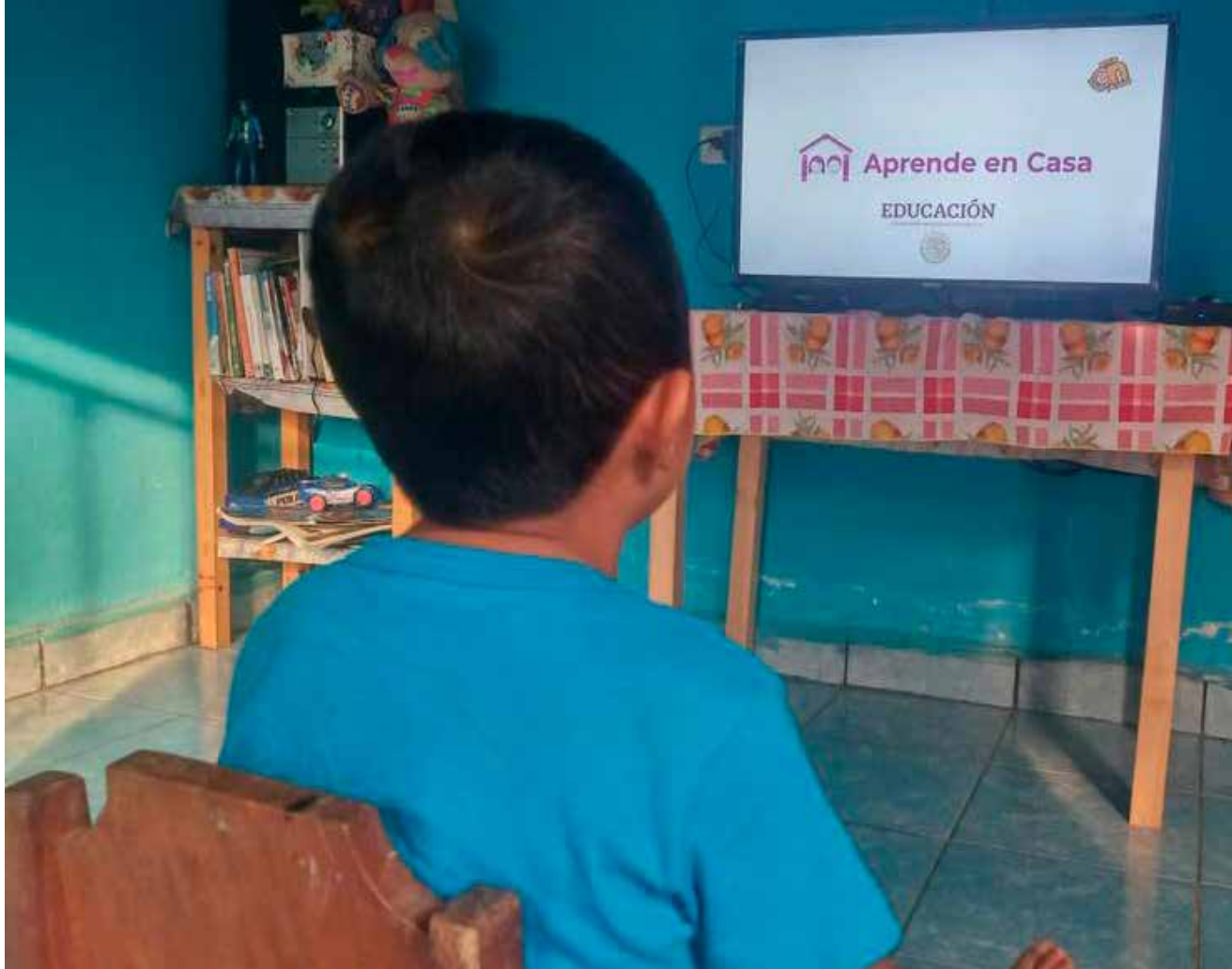
To start off we need to characterize the current moment as a historic moment worldwide. A moment

in which the Covid19 pandemic has revealed the collapse of the neoliberal capitalist system and the failure of its policies of dispossessing rights and devastating the environment. It has also highlighted the fragility of education systems and the failure of competency-based models.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17,106,000 people have tested positive with Covid19 in the world, and 668,000 people have reportedly died of the virus as of July 31, 2020. Although this is explained by the severity of the illness, it is also a product of the deterioration of living and working conditions of great masses of the population as well as the dismantling of public healthcare systems around the world. For 30 years, we have been repeatedly told that private is better than public and that in the public sector we have dismal quality, corruption and lack of capacity.

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1. Professor Faculty of Economics UNAM. Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education, Mexican Section.



However, in these 30 years of neoliberalism, we have seen how education models, particularly those based on competencies, were clearly designed to educate students to satisfy the needs of the market, through individualism, exacerbated competency, standardization and external evaluation of the learning-teaching processes. This type of education, as well as the science and technology that it promotes, has not served to resolve the great national or world problems, as has been demonstrated over the past few months of the health emergency.

In the two previous webinars organized by the IDEA Network, we posited two main ideas. The first is the greater vulnerability of society to control and surveillance by the empire of large communication and information transnationals. Secondly, we heard that online education disrupts teachers' working conditions, transforming teaching work into online tasks through the use of technologies. This has increased working hours, deregulated and flexibilized teaching work and reduced in relative terms the salaries received by education workers, all of which in turn affects our health.

And the boundary between work life and personal or family life is dissolved.

Why is it important to talk about the dangers of institutionalizing online education and its impact on teaching work? Mainly because we need to rethink education. We are in a new historical moment and it is the responsibility of education actors and their organizations to face this reality. But it is also the state's role and that of the entire society to construct a pedagogy for social transformation and freedom as a creative, critical and humanistic process for the development of life in community. This is essential if we want to overcome the current economic crisis and social devastation.

In education we are facing an alarming situation. In July 2020, the UN Secretary General warned of the danger of a generational catastrophe due to the closing of schools and its impact on a billion students worldwide. This is the size of the challenge we are facing.

We are also faced with authoritarian and technocratic decisions which go against the collective will of teachers and their unions to find a solution to the cu-



rent challenges and demands made by society, as well as against common sense given the failure of neoliberal policies in education. Education authorities imposed school closures and online education through virtual platforms or through TV, reinforcing privatization policies already underway and creating new types of privatization where the centrality of the school is displaced, where pedagogy is absent and where teachers' labour is stripped of its reason for being. That is, to be a main social subject in the act of education.

In basic education in Mexico, which spans pre-school to high-school, what is being imposed is a program called "Learning at home" which will provide courses through national TV during the 2020-2021 school year. For post-secondary education, so-called hybrid models are planned which combine face to face courses with virtual platforms, but because of health and safety concerns it is likely they will be completely virtual. The Mexican education system is federal and not decentralized as in the US or Canada.

For that school year, the secretary of public education had previously reached an agreement with four well-known businessman from the monopoly groups who control the television channels, that 30 million children and youth would attend school through TV

and radio with classes broadcast from 8am to 7pm, for which the companies would receive about 400 million pesos (about twenty-two and a half million US dollars), in spite of the fact that the digital spectrum and TV and radio frequencies are property of the nation.

It seems important to ask here - what will the role of teachers be? We will basically be turned into markers of homework and agents of the control and rating of academic progress. The authorities have not said who will be developing the learning content, nor what the cost of that will be.

For many years in Mexico there has been a high-school distance education program designed for rural communities called "Telesecundaria". Teachers play an important role because the students are not isolated. They meet, study and are challenged by their teachers, and all this learning cannot take place without the proper preparation and the will to go beyond the classes that are broadcast on TV.

A hybrid model is proposed for the universities but the majority of schools will provide courses 100% online, even schools such as the faculties of medicine, science, and chemistry.

We are facing a new reality about which we were not consulted, nor were communities. We recognize



there are different impacts on teaching work in the two government strategies, in basic and higher education, but the lengthening of the work day, intensification of work load, increased stress, inequality in access to digital tools and the lack of training in their use are common to both.

We have also identified the issue of depriving teachers of their reason for being; the absence of pedagogy in online policies can be seen in light of the loss of the centrality of schools. The responsibility for learning is transferred onto individuals. Learning at home is "an individual endeavour" and it stops being the responsibility of society and the state as its representative and is moved into the private realm of the home and the family. Furthermore teachers stop being a key actor in the education process, and the focus shifts to the work produced rather than on learning itself.

Schools can be important generators of culture and of communities of learning and of refuge, like the sanctuary schools in the United States that countered Trump's offensive against migrant communities. This is what we must recover - schools embedded in their communities. Teachers' unions and social organizations are already working on this such as the CNTE (National Coordinator of Education Workers) in Michoacan,

Oaxaca and Veracruz in Mexico. In Chicago the CTU is an example of community work and the struggle to defend education.

What we are facing is a new reality, not a new normality. There is renewed dispute and therefore a need to reinforce the organization and democratic participation of education workers. It can be both a challenge as well as an opportunity to rethink education. We don't want education like before, but what we are being offered is even worse.

At this moment, we need to discuss the role of the school, of teachers and their unions, colleges or social organizations. Can ICTs (information and communication technologies) be used to advance towards a liberating education? What are the working conditions in this transformation project? How can we defend our autonomy and creativity as teachers?

The IDEA Network has organized webinars to help define a common agenda. We are proposing an international campaign of local, provincial, national or institutional actions but always in the context of international solidarity, asserting education as a social right in a pedagogy for the liberation of our peoples as proposed by Paulo Freire.

# Paritarias<sup>1</sup> as a Tool of Struggle for Education and Working Conditions: The Argentine experience with collective bargaining

**Noemí Tejada<sup>2</sup>**

Translation by Carl Rosenberg

## **Summary:**

With the onset of the pandemic, teachers reorganized their work and adapted their conditions to guarantee

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1. “Paritaria” refers to collective work agreements reached in meetings of workers with management to discuss working conditions. It is fixed by law for teachers who work in public schools. They meet with representatives of the Ministry of Labour. The word “paritaria” means that salaries or wages are negotiated in a forum with parity of membership: an equal number of members from each side. The word has more than one meaning in Argentina. It also refers to the body which negotiates salaries and working conditions, the negotiation round (nearly always annual), and the salary or wage agreement itself. (Translator’s note.)

2. Secretary of Labour Health, CTERA Argentina. Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación de la República Argentina (Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic). (Translator’s note.)

the right to public education by means of distance or online work. This situation immediately resulted in many problems associated with workload, limitation of rights such as time off for illness and consequent physical or mental deterioration. Nevertheless, the Argentine experience of collective bargaining through the national paritaria achieved important gains and agreements with the force of federal law which led to the regulation of teaching work in the virtual context, guaranteeing respect for rights gained and the assurance of conditions and minimal rights for teaching work during the pandemic.

As a way of thanking the IDEA Network and teachers and professors in Latin America and all over the world



for the efforts they are making in these exceptional times for humanity in the midst of the pandemic, I would like to share an experience which makes us proud of the value of union organizing, of the paritarias for the teaching profession and of collective bargaining for the workers of our countries.

These are moments of uncertainty but there are also some certainties which have to do with what today more than ever, and against the grain of neoliberal policies, is being revalued all over the world: the importance of the centrality of the state and the need for public policies. In the face of the Covid 19 pandemic this refers to public health but also relates to public education.

State regulation of the use and management of technology has become indispensable because virtually overnight the pandemic meant teachers all over the world began to teach and educate by distance learning. They have made use of precisely those new technologies which are seen as “the possibility” to continue guaranteeing what we call in Argentina “pedagogical continuity” and assure the social right to education of children and youth throughout the country and in every country of the world.

In this context, we have had to reorganize our work and teaching tasks for online education, which meant rapidly taking on major modifications of our working conditions. Because of this, the Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic (CTERA) expressed the need and urgency for a paritaria agreement which establishes that, in the first place, our teaching work cannot be framed within the strict

conditions of “telecommuting,” but as work carried out in a virtual and not in-person context which allows in part for it to be sustained by the use of technology, and, secondly, that these technologies must be guaranteed by the state and placed at the disposal of teachers and students.

This virtual work soon generated an increase in workload. Motivated by this situation, we in CTERA undertook a survey to discover the reality of educational labour in this new context. Fifteen thousand teachers throughout the country took part in this survey. Among the main results, it was observed that 80% of respondents denounced the increase in work time in this virtual mode and also the deregulation, flexibilization and precarization of working conditions. Likewise, there has been a self-imposed limitation on claiming one’s rights. For example, we observe that teachers do not take time off even when they are sick, and that in turn this heavy workload results in various kinds of illness such as vision problems, eyestrain and muscular and joint ailments. Furthermore, there is the demand for an almost one-to-one connection with students, which not only requires a greater amount of time, but also entails other demands such as preparation of work material for virtual classes and also specific communication with students, a practically individual form of communication.

In this regard, we have also observed that the line between the workday and family and personal life has been blurred since in most cases teachers have transformed their homes into classrooms. An aggravating

factor in this situation is gender since in our teaching sector approximately 80% of teachers are women who as such are mainly in charge of school aged children. All this has made teaching work and the life of education workers more complicated and complex.

For these reasons, we began to work to achieve a regulatory framework which guarantees better conditions, and on June 4, 2020 we reached an agreement between the union and the federal government in the framework of collective bargaining of the National Teaching Paritaria.

When the pandemic took us by surprise, we had already recovered this tool for struggle and improvement of working conditions from a collective perspective. This option had previously been repealed by the last neoconservative government which repressed the rights of workers until the end of their mandate in 2019.

We now have a new national government which enables dialogue and debate, and which makes it possible to reach certain agreements which have the force of law and which serve as a basis for other agreements in the provinces and jurisdictions. The provinces, for their part, can reach agreements to gain better working conditions than established on the national level, but the base level is the national one. Because of this, these eleven points of paritaria agreement reached on June 4, 2020, are very important.:

1) Defining teaching work in an online rather than in-person context, related to the basic agreement of Collective Bargaining Agreement 177. We insist that this is in a context of virtuality and only during the pandemic emergency and that in-person teaching work can never be replaced. By “in-person” we mean the task of education and interaction with others, and collective work not just with our brothers and sisters but also with students. In the meantime, we must regulate online work, and because of this we define it as teaching work which is not in-person and not telecommuting.

2) The work will be carried out by means of communication and information technologies suitable for virtual application.

3) The integrity of the teaching salary for virtual work must be maintained, and all the arrangements for time off, which have been gained through struggle and expressed in statutes and paritaria agreements, must also be respected. Substitute teachers must be replaced, just as when teachers get sick there are replacements.

4) In relation to work schedules. Shifting boundaries and flexibilization have meant that at times work schedules are not respected, either because instructions have been given to school principals or to teachers in each subject area, and the work schedule is not respected. We propose that the work schedule be respected in accordance with what has been established for workload and reiterate the right to rest. The government of each jurisdiction should establish limits on when a principal or teacher must communicate with students and their families, so that they are not connected at all hours of the day or on the weekend. And we invoke the right to disconnect so that each worker has the right to disconnect at times of rest such as holidays or the end of the work day.

5) Work safety: coverage of work accidents during the pandemic for teaching work in virtual and distance learning contexts.

6) The complete recognition of teaching work in the virtual context in the framework of established union rights.

7) Commitment of the federal government to progressively provide technological resources to carry out virtual work, but also even when work is not done online, to have an equal distribution of technological resources. We spoke about universal access so that students as well as teachers can have access to new technologies. We have asked them to bring back the program “Connecting Equality”<sup>3</sup> which not only provided laptops to teachers and students, but also

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3. “Conectar Igualdad” was an initiative of April 2010 of the government of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina to give laptops to secondary students and teachers in public schools, special education, and teacher training institutions. (Translator’s note.)



established the basis for a sovereignty of knowledge in relation to the use of platforms. The current government is working to resume this program, not to the same extent as before, but nevertheless considering access to state-of-the-art computers or devices as well as the federal and provincial governments creating their own virtual platforms, which provides an alternative to depending on other platforms and multinational groups.

8) All workers engaged in education must have free training provided by the government. Today the handling of new technologies requires training. The lack of preparation in this regard contributes to other problems such as work stress, due to the enormous effort made to learn to handle new technologies in a short time while, at the same time, attending to the student body through the same platforms.

9) For the return to classrooms and the revival of in-person educational activities in schools, we need adequate infrastructure, equipment, health, security and hygiene conditions in order to avoid transmission of the virus. To this end, a paritaria agreement established in 2011, known as the “the 12 basic points,” was revived. These points proposed the need to fulfil certain minimal requirements before sending teachers and students to school premises.

10) The establishment of regulations and protocols to enable a return to work in the physical spaces of schools must include the participation of workers and their demands in order to generate formal agreements on the number of students and the protective equipment and measures which the government must provide.

11) The provinces must ensure compliance. Employers must also comply with the agreements. The commission of the paritaria must reconvene within thirty days to evaluate the application of this agreement, given that it has a national scope, but in each jurisdiction there must be control of compliance with these points.

I want to close by giving thanks and pointing out that as teachers and professors we can make this experience available to other workers as an example. I am sure that there will be more to do. Public schools teach, resist and dream, and we have shown that in this contingency we have made the greatest effort to guarantee the social right to education. However, it is also clear that we must continue guaranteeing the best working conditions and emerge from the pandemic having learned and with greater and better rights to guarantee better public education in our countries.

# Disaster Capitalism: Puerto Rico's experience with public education

**Mercedes Martínez** <sup>1</sup>

Translated by Wendy Santizo

When we speak of disaster capitalism in Puerto Rico, it applies to us directly since we have been a colony for over 500 years, first of Spain and later of the United States.

Today I want to share some historical context to better understand what we mean by disaster capitalism. In Puerto Rico, the struggle of educational communities has gone on for over 25 years against privatization policies by all colonial governments, which have attempted to privatize the public education system without success. In 1983, Ronald Reaâgan presented a report called "Nation at Risk" which stated that the public education

system was broken and new structural reforms that followed market principles were needed. It also laid the blame on public schools in order to discredit and dismantle them.

In spite of that, it would be ten years until the first attempt was made, in 1993, to privatize public education through a voucher system by which parents were given money from public funds to subsidize private schools. The teachers won the struggle against this model; we held a one day strike, brought forward a lawsuit and education vouchers were declared unconstitutional.

Over the following decades the Puerto Rico Teachers' Federation (FMPR) was the only representative of all teachers in the country, representing 45,000 members. Strikes are illegal in Puerto Rico, so having a presence

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1. President of the Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico - FMPR.



in the streets was a question of conscience because the government wanted to dismantle public education and hand it over to business. We were able to obtain a written stipulation by the Education Secretariat of the time which highlighted that no public school in the country could be privatized. That win was achieved thanks to the thousands of teachers who took to the streets for ten days.

In 2011, the former US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, visited Puerto Rico to impose charter schools and tried once again to privatize but was not successful. Years went by and both political parties, which are very similar to the Republicans and Democrats in the US, favoured privatizing education to profit big companies and corporate interests and handing over the budget for the Education Department to these companies.

In 2015, authorities imposed a legislative bill that attempted to privatize and close hundreds of schools and teachers once again took to the streets and managed to stop the privatization. Then came the closure of schools. The colonial administration of Rafael Roman

tried to privatize and close 300 schools. We had already experienced the closure of 120 schools between 2014 and 2015 and although many schools closed, our struggle enabled us to save and recover half of them.

In 2017 Julia Keleher, who had no connection to this country, was named Education Secretary. She earned a salary of 250,000 dollars annually, and her first action in her new position was to announce the closure of an additional 305 schools. She is currently accused of corruption, but that year she managed to close 166 schools.

Also in 2017 Puerto Rico was ravaged by a category 5 hurricane which became the perfect moment for the privatizers to take advantage of the misery of the people. Authorities began to find ways to close hundreds of schools in a time of crisis. Schools suffered great damage, many were destroyed and others were flooded. At the time, Julia Keleher compared Puerto Rico to New Orleans and said it was time to have education reform. We knew that meant to privatize, close and hand schools over to the highest bidder. However, unionized

teachers dedicated themselves to repairing schools and making them ready to reopen and receive students; we also received a lot of international solidarity in order to reopen the schools.

While teachers repaired classrooms, authorities used New Orleans as the point of reference for moving ahead with the government's privatization agenda. 300,000 homes were lost, 75,000 permanently and the Education Secretariat saw that as the best time to privatize. Schools and communities resisted that plan and prevented many school closures. However, the reopening of schools was slow, and parents began to take their students out of public schools and into the private sector. In this context the FMPR turned to an act of civil disobedience which resulted in the arrest of 21 teachers for defending the right to public education. None of the charges were ever proved because the only crime committed was that of defending education as a human right of each child.

In 2018 we prevailed. We were able to reopen schools and presented an appeal before the education department tribunal. However in March, while the people were still recovering from the hurricane, for the first time in twenty years, the legislature passed a law that allowed for 10% of schools to be privatized. Nevertheless, the same day the privatization bill was announced, the teachers' union paralyzed the country and up to now only one school, one charter school of the 876 that exist in the country, has been closed. So they weren't able to carry out their privatization plan.

Then in January 2020, the country suffered an earthquake that brought down school buildings in the southern and other regions, and many children have not been able to return to class. Meanwhile, Covid19 has exacerbated the social inequalities which already existed because capitalism has forced us to live that way. Close to 60% of children had zero access to either the internet or a computer, and close to 30% of teachers also had no access; in the middle of the pandemic the government tried to privatize the public education system through online learning, although that project was repealed.

At this moment we are groups of teachers united from different unions and making proposals on how education needs to be implemented in the face of this pandemic and in the up-coming semester:

- Reducing the number of students to 10 or 12 per classroom to guarantee social distancing
- Reopening schools that were closed, which add up to 34%
- Computer equipment and internet be guaranteed as a human right for all the population
- All education workers and students be tested before even speaking about restarting face to face classes
- Health and safety protocols need to be established, and discussed with the teachers' union, as well as promoted to guarantee the well being of the educational community
- It's crucial that on a tropical island, where only 15% of what we consume originates from within the country, courses in agriculture and food sovereignty be implemented and further developed.

"There is no triumph without struggle, nor struggle without sacrifice"

Eugenio María de Hostos.



# COVID-19 and Online Learning in Ontario, Canada

**Gary Fenn<sup>1</sup>**

Within days of closing all schools in Ontario on March 14, the provincial government introduced an online learning plan that required educators to continue to work with their students. However, the plan came with very little support from the provincial government. Local school boards and educators were to their own devices to make it work.

The conservative provincial government promoted their online learning plan as “continuing education” for students. In reality, it was emergency remote learning. The government pushed for more synchronous, livestreamed learning sessions with students, rather than allowing students to work at their own pace in an asynchronous way.

The Ontario government, like many other provincial governments in Canada, were praising their ability to

deliver high quality education using online tools to students across the province. What we discovered was that many students disengaged from online learning as inequities emerged, and became exacerbated by moving to a fully online format. Many students lacked access to reliable internet connections, or did not possess the devices needed to work online. Many students were not familiar with the online tools used by educators, while others did not have a quiet space to work in their homes with many parents forced to work from home themselves.

Teachers, as well as education workers who support students with special needs or who provided mental health supports, struggled to balance their work and lives. Like many of their students, some lacked access to reliable internet, especially in rural and northern areas of the province, especially when it came to attempting to connect with students with livestreaming tools (i.e. Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Many were caring for their

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1. Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF-FEE-SO)



own children who were at home with them. Educators had many of the same issues that their students faced when it came to accessing online learning. Despite these challenges, many educators were able to provide creative learning opportunities for their students under the most difficult of circumstances.

However, this was emergency remote learning and did not match a true, in-person learning experience that students would receive in a typical classroom. While some students persevered through the emergency remote learning experience, many disengaged from learning or struggled through it. Despite these challenges, the Ontario government continued a publicity campaign to promote how well their plan was working and that every student should have access to online learning tools.

The Ontario government continues to use the pandemic to promote its agenda of increasing online learning opportunities for students at the secondary / high school level, increasing the threat of greater privatization of publicly-funded education. This issue emerged in the last round of collective bargaining between the government, local school boards, and the education unions. The Ontario government declared that all students would need to complete FOUR high school courses online, known in Ontario as e-Learning courses, in order to graduate. Unions forced this proposal to become a

bargaining issue, and the parents raised their objections to this change in the graduation requirement.

While the Ontario government has the power to unilaterally change graduation requirements, public pressure forced them to rethink their plans. Students will now need to complete TWO e-Learning courses, but there are a number of ways for students to opt out of being forced to take these courses, including parental consent, or a recommendation from a teacher. Before full implementation of this plan, there will be a provincial election in Ontario.

In conclusion, many provincial governments in Canada have tried to promote online learning during the pandemic as an alternative to learning in a classroom. Parents, students and educators saw it and experienced it very differently. Despite this, many governments are using the pandemic as an opportunity to promote a permanent increase in online learning for students, heightening the threat of greater privatization of education. The Ontario government appears to be starting down that path with increasing the use of online courses, and other provinces are following close behind. It will take significant public pressure to get governments to stop thinking of education as a cost, and instead see it as an investment in the social and economic future of the country.

# The experience of teachers in Los Angeles, California

**Cecily Myart Cruz<sup>1</sup>**

Translated by Carmen Barrios

To speak out at this unprecedented moment about the defense of public education. To do so we must name the moment as a crisis; the pandemic has brought to light all the inequalities that we know exist. Right now, we are in talks to find out how to reopen our schools safely. Buildings may remain closed but classes stay active. We can all agree that distance education in the spring generated a crisis in teaching.

The conversations that we are having now about our schools should give us pause. Educators have been asked to risk our lives and the lives of students that are going back to the classrooms and their families.

So, let's consider why this is happening. Families need to go back to work, but to ask for or demand education should not be the same as asking for childcare. This really highlights the lack of infrastructure to support working families. The United States has consistently and systematically de-funded the public education system for decades, meaning that they are starving us of resources that are vital for students who are also hungry. And now the economy of the United States is looking to public education to support an economic system that does not support education itself nor its educators.

Teachers are not earning enough to pay rent and buying a house is impossible. In the communities where the UTLA works, many teachers have a second job or find room-mates because they can't afford the rent. We are being asked to go back to the classrooms to help

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1. President United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA)



maintain an economic system that does not support the communities in which we work. So at what point should we stop and do something? We also have to ask ourselves what we are fighting for?

If we speak of eliminating systemic racism in the educational system, then why are we going back to school? This is an education system which is oppressive to African-American people, people of colour, people who are different. Instead of maintaining this and supporting an educational system that does not support people of colour and an economic system that does not support the families of the students, this is the time when we have to stand up. We have to stop. Educators need to stand alongside our communities of colour, with working class families, and demand more for education. We have to demand that our politicians act because people's lives are at risk. An inclusive education system that represents us all is what is at stake.

How long are we going to fight for what is right? It is about all of us, at the national level and at the

international level. We must generate actions now, both nationally and internationally, to send a clear message to the privatizers - to the millionaires and corporations - that as workers we are united across the various sectors and we say enough is enough. To fight together, on all fronts, asking all sectors of labour to hold national and international meetings and demand that our schools be safe and that they give us funding for schools. Governments must provide more funding to schools than they are now.

We cannot leave this to local taxes. We must demand more and not less. We must continue to be visible in our communities. We must be in the streets to let our voices be heard and to demand justice because this is the moment to create a new world. We cannot go back to how it was before. We need to create a new world and new possibilities and when we do that, we will give our students what they deserve. That is justice and it is up to each one of us to make this come true.



**#ContraLaDesigualdadEducativa**  
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## **IDEA Network Campaign - 2021**

### **IDEA Network Declaration Against Educational Inequality, an Emancipating Education**

The world has shifted with the grave consequences of the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, affecting all nations and especially those with great structural inequalities within their respective populations.

This health crisis has combined with economic recession, rising unemployment, increased poverty levels and a deepening of preexisting inequalities; products of neoliberal policies that have spread throughout the planet in these times.

This situation is reflected in the education sector by growing inequalities between families regarding standards of living, levels of education, access to internet and the availability of technical resources and digital devices, among other issues. These circumstances also affect the precariousness of teachers' working conditions and overwork, due to new demands stemming from the sudden shift to education systems based on new communications in information technologies without ensuring necessary conditions for successful pedagogical processes.

As the pandemic unfolded last year, governments resorted to various mechanisms in education to adapt to the situation. But with a lack of public infrastructure for online education, most opened the door to large multinational tech businesses, such as Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon y Facebook, generating an environment for greater privatization and commodification of education.

In the face of these developments, the labour and social organizations of our IDEA Network call for a global mobilization to resist this assault on public education. We do so in the year of the centenary of the birth of Paulo Freire, a tireless fighter for emancipating education, who warned, "It would truly be naïve to hope that the dominant classes would develop an education that encourages the dominated classes to perceive social injustices in a critical fashion."

**Given the factors above, the IDEA Network declares that today more than ever, we must:**

- Place pedagogy at the center of public debate and fight to connect and expand experiences of alternative education developed throughout the Americas. We consolidate education policies that place the right to education above those that would make education a commodity.
- Strengthen the bonds between teachers, their organizations and the community in a common struggle for universal, critical, humanist, scientific and creative education that promotes the protection of living things, nature, art and culture, and is at the service of our peoples.
- Demand that nation states generate legal norms and regulations that prevent transnational corporations from commodifying the education process.
- Respect labour rights won by education workers and guarantee children and youth their right to universal public education, from early childhood to the post-secondary level.
- Guarantee better working/teaching conditions for teachers, considering holistic health, and adequate equipment and infrastructure; together with the improvement of standards for vulnerable students and their families.
- Recognize the importance of the Internet as a public utility. Internet access must be provided as a social right, but without opening the way for corporations to, behind the screen of “free services,” use the private information of users throughout the world as raw material to impose the values of the market and neocolonial hegemonic principles.

In this centennial of the birth of Paulo Freire, a visionary advocate for emancipating education, and in the face of growing social and educational inequality, we declare our defense of free, secular and emancipating Public Education as a social right.

**Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas - IDEA Network/Red SEPA**



## What is IDEA?

The Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA) 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 on social rights of "free" trade agreements and other transnational neoliberal policies. 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, establishes 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 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: the Education Research Network (RIE) and an Indigenous Educators' Network (REI)

The RIE involves researchers working with educator, student and community organizations in collaborative work to produce studies that analyze and compare similar situations and policies in a range of American countries. The REI enables indigenous educators to communicate with their counterparts in regions 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/Brazil)
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF/Canada)
- Latin American and Caribbean Students' Organization (OCLAE)
- One representative each from the RIE and the REI

Initiative for Democratic Education in the Americas (IDEA)

**"Weaving a public education that transforms the world"**

