



# Intercambio

Education Research Bulletin of the IDEA Network

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## PRIVATIZING TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: social responses and the construction of alternatives

PHOTO: MOBILIZATIONS OF ECUADOR

Eblin Farage y Raquel Dias | Alejandro Álvarez Béjar | Ángela Zambrano Carranza | Maribel Guerrero, Ana Figueroa y Carlos Moreno | Luz Albergucci y Liliana Pascual | Nicole Seguin | Tracey Germa y Michael Young

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# INTRODUCTION

We write the introduction to this issue of *Intercambio* in the midst of the global health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are living a historic moment due to the global character of the pandemic, the number of those infected and those who have died. This health catastrophe has exposed the harm caused by the neoliberal policies that have been applied for more than 30 years, leaving wide open the dismantling of the public, the privatization of health systems, the worsening of living conditions and the prevalence of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension.

The global economic crisis that was already in progress has deepened with the pandemic; it is a systemic crisis and its pattern of accumulation will obliterate small and medium businesses, and will leave millions of workers unemployed which will heighten inequality.

There are multiple impacts on education. According to UNESCO, 1.198 billion students are out of school in 150 countries, and millions of teachers have had their working conditions affected. The closing of schools affects the entire society because in many countries schools are the spaces that provide safety, food and affection to millions of children.

This health emergency has also been taken advantage of to promote the massive use of digital platforms to carry out online education. This means improvisation, simulation and, of course, big business for the owners of large transnational communications and education companies.

A danger that we as education workers and our unions face is that some are taking advantage of the current crisis to impose mixed educational models (in-person combined with online classes) as a standard where the transmission of simplified knowledge is what dominates and the formative, critical and humanistic nature of education is abandoned. And where the social and collective essence of teaching and learning is threatened.

In the face of a horizon of uncertainty towards a “new normal” after the pandemic, where the large communications and education corporations such as GSMA, Microsoft, Weidong, Amazon, Google, Facebook, Coursera and Zoom seek to take advantage of the power they have gained during this emergency, we the education unions, the teachers and the students that participate in the IDEA-Network know that the crisis that we are living through is also an opportunity to question the neoliberal model of removal of rights that has been imposed on us. We are preparing ourselves to act in this context and reverse the budgetary restrictions and the strict control of teachers that seek to transform them into mere facilitators in the transmission of educational content. To do this we have started a cycle of online (for the time being) seminars, “Disaster Capitalism: public education in the context of the pandemic,” to define an agenda of international struggle and actions to carry out.

Fortunately we can count on the commitment of the organizations that converge in this effort of international solidarity, and the experience developed over the past 20 years as the IDEA Network, to promote education for transformation with social justice and for emancipation of the peoples.

In this issue the reader will find articles that deal with some of the main problems that the secondary and post-secondary education sectors on our continent face. Even before the pandemic, the privatizing hurricanes had battered education all over the Americas.

From Brazil, Eblin Farange and Raquel Dias present a pivotal theme for the exercise of critical pedagogy: teaching freedom. They tell us that public education in Brazil has been a constant target for commercial interests in



a recurring attempt to transform it into an attractive niche market for mega international investment. Higher education is seen as business but also as part of the control necessary for the imposition of hegemony as the right-wing forces that govern this country exercise their power.

After analyzing the role of international organizations in the design of neoliberal educational policies orchestrated by different governments in Mexico, together with the intensive use of new ICTs, Alejandro Álvarez Béjar warns how this can have important political-social consequences. Without democratic control this can affect in the long-term the national capacity for endogenous change in each of our countries.

The failure of governments to guarantee their right to access and permanence in higher education fundamentally contributes to one of the most serious problems for youth - social exclusion. This is the theme that Ángela Zambrano Carranza deals with, from an Ecuadorian perspective.

From the Confederation of Education Workers of Argentina, Luz Albergucci and Liliana Pascual explain how many governments take up international organizations' proposals, transforming them into education policies. In their analysis they discuss teacher training and standardized evaluation in Argentina and question the centrality of these standardized exams and the use of their results to legitimize political decisions on austerity in higher education.


Labour precarity for higher education workers is a problem that crosses borders and has similar characteristics across our countries. Nicole Seguin from the BC Federation of Post- Secondary Educators, shows the lack of equity in pay and contract conditions for educators who are not part of collective agreements and the struggle that they are carrying out for equal pay for equal work.

Also, from Canada, Tracey Germa and Michael Young, from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) discuss the struggle of their federation to defend public education, in particular in the face of the attempt by education officials to lay off 10,000 teachers by making it mandatory that students receive one online course per school term. The combativeness of OSSTF members, and the support of academic communities and society as a whole, allowed them to stop this effort by the Ontario government.

Another case of struggle against labour precarity is presented in the collaboration between Maribel Guerrero, Ena Figueroa and Carlos Moreno, members of the SIDUNAH (Union of Teachers of National Autonomous University of Honduras). They also deal with the precarious conditions under which educational activities in this institution are carried out.

We close this issue with a rap song from university students in Costa Rica. Its title, "Awakening Consciousness," conveys the importance of a process in progress among this country's students.

We hope that this issue of Intercambio contributes to a reflection on the difficult conditions under which students, teachers and their unions struggle to guarantee the right to education and to carry out proposals in the face of the increasing privatization in higher education today.



# THE DESIGNS OF CAPITAL ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: PRIVATIZATION, COMMODIFICATION AND LIMITING ACADEMIC FREEDOM

PHOTO: REUTERS / ADRIANO MACHADO

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## *Summary*

Public post-secondary education in Brazil has been a constant target of commercial interests aiming to transform it into an attractive market for international mega-investment. This onslaught by capital occurs in the context of increased precarity in teaching in higher education, with structural limits on both its quantitative expansion and public investment in private education. So that this project can be viable, capital has begun to utilize other methods in an attempt to avoid opposition from society and the academic community to the dismantling of public higher education. An example is the so-called “non-partisan school projects” which attempt to impose a “single thought” on higher education. This model of education gained momentum with the election of the new president of Brazil for the 2019-2022 term, as we shall demonstrate in this article.

**Key Words:** Higher education, academic freedom, commodification.



### ***Introduction:***

Brazil's public education system developed slowly and gradually, with the contemporary administrative structure stemming from the University Reform of 1968 during the military dictatorship (1964-1985). The expansion of public universities began in the first decade of the 21st century, in particular with the imposition of racial and socio-economic quotas. Nevertheless, despite the expansion and democratization of public post-secondary education, access is still limited with approximately 20% of higher education being public and 80% being private.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF/1988) is an important benchmark for Brazilian public universities; article 204 establishes the autonomy of universities and universal access/free tuition, and article 206 the freedom of academic thought.

These changes in Brazilian education are parallel to social relations under capitalism in each of its historical periods. Since the crisis of capital, new requirements have been imposed to reconfigure social and public policies with the objective of commercialization. Education as well as health and welfare are considered as potential markets for capitalist development, under the directives of neoliberal policies and expressed in ultra-conservative measures affecting public education.

### ***Pro-capital policies applied to public education in Brazil:***

Within the framework of CF/88 and the 1996 Education Law, we can see in the National Education Plans or PNEs and other laws which govern education in Brazil the contradictory elements of disputed corporate proposals – on the one hand, the defense of public education policy based in universality, secularism, quality, respect for labour rights and opposition to the commercialization of education, and on the other, the regulation and promotion of private initiatives and adaptation to projects of international capital.

Higher-education has gone through an intense process of commercialization and counter-reforms. After 10 years of no public bidding, in the 2000s public universities began to expand, with new faculty and staff hires; these were, however, insufficient to cover the historical deficit in resources. The expansion, including more seats for students, did not include a structure to guarantee the three pillars of public universities: teaching, research and outreach. Nor did it mean all students were able to attend.

At the same time that public education broadened its scope, so did private schools through public subsidies with programs such as the Fund for Financing Students (FIES) created in 1999 and the University Program for All (PROUNI) in 2004; these programs maintain the private conglomerates in the education sector.

In addition to the process of commercialization which occurred in Brazil itself, the international political and pedagogical model of the Bologna Process required a mass amount of certification, modernization and online learning as central to the model.

The private sector markets itself with an education model which was initially expanded through the approval of sub-contracting. The government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in the 1990s eliminated a number of technical staff within universities; he created private legal foundations which governed public-private partnerships, and which sought to subordinate research and production of knowledge to interests of the private sector.

In the second decade of the 2000s, the adoption of the National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024 incentivized the growth of private education and deepened commercialization and the promotion of conservative perspectives within public education. In 2015, successive funding cuts and the promotion of new goals for Science, Technology, and Innovation in 2016 widened possibilities for privatizing public universities and dismantling full-time tenured positions.

Later, with the approval of the Middle School counter-reform in 2017 and the approval of the PNEs in 2017 and 2018, a new structure for elementary and



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PHOTO: NEWS SECTION ANDES SN

secondary school was imposed with repercussions for undergraduate university courses, in particular with regards to students not having the proper prerequisite background knowledge.

In 2017 the Supreme Federal Court broke with the 1988 constitution and authorized the collection of tuition payments for graduate courses, opening up the possibility that, under the excuse of an economic crisis, in the near future tuition fees could be expanded to undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees as well. All of these actions at the federal level, linked to struggles against forced labour and outsourcing (both in 2017), deepened the precariousness of federal post-secondary institutions. The federal model became the preferred education model for state and local authorities.

### ***The resurgence of conservatism under public higher education: “Non-partisan” Schools***

In addition to the above-mentioned actions, public universities are under attack from conservatives who are attempting to destroy the public character and social function of university education as a producer of diverse social, cultural, and scientific knowledge. An example of this is the number of military personnel and people linked to the Non-Partisan Schools Project

being appointed to positions within the Ministry of Education. In his inaugural address Minister Ricardo Velez Rodrigues, emeritus professor of the Estado-Maior military academy (ECEME), “committed to fighting against cultural Marxism, currently present in secondary and higher education institutions,” according to a report published by the site G1, January 2nd, 2019<sup>1</sup>.

In line with official discourse, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front says in its Manifesto for the Nation (2018, pg. 54) that it deems it necessary “to liberate public education from authoritarianism, gender ideology, and the ideology of pornography [...]”.

These ideas form part of a series of bills which seek to limit freedom of thought and academic freedom through the prohibition of certain content or punishment of educators, as a way to encourage the persecution of teachers by apologists of the Non-Partisan Schools initiative.

In the second half of 2018 and in the midst of an electoral campaign, there were twelve attempts to approve the Non-Partisan Schools initiative in the House of Representatives which faced opposition from the National Front for Free Schools, students unions and other movements, and several members of the opposition parties.

It’s important to note that the Non-Partisan Schools initiative seeks to modify the LDB, including in the principles of national education “respect towards the convictions of students, their parents or tutors, giving priority to family values regarding academic education in aspects related to moral, sexual, and religious education”(PL 7180/14). The initiative will also prohibit the distribution of books in public schools around issues of sexual orientation in order to end “indoctrination” in schools.

<sup>1</sup> “Ricardo Véllez Rodrigues assumes the MEC and says that Cultural Marxism is against the government” y dice que Marxismo Cultural contra el gobierno”. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/01/02/ricardo-velez-rodrigues-assume-ministerio-da-educacao-em-cerimonia-em-brasilia.ghtml>. Accessed: 08/02/2019.

In the name of this supposed fight against indoctrination, the Non-Partisan Schools Initiative devalues the figure of the teacher. As Penna (2017) notes, this is present in the “removal, sometimes explicitly, of all the work of the teacher, to the extreme of eliminating freedom of expression”. The author concludes that, “according to this logic, teaching is the only profession in Brazil that has no right to freedom of expression”.

### ***Final Reflections***

Current projects in Brazil support the plans of capital for education, orienting it towards privatization, commercialization and in the interests of corporations. As the president, Jair Bolsonaro, expressed in his inauguration speech: “teachers should promote quality education to prepare children and young people for the labor market, not for political militancy”.

Conservatives are attempting to sell the false idea that public universities have no social function. This discourse denigrates educators and universities, and it transfers the responsibility of education onto middle schools through distance learning and a reconfiguration of the curriculum, thus leaving the universities the role of educating an intellectual elite made up of those who can afford a university education. The objectives of capital are clear, but to achieve them, it will be necessary to silence those who resist.

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# THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL BODIES AND NEW ICT<sup>1</sup>, IN ESTABLISHING THE DIRECTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MEXICO

PHOTO: CONACYT NEWS AGENCY

**Alejandro Álvarez Béjar\***

**Summary:**

Thirty-five years of neoliberal economic policies in Mexico have profoundly affected the education, health and social security sectors, worsening budgetary inequalities, infrastructure deterioration and overall quality. It is wrong to orient educational changes according to the requirements of the market since this only aggravates the distortions experienced by labour markets after long years of austerity and the presence of dominant monopolies. The global economic crisis of 2008-2019 has not resolved delicate economic and social problems, but rather it has accentuated important changes: an expanding multipolarity with the ascendancy of emerging economies, a decrease in the relative weight of developed countries, and the increased centralization of capital and weight of oligopolies. Additionally, it has given rise to a Fourth Industrial Revolution which encompasses complex and long-lasting scientific and technological changes, especially in the countries of the global South. Post-secondary education, subject to globalizing policies on the part of bodies such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Information and Communication Technology. (Translator's note.)

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has experienced an increased focus on ICT with important socio-political consequences which, without democratic control, may ultimately affect our national capacity for internal change.

This article deals with two of the four themes dealt with at length in the keynote address, “The National and International Context and its Influence on Public Higher Education,” presented by the author during the Interdisciplinary Week, “Prospects for Public Higher Education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” UPI-ICSA1, IPN2, Mexico.

### ***The role of international bodies in higher education***

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is formally dedicated to economic development, but in reality is a kind of “Club of Rich Countries” created to influence the economic policies of all the rest by laying out guidelines. Its essential purpose is to make capitalism work on a global basis. It currently comprises 34 countries, practically all the developed countries and various emerging economies such as China, India, Korea, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Chile and others.

In the past 25 years education has become one of its main concerns with the approach being that education is basic to the formation of “human capital” and an important component of capitalist development.

Without any official role, the OECD has involved itself in the management of financial crises, the application of structural reforms, the management of privatization and the development of statistical information relevant to better assessing economic changes. But above all, it has been giving guidelines for ways to dismantle the institutions of the so-called Welfare State: education, health and social security. Mexico joined in 1994, and since then the OECD has imposed

the application of various “performances tests,” with “scientifically proven measurements,” to compare us to “the developed world.”

The Canadian researcher Larry Kuehn reminds us that the first program of the OECD to follow this model was the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which began in 2000 and administers a test every three years. PISA ranks countries to create a sense of crisis in the national educational system. It places educational reform on the government agenda and provides reasons to change education policies. Mexico rates very low in comparison with other countries, so the results become an excuse to justify changes in educational policy which may have negative impacts. Moreover, PISA assesses only limited aspects of education (it focuses on language, mathematics and sciences) which, important as they are in the current context, are not the only important areas of education. At the same time, other important subjects are even being left out of the curriculum, such as history and philosophy. The PISA test focuses on the individual more than on collective and democratic development, which should be key elements of education (Kuehn, 2019).

The OECD has especially focused its attention on changes to public post-secondary institutions and its main recommendations have been to convert their administration to a “managerial” model which reproduces the structures, values and practices of the business world. Because of this, it conceives students as “consumers,” teachers as “providers” of knowledge, and directors of institutions as “managers or executive directors.” Thus, according to the OECD, the strategic goals for today’s institutions of higher learning are: competency, quality, flexibility, efficiency, and control. Competency implies being subject to comparison with other institutions and other countries; quality must be standardized to be measurable and comparable, based on tests of universal value; flexibility implies establishing basic or minimal educational content, adapting it to the utilization of information and communication technology and renewing it periodically; and efficiency

1 Interdisciplinary Professional Unit of Engineering and Social and Administrative Sciences. (Translator’s note.)

2 Instituto Politécnico Nacional, National Polytechnic Institute. (Translator’s note.)



PHOTO: MILENIO NEWS

means resorting to centralized management systems which demand accountability of executive directors, providers and consumers.

But the key word is control, achieved by incorporating educational institutions into a National Productivity Committee, of which employers are a central part, and supporting them with public financing but only so long as they fulfill the demands of the professional marketplace (although they never make it clear that this demand is established by employers, who never consult with professionals regarding the number or kinds of professionals the country requires). (OECD-Mexico, 2019.)

The OECD's fundamental critique of higher education in Mexico is that it is removed from the needs of the labour market (which, as we have already seen, requires few employees and will require even fewer in the future), which leads to a great waste of resources since its graduates either do not find work or fall into informal employment. Because of this, its most important recommendation is to "adjust to the demands of the professional market."

And it is the same private employers who recommend that university graduates turn themselves into "entrepreneurs," because neither in the public nor the private sector will there be enough jobs.

We have said that the policies that shape the labour market are: in the first place, budgetary austerity imposed on public finances; in the second place, the commercial

openings shaped by free trade agreements which are in essence pro-monopoly; in the third place, the restructuring of businesses even before formal reforms of labour legislation occurred, that is, before the unilateral and abrupt start of subcontracting and "outsourcing," and finally, firings and layoffs as the result of policies to combat union organizing as well as the bankruptcies of micro and small businesses due to the high level of monopolization. (Alvarez, 2018: chapter 10)

### *Some thoughts on ICT in education*

Education is a public good and a social right so we must always remember that it plays a crucial role, not only in allowing students to earn an income with a salary adequate enough to live with dignity, but also in the construction of their social values. This is why the construction of false identities such as "entrepreneurship" is highly objectionable. If the economy is strongly monopolized and oligopolized, micro and small businesses have a life expectancy of a little more than a year. This becomes a pretext to withdraw public and private responsibility for creating jobs and forces on professionals the brutal reality of unemployment as if it were a product of "individual ineptitude."

With the growing influence of private investment in post-secondary education, the classist segmentation of the latter has been accentuated. However, in the face of poor training of teachers and poor infrastructure, information technologies are not a good alternative



since they impoverish education and damage the role it plays in building values because of the profit motive behind them. Today, technological companies are central actors in the design of the digital contents of educational services and thereby disempower teachers. Finally, in terms of information technology in education, it is necessary to clear up a number of common errors. One is to believe that preprogrammed computers can replace thousands of professors and teachers. Another is the view that with online education a professor can attend to many more students than face to face in a classroom. It is probably true that “programmed learning” is useful to acquire some skills, but a rich educational experience for children and young people undoubtedly requires human interaction although that could be conveyed through ICT. But in addition, there are two unresolved problems: one, that it has still not been established that education based on ICT is cheaper and, secondly, that there is no information regarding what happens with “terminal efficiency” since most students tend to rapidly abandon large open online courses.

The harsh reality is that the essential uses of computers in education have been administrative and carried out in order to administer exams to students, not for the process of learning to construct a more just society. Strictly speaking, “data mining” is being forced on all aspects of students’ lives - how many books they read, what notes they take, how they underline texts, etc. A third error is that some professors are sharply opposed to the use of ICT in education on the grounds that they don’t know how to control its use. Bad idea: it is a process that cannot be stopped because it is already part of the social life of most students. Another serious problem is that the authorities concern themselves with providing technology to students but not to professors, and this creates a tremendous gap. They give tablets and computers to students, but to professors they give credits to buy them.

Critical pedagogical circles created by professors who use ICT in teaching can be a good way of partly

overcoming these inequalities, which in many ways are a living reflection of national and international realities. (Kuehn, blog, 2014.)<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a combination of long-distance education with in-person education can give better results, but it is necessary to do it in a controlled and experimental manner before extending it to the entire system.

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to working groups which have a critical pedagogical vision, to observe what takes place with new technologies and strive to ensure that current inequalities do not deepen. (Author’s note.)





# FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION: A RIGHT NOT YET ACHIEVED

PHOTO: OTRAS VOCES EN EDUCACIÓN.

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## *Summary*

As a universal and fundamental human right education is a tool for personal and community development, one that is guaranteed by several legally-binding international instruments. But in spite of this and of all the enforcement efforts made, statistics show a reality of low levels of coverage, access, retention, promotion and quality in the Latin American and Caribbean region. There is a lack of policies to support free public education in order to overcome all forms of social inequity and inequality at all levels.

**Key Words:** the right to education, free public education, public education.

## *The right to education*

On December 10, 1948, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established education as a human right. This was later reinforced by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), legally obliging the signatory states (UNESCO (Etxea 2005, p.5).

Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of the United Nations, specifically Objective 4, refer to “guaranteeing an inclusive, equitable and quality education and to promoting life-long learning opportunities for everyone.” However the United Nations Organization itself has acknowledged that “currently, there are more than 265 million unschooled children, and 22% of them are of an age to be attending elementary school” (UN, undated).

The statistics above reflect how the right to continuous education remains inaccessible for many, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has pointed out in its website that there are 14 million children and adolescents between the ages of 7 and 18 who are outside of the educational system in the region. The distribution is as follows:

“1.6 million children are excluded from preschool education and 3.6 million from elementary education. But the situation is even more critical at an intermediate level, where 2.8 million children drop out during junior high and 7.6 million end up being high school drop-outs. The percentage of children and adolescents who do not attend school during the earlier years of secondary education in Latin America and the Caribbean is of 7.7%, almost 4 times more than in the developed nations (2.1%)...

...7 out of every 10 children with a disability are not attending school, and more than 8 million of these boys, girls and teenagers are at a risk of being excluded” (UNICEF, undated).

The outlook is more serious and with even fewer opportunities for children and adolescents who live in rural areas, where access to education is not only limited by lack of public transportation and the poverty which renders them more vulnerable, but also by a lack of public education policies to tend to their needs and practical and strategic interests.

These limiting factors are magnified when interwoven with others conditions such as migration, disabilities, a gender gap and ethnic discrimination which even further restrict the ability to exercise the right to education.

It is also important to highlight that the full right to education is not limited to access but also includes other inherent elements such as retention, completion and quality to which, as the numbers clearly show, heads of state and other regulating authorities pay little attention when designing equitable and inclusive policies.

In terms of quality, we realize there is a need to rethink the type of education we wish to have, with more relevant models and methods to contribute to the achievement of a fairer and more equitable human society. The goal is to achieve a transformative and liberating education in which the educational community can solve the problems of its own context in a critical way, and which allows the public school to be the stage for that to happen.

### ***What do we mean by public education?***

Public education does not only include administrative aspects, generally understood to be the responsibility of the state. From the perspective of a more complex analysis, it is a philosophy and an educational concept that presupposes an acknowledgement of the universal right to education of everyone and thus foresees and includes all necessary factors to guarantee its full compliance.

Education is meant to be free, democratic, critical, innovative, participatory, contextualized, investigative, alternative, inclusive, intercultural, free from all forms of discrimination and with equality of quality opportunities.

However, and in spite of all the efforts made to defend this right and to find ways to implement it, statistics show that not all young people finish their studies. This is seen in the report of the Graduate XXI project organized by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, undated), with statistics on school desertion in Latin America showing the following discouraging results:



PHOTO: MILTON CALDERÓN "RURAL EDUCATION IN ECUADOR", SOCIOTRAMAS

- Four out of every ten Latin American students do not finish their high school studies.
- Only 20% to 30% of disabled children and youngsters attend school, and most do not conclude high school education.
- Only 30% of low-income students reach the same level of education as 80% of people with a middle or higher income.
- 50% of students in rural areas do not complete 9 years of schooling.
- More than 40% of indigenous youth do not attend school.
- Around 43.3% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 enroll in post-secondary institutions, but only half of them actually obtain a university degree.

Although the causes of these figures are mainly related to social and economic conditions such as family environment, lack of student motivation or teenage pregnancy, there are other more specific conditions that have to do with the institutional environment, ranging from actions undertaken by governments to ensure the right to education to the role teachers play in the classroom.

Free education should be guaranteed for all people

throughout their lifetime. Everyone should have the opportunity, throughout the educational system, to complete their studies in a way that will allow them to have autonomy and equal opportunities in a world that is increasingly competitive and unequal. For this reason, public universities ought to be free.

Furthermore, it is imperative that we have more discussion about what is required in the public education system. When speaking about social injustice, François Dubet (2012, p. 6) points out that "it does not seem that equal opportunities reduce social inequality..." and "it is not sure that equal opportunity will be more liberal, more favorable to autonomy, that equality of positions..."

Dubet argues that the "equality of positions" model has the objective of reducing the distance between social positions and seeks to know what the difference is between the most favored and the least favored students. Justice would mean a reduction in this gap. The opportunity model, on the other hand, only considers how many will be able to access the system. For this reason, he defends the idea of giving priority to the equality of positions, because the more equality of positions there is, the more equal opportunities there are. (Contemporary Sociology, 2011). In this sense,

equality and social justice remain as mere aspirations and although they may be acknowledged in theory, we must reconsider how to reach them.

### ***Rights and public universities***

It is important to reconsider the kind of public post-secondary education model that we need, not only situated in the traditional discourse of inclusive institutions that do not discriminate against the people who attend them and whose staff is highly committed and trained in pedagogy. It is also necessary to advance the epistemological discussion on the duty of higher education at the service of society. We must overcome the flaws of the pedagogical and educational models whose deficiencies have been shown, and which have contributed to deepening social injustice and gaps in equality.

Regarding the free and compulsory nature of the public university, it should be highlighted that it is a human right and therefore must be free because if it weren't, it would turn into a commodity. Government policies must guarantee the right to an integral, compulsory and quality education by promoting relevant strategies to increase the rates of universal access, permanence and completion, with equity between men and women, both in urban and rural areas and at all levels, from elementary school all the way up to the post secondary level. Any initiatives that seek to place fees on the services of the public university must be considered an attack against the right to life-long education and as an attempt to weaken education's social functions. Fee-based universities promote greater social inequality and fewer possibilities for peoples to develop.

### ***Conclusions***

Education strengthens the social fabric, so it must have amongst its principles: free services at all levels; the universality of the right to education without any type of discrimination; access, retention and a high graduation rate; it should be fair and be in solidarity with vulnerable sectors; it should be of a quality to empower

the individual and collective capabilities of a society; and it should improve learning and develop skills and aptitudes through holistic and contextualized curricula. It is necessary to promote strategies so that the public university is socially valued and acknowledged as an engine for development. It should be seen to be carrying out its function with a deep humanitarian sense and with total autonomy, according to the needs and interests of the population.

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# PUBLIC UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN HONDURAS: EMPTY-HANDED

PHOTO: ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION. LA PRENSA HONDURAS

**Maribel Guerrero, Ana Figueroa,  
Carlos Moreno\***

The situation of public university education in Honduras is characterized by a lack of both resources and legitimate leadership as well as by the limited influence the university community has in the development of proposals. Decisions are taken in a closed circle by those who govern.

University teachers do not have protection in terms of social security. In the face of this, the Union of Teachers of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (SIDUNAH) has publicly denounced this and taken legal action to various state institutions without any results to date. The university has turned into a space for political posturing that then turns into national reality, sadly reflecting the situation of the country.

\* Union of Teachers of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (SIDUNAH)



### ***Public University in Honduras***

Honduras has gone backwards in various areas, especially in public education which has been hit at all levels, violating the right to education that the whole population should be able to access. At the university level there is the phenomenon of exclusion which impedes entrance to low-income youth. They have to pay if they want to opt into the aptitude exam and the admissions exam that is used has a high failure rate. The aptitude exam is corporate and private, with much flight of capital without any control by the government. The exams are completely created by international organizations that do not know the national reality. An education system that is isolated and not interconnected has been imposed. Within this system university teachers find themselves trapped in their classrooms without the minimum teaching resources, empty-handed, to such a degree that the teachers must supply these gaps from their own economic resources in order to complete their assigned academic load. Meanwhile, students must rent audiovisual equipment since the university does not provide the basic resources to carry out their academic activities.

As teachers we continue to struggle to improve the quality of higher education, often without receiving the salaries that we are guaranteed by law and that have been accumulating over years. Teachers' freedom is threatened and a digital clock controls entrances and exits similar to a sweatshop factory. The law is applied at their convenience and the quality of teaching is diminished.

There are also very high rates of failure and absenteeism due to students' lack of motivation. The high ongoing

costs of their academic programs impede or delay the completion of their degrees. These youth also have their hands empty as they wait for a better present and future. In a similar vein, the evaluation of students and teachers is carried out in a vertical manner, leaving university administrators exempt from evaluation. Many of those holding high-level positions don't have even the most basic credentials but receive their posts through political patronage. The incompetence of directors and administrators is leading to disastrous results for students and teachers and also for the country. Those who govern public universities should be evaluated by the university community. Currently universities are not focused on academic matters, but rather on the business being carried out in the same buildings. We know that universities receive an important percentage of their annual budget from the state and yet they do not report on the income that they receive. Meanwhile students are evaluated in a traditional manner by policies established by these same institutions. Students find themselves constrained and unable to develop their abilities and skills. They then face challenges at work and/or in post-graduate studies inside and outside of the country. Teacher evaluation is first carried out by the teachers themselves, secondly by the students and thirdly by the immediate supervisor, all without clearly established parameters.

We all continue, with our hands empty, as we wait for a state of legitimacy to return to our country.



# GLOBALIZED TEACHER TRAINING AND STANDARDIZED EVALUATION:

## THE CASE OF ARGENTINA\*

PHOTO: INFODOCENTE

**Luz Albergucci and Liliana  
Pascual\*\***

**Summary:** This article analyzes official documents and national guidelines regarding basic teacher training to compare and contrast them with various documents produced by international bodies (especially the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Emphasis is placed on the increase in standardized evaluation in teacher's training in Argentina through the Teaching Test, given to advanced students in teacher's training, which began to be applied in 2017.

The tendency to universalize the contents of teacher training goes along with the trend to standardize the knowledge required of teachers and to establish frameworks which encompass all aspects of teacher's training. In Argentina, in keeping with the recommendations of international bodies, standardized learning tests are now central to national policy and are regarded by those currently responsible for national policy as the "empirical" basis for the necessary "educational revolution" This article questions the centrality of these standardized tests and the use of their results to legitimize adjustment policies in higher education. Particular results in certain jurisdictions of the country

\* This article was written in November 2019, before the change of government in Argentina on Dec. 10, 2019. (Authors' note)

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are presented as examples to be used in the context of federal organization.

**Key words:** teacher training—teacher evaluation—international bodies—quality.

### ***Globalized teacher training and standardized evaluation: the case of Argentina***

A review of the discourse of international bodies, especially international credit organizations, shows that teacher training has come to be seen as a problem which governments must urgently address. This is clearly shown in the statement that “the quality of an educational system depends to a great extent on the quality of the teaching staff” (OECD, 2019, p. 13). It should be noted that this conclusion, which all previous statements agree with, is highly simplified and does not consider the complexity of teaching and learning. It does not take into account the conditions in which teaching is performed (teaching resources, equipment, building resources, teachers’ salaries, teacher training policies etc.), or the conditions in which learning is developed (educational level of families, availability of books in the home or at school, previous educational background, etc.)

With the goal being to help countries in the improvement of quality, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) undertook the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) which “analyzes the work and attitudes of teachers, the learning environment, and role of school directors” (OECD, 2019, p. 11). Many other such evaluations have been carried out, all with the same objective of obtaining information regarding teaching and thus assisting countries in the ostensible process of improving “educational quality.” The indiscriminate increase of standardized evaluation pursued by educational credit bodies directly and indirectly guides the particular evaluation policies of each country. Recently a specific evaluation for countries “in development” has been developed, called PISA-D<sup>1</sup> which “focuses on making PISA more accessible and relevant for countries of lower and middle income” (OECD, 2018, p. 2).

Under the presidency of Mauricio Macri, standardized evaluation has been one of the central policies in Argentina, “one of the few policies of the Ministry which

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<sup>1</sup> PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] for Development. (Translator’s note.)



PHOTO: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARGENTINA





shows an important increase, both nominal and real, between 2016 and 2020” (Collective of observation and investigation teams in education, 2019, p. 12). During this period the state is primarily present in order to measure and control, measuring learning results—in primary and secondary school and also in teacher training—and utilizing them to legitimize policies of adjustment and disinvestment in education. But also, these results have been presented and utilized by those responsible for national policy to strengthen in public opinion the idea of a devastated and devalued school and of poorly trained teachers who are responsible for this decline, especially at the state level. The Minister of Education himself, Esteban Bullrich (2015-2017), has affirmed that “teacher training must change” and has said on several occasions that the training system is too extensive and that there must be a smaller number of institutions: “We want to modify the system. We believe that the initial training must be in fewer institutions but concentrate on better teachers of teachers.” (Romanello, 2017)

Following is an analysis of a series of documents produced by international bodies—OECD and the

World Bank, which are closely connected to each other—together with a comparative reading of current national guidelines as well as documents prepared and published by the Ministry of Education since the implementation of Teaching Tests. For this selection, we consider especially specific allusions to teacher training, teaching and standardized evaluation.

The World Bank has created various documents referring to teacher training, perhaps the best known in our country being *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Firstly, the document establishes a direct relation—without mediation or consideration of intervening factors—between teaching and learning, and from this reductionism and simplification the authors affirm that we need “excellent teachers to improve learning.” In keeping with what is being affirmed, the document then positions the teacher as a key actor to improve quality and conceives “quality” in terms of “educational results on standardized tests,” especially PISA, pursued by OECD. In the third place, it measures the economic impact of the quality of teachers since it relates the results of PISA tests with the economic growth of

the country as measured by the PBI<sup>2</sup> and adds, “The differences between the average level of cognitive capacities of countries correlates systematically and solidly with the long-term measurements of economic growth” (World Bank, 2014, p. 2). In this way, it sees education as the motor of economic growth and competitiveness, necessary for this growth. Finally, it affirms that if there is indeed little evidence regarding the success of the policies it extols, the countries which applied them have nevertheless had good results. And it adds that, in spite of this lack of “scientific evidence,” since Latin America has results greatly inferior to the average of OECD countries —measured through the PISA tests—the policies which these countries must pursue must be more radical and profound.

It is here that the need to redirect spending makes an appearance, proposing the reduction of expenditures in education to direct them toward the reduction of poverty. Another forceful statement in this document presumes that the quality of teachers is compromised by a poor handling of academic material and inefficient teaching practices. In keeping with this analysis, in April 2018 the Federal Board of Education authorized Resolution No. 337/18 establishing the “framework for professional skills of basic teacher training.”<sup>3</sup> The guideline puts the emphasis on the need to promote certain “professional skills for teacher training,” summing up and reducing the job of a teacher to a limited number of basic and general skills. In addition, this is one of the first policy documents which universalizes the contents of teacher training.

There is also the claim that in Argentina there are too many post-secondary institutions dedicated to teacher training, and that their graduates are not always of good academic standing. The document also notes that the Latin American region has a limited capacity to implement policies of improvement of teacher

training owing to university autonomy and policies of unrestricted admission.

It is important to remember that in our country there have been multiple attempts to intervene and establish stricter parameters for admission to higher education and also to limit and control teacher training. For example, in 2017 in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (governed for 12 years by the party to which President Macri belongs) there was a serious conflict when a bill was introduced which sought to close the 29 teacher training institutions and create a single institution at the university level for teacher training. In spite of resistance, the project has moved forward and currently the Teacher University (UniCABA) is in the stage of being assembled. At the national level, the Resolution of the Federal Board of Education which implemented the National Commission of Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality and of Teacher Training, CNEAC<sup>4</sup>, has also been setting up a new mechanism of accreditation and evaluation which supersedes the autonomy of provincial governments.

The World Bank document identifies three necessary steps to train high quality teachers: recruit, develop and motivate. To “recruit” better teachers, there must be selectivity in admissions to teacher training, selectivity of institutions in accordance with parameters of quality established by standardized evaluations and selectivity for the hiring of teachers through established parameters. To “develop” it will be especially necessary to evaluate and produce quotas, which for the World Bank is what assures improvements in teaching. And finally, teachers will be “motivated” to improve their performance through salary rewards and a modification to the teaching profession through which promotion is related to results of external evaluations of teaching performance. In this way, the need to “reduce or eliminate teaching labour stability (...) and empower clients (parents and students) to supervise or evaluate teachers” (World Bank, 2014, p. 42) is affirmed.

2 Producto Bruto Interno (Gross Domestic Product). (Authors' note.)

3 The legal document can be downloaded at: [http://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/res\\_cfe\\_337\\_infod.pdf](http://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/res_cfe_337_infod.pdf)  
[http://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/anexo\\_rs\\_337-18.pdf](http://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/anexo_rs_337-18.pdf)

4 Resolution CFE No. 347/18, available at: [http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/normas/RCFE\\_347-18.pdf](http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/normas/RCFE_347-18.pdf)

Meanwhile, as we have seen, the OECD has been expanding its work regarding standardized evaluations. This organization analyzes the way in which institutions and educational systems which are considered successful (also because of the PISA results) hire and train teachers, and since 2004 has proposed a series of recommendations similar to those of the World Bank: 1) attract better candidates to teaching 2) raise the admission requirements to teacher training institutions 3) give priority to quality before quantity of teachers and principals 4) raise the quality of training institutions 5) improve programs of teacher training during their professional development and 6) transform teaching into a profession rich in knowledge (OECD 2004; Acuna Gamboa & Merida Martinez, no publishing date given). Labour flexibility regarding conditions of work and types of employment hiring is, according to their perspective, also a model to follow to achieve effective teaching policies.

The OECD proposes the creation of a system of teacher evaluation with an emphasis on formative and professional processes, in both teacher training and professional practice. This system of evaluation will promote the “recognition of and recompense for quality teaching to the extent that it represents the challenge, for teachers, of confronting and overcoming their weaknesses” (OECD, 2018, p. 18).

The first attempt at teacher evaluation in Argentina has been Operación Enseñar (Operation Teaching), a standardized evaluation directed at students in teacher training programs. This standardized evaluation was used for the first time in 2017, directed at students in the final phase of teacher training. In the official documents, the model adhered to is that proposed by Darling-Hammond (2012) which “proposes three stages of teacher evaluation: during training, at the start of professional practice before the first teaching assignment and in the advanced stages for encouragement and promotions” (Ministry of Education, 2017. P.7).

The results were presented by the Ministry of Education, who observed the existence of a “strong inequality in

teacher training,” even when all official reports affirm that the results cannot be read in a conclusive manner because “given that a probabilistic selection of institutions has not been implemented in all jurisdictions, we cannot count on a representative sample for the entire country and the results must be considered of an exploratory character” (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 235).

In accordance with these readings and statements, in 2018 various adjustment policies were carried out, of more severity in some jurisdictions of the country than others: closure of teacher training institutions, programs and/or courses and transfers to the private sector of money invested in teacher training. It is important to note that these policies of adjustment were rejected by the affected educational communities: multiple protest actions were undertaken, and in many cases enrolment of students continued in spite of official communications. Many actions were carried out which gave visibility to the conflict and saw to it that, at the start of 2019, the impact of these policies in some parts of the country was diminished.

In spite of this, in the last four years our country has implemented many of the international bodies’ guidelines. Their diagnostics are being legitimized, and they have developed actions which support the trend to globalize the contents of teacher training, standardize the knowledge required of the teacher and establish frameworks which encompass and define teacher training. The Aprender (Learning) evaluation has been central to this process since it has been set up and presented as the “empirical” base for a disguised “educational revolution” which translates into adjustment and control of the formative educational system.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Operación Aprender (Operation Learning) is a standardized national evaluation, assigned to evaluate the learning of students on the primary and secondary level, which was implemented in 2016, during the presidency of Mauricio Macri. In this period, as we have analyzed in other works, the policies of standardized evaluation in Argentina was changed drastically. See Pascual, L., and Alberugcci, K. (2019), “Viejas recetas y nuevos negocios en educación” (Old Formulas and New Businesses in Education) Revista Intercambio, Year 10, No. 14, May 2019, pp. 11-15. (Authors’ note.)

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# SAME JOB, SAME PAY:

## BRITISH COLUMBIA'S POST-SECONDARY EDUCATORS AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUITY

PHOTO: FPSE CAMPAIGNS. FIGHT FOR EQUITY

### Nicole Seguin\*

For decades, unionized educators in British Columbia's post-secondary sector have tried to achieve fairness for contract faculty at the bargaining table. Unfortunately, due to the combined headwinds of largely conservative governments and an increasingly privatized approach to funding, this goal has remained out of reach. Led by the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC, educators are taking on this issue again in their current round of collective bargaining.

The corporatization of post-secondary in BC and Canada is well established. Studied by organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives<sup>1</sup>, government funding as a percentage of overall expenditure on post-secondary education has been falling steadily since the late 1970s. This corporatization plays out in

\* Member of Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia.

1 Ivanova, Iglia. (2012). Paid in Full Update: Who Pays for University Education in BC? Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from: [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2012/01/CCPA\\_Paid\\_in\\_Full\\_2012\\_web.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2012/01/CCPA_Paid_in_Full_2012_web.pdf)



three key ways: financial, administrative, and workforce. The neoliberal direction of post-secondary funding and policies were choices made by successive governments, and not inevitable or impartial decisions purely motivated by evidence-based best practices.

The rationale provided by both governments and institutions is that with insufficient government funding, institutions must make up the funding shortfall through private funds. The increase in tuition is the most obvious source of private funds; however, philanthropic donations and the corporate funding of research also have grown. Investigated at great length in Jamie Brownlee's *Academia, Inc. How Corporatization Is Transforming Canadian Universities*<sup>2</sup>, private donations and corporate research funding have been demonstrated to grow in direct relation to the next form of corporatization: administration.

<sup>2</sup> Brownlee, Jamie. (2015). *Academia, Inc. How Corporatization is Transforming Canadian Universities*. Halifax & Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing.

Post-secondary institutions have undeniably evolved from their elitist origins due to demands by disenfranchised groups in society for access and fairness. However, progress towards a system of collegial governance where those with the greatest expertise in education are included in the operation of the education institution has been slowed or reversed from a high point in the early 1970s, when government funding was at its high point. As pressure was increased by government for institutions to source corporate funds, the roles of the President and Boards filled with corporate board members and executives. This shift towards corporate operation of institutions erodes collegial governance. Institutions acting as corporate employers, minimizing costs and maximizing revenues, results in an increasingly precarious, underpaid workforce. From janitorial staff to librarians to faculty, institutions are looking to contract work as a legal mechanism to pay workers less than what has been collectively bargained. Conservative governments actively facilitate this through legislation pertaining to advanced education and labour law: the landscape open to workers in their fight for fairness has not been static throughout the decades. Acknowledging that the respect granted to the collective bargaining process has definitively lost ground in Canada since the historic high point of the 1960s, the collective agreement remains the primary path to addressing work conditions.

Within our own federation, this dynamic exists. Contract faculty do the same work and therefore they should receive the same pay.

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC began as the College Faculties Federation in 1970, at a time when college faculty were not legally able to form a union. When Premier Barrett changed this in 1973, post-secondary unions quickly began to form. Among the early working conditions discussed by educators were the lesser pay and precarious work experienced by contract faculty (also known as sessionals and adjunct faculty). Fifty years later, educators

have won historic victories in this long-term battle against precarious work in the sector, most notably achieving “regularization” in their collective agreement language in 1998. This language forces employers to move contract faculty who achieve a certain workload threshold into secure employment. However, enabled by successive anti-union governments and anti-union legislation, progress has stalled.

Now, most contract faculty within the federation’s membership are not paid fairly – some are paid 80 percent less than their colleagues. This disparity in compensation further adds to the hardship of being trapped in a cycle of precarious work. The inherent unfairness in paying people less for doing the same work is exacerbated for racialized educators who are overrepresented within contract faculty. Not only have these workers had to overcome systemic racism and bias throughout their lives and educations, but then they are held to lesser pay and the constant threat of dismissal should their studies, union activity, or any other action be seen in a negative light by administration. All workers are disadvantaged in terms of career opportunities by being ineligible for service work, such as sitting on committees, and the institutions are less for excluding their contributions.

The situation grows worse when one considers the consequences of workers being shut out of both public and private social safety systems set up to support working people. Contract faculty are largely not eligible for benefit programs, Employment Insurance, and pension programs. As difficult as life is during early stages of one’s career to face financial insecurity without an end in sight, the potential for financial devastation in the case of injury, disability, and retirement is all too real for this precarious contingent of the post-secondary educator workforce.

What are we doing to fix this problem? Firstly, this issue is at the table during our current round of collective bargaining. Secondly, we’re continuing to raise awareness about the issues faced by contract faculty

through our Fight for Fairness campaign ([action.fpse.ca](http://action.fpse.ca)). Finally, there is a lot we still don’t know about all the loopholes Employers are using and creating to keep people as contract faculty, so we’re monitoring the situation and gathering information.

Contract faculty do the same work as their colleagues and deserve the same pay. We need to make it fair.



# MAKING OUR HISTORY, ONE STRUGGLE AT A TIME\*

PHOTO: THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Tracey Germa & Michael Young<sup>1</sup>

The more than 60,00 education workers and teachers represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) knew from the outset that the struggle to defend Ontario's publicly-funded education system against the devastating agenda of the Conservative government of Premier Doug Ford would not be a short one. We also knew it would not be easy. The one-day, province-wide full withdrawal of services that Federation members were compelled to undertake in early December of 2019 marked the first province-wide strike by OSSTF/FEESO members in more than 20 years. We have seen austerity agendas wreak havoc on the classrooms of the province before, but we have not seen cuts this drastic in our history. Our leadership has taken a measured approach to our labour action, with a series of additional one-day walk-outs in targeted locations around the province. Members spend their walk-out days picketing outside their schools or at the offices of their members of the provincial parliament. The continued pressure and the

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\* This article was written at the end of February, 2020. Two weeks later, the OSSTF's strike was effectively halted when the Ontario government closed public schools indefinitely due to the Covid 19 pandemic. In May, the OSSTF membership ratified a new collective agreement with the ministry of education that includes a small increase in maximum class size (up from 22 to 23 students) and the introduction of two mandatory online course for secondary students as a graduation requirement (the government had originally sought to require at least 4 online courses).

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unified, repeated approach to political action has been designed to put the greatest pressure on the government while limiting the impact on our students.

As the cold winter in Canada wears on, our organization finds itself more than two months into one of the largest job actions in the history of our union. Our members remain steadfast, braving temperatures of minus 40 degrees Celcius to defend public education from cuts.

OSSTF/FEESO members around the province are gaining a new appreciation for words like “resolve” and “solidarity”. These are words we reference frequently across labour, but they are anything but clichés or hollow platitudes. More than a hundred years of OSSTF/FEESO history tells us that the resolve and solidarity of the members have been at the heart of every success and every victory OSSTF/FEESO has won. It is this history of labour strength upon which our members are now relying.

In 1919, 123 educators in Ontario took a significant risk by standing together to form the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation. They wanted the protection that being part of a union could afford them. They understood, as we do now, that the risks involved in defending publicly-funded education are risks worth taking. In 1973, thousands of OSSTF/FEESO members stood together when their rights were under attack and when an austerity agenda threatened the quality of public education in Ontario. Their determination to remain united allowed them to push the government to increase funding for the system. In 1985 and 1995, and in several local actions in years since, OSSTF/FEESO members have repeatedly stood together, not just in defence of their rights as workers, but also to protect the integrity of the education system in which they worked.

Over and over again, the history of OSSTF/FEESO reminds us that solidarity and resolve are central factors

in every significant accomplishment. The message rings true for all of us around the world who are fighting to protect education. Yes, we face governments who want to privatize and dismantle public education, but we also know that our fight is the right one. Our organization now represents workers in over 150 different education-related job classes from Kindergarten to post-secondary, including Early Childhood Educators, Office and Clerical Technicians, Custodians, Educational Assistants, Speech and Language Pathologists, Teachers, and Occasional Teachers. Our diverse membership helps us understand just how much it takes to provide our students with a world-class education. We are stronger because of our diversity, and that has been evident during our current labour actions.

In Ontario, the public is standing behind its education workers and teachers. According to all available polling data, the people of our province have seen the passion and determination with which teachers and education workers have come to the defense of our world-class public education system, and a significant majority have sided with educators. The public understands, it seems, that the current dispute is about those key issues that the government doesn’t want to talk about – issues like class size and mandatory online learning. Issues that have huge consequences for the quality of the learning environment and the integrity of the system.

In a highly politicized dispute, having the public on our side is no small thing. It doesn’t guarantee us the victory we need, but it gives us a distinct advantage. The public has seen our resolve and our solidarity. They have witnessed the passion with which OSSTF/FEESO members have stepped up to defend what is arguably the province’s most important asset – a world-renowned public education system. And many, many Ontarians have now come to understand that when we fight to defend our students’ learning conditions, we are really fighting for the future of the province. When we have the people united beside educators, it’s harder for a



government to continue its destructive assault on the education system.

On Friday, February 21, 2020, OSSTF/FEESO members joined in with the other three education union in our province and staged the largest education-sector strike in our history. On this day over 200,000 education workers and teachers took to the picket lines across the province. They stood under the banners of #NoCuts-ToEducation, #CutsHurtKids, and #EducatorsUnited to show the provincial government that we will not back down. Public support for these striking workers was palpable, even with over 2 million students out of classes across the province. Parents, students, and the general public joined picket lines, brought warm coffee, and honked approval as they drove past. It was a province united against the cuts to education, and the power of the people could not be ignored that day.

OSSTF/FEESO members, of course, have always known that our fight is just and that our resolve is key to the victory. Our history tells us that our victories lay the foundation for the future of education in Ontario, and the current struggle with the Ford government is already part of that tradition. This is our history in the making.



**RAP:**

# AWAKENING CONSCIOUSNESS

**By the Anonymous Collective  
from somewhere in our aching Latin  
America**

Many social sectors in Costa Rica have had to confront the imposition of neoliberal measures by the state, under the directives of the same old large international bodies (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, etc.). All of these are directed towards an acceleration of the privatization of public services. A clear example of this is in public education.

In 2018 the executive promoted the draft Law to Strengthen Public Finances at the national level and in the Legislative Assembly (supported by the ruling party legislators). Once approved, this bill had an important impact in terms of government budgets especially in terms of social security (understood as: Education, Health, Culture, Social transfers from FODESAF, National Patrimony of Childhood (PANI), among others). In addition, it placed a limit on public spending which had strong repercussions in areas like education and the assigned budgets to the regions and a reduction in social action and activities. In response, a number of resistance networks connected in an attempt to organize against the attacks that continue to impoverish the historically most vulnerable sectors.



All of this unleashed a historic student struggle that started in the post-secondary institutions in the provinces and then extended to the centre.

In order to exert pressure, the students occupied various university buildings including at the University of Costa Rica (UCR): the Pacific campus, the Engineering Building and classrooms in the Western campus, Tacaes Precinct, Guanacaste location and at the Central location: the EducArtes Faculty, Social Sciences, Economy and General Studies. At the National University of Costa Rica (UNA) they occupied the Administration Building and carried out a blockade of Calle 9 (9th Street) in front of it.

The following song, “Awakening Consciousness”, is an expression of our feelings and thoughts at this moment of resistance and struggle. The lyrics scream rebellion and clamour for justice not only through our voices, but also through collective and horizontal action that fights against capitalism, patriarchy and colonization. It is also an attempt to manifest our dissatisfaction with an academic culture that seeks to analyze objects of study before recognizing people and to, in this way, build education that, in a collective manner, seeks emancipation. We decided to create an irreverent rap with the feeling of the popular heartbeat instead of an article with words that do not always reach those with whom we want to share.

*A monster lay in wait,  
And it threatened gigantic cuts,  
What that monster could not imagine,  
Was that the student movement was organizing.*

*Neoliberalism crude and pure,  
With a right-wing government the horizon is sure,  
To cause trouble for students,  
And that is what the walls now cry out.*

*Our movement is collective,*

*The occupation was something decisive,  
I am overwhelmed by all that I live through now, but  
I have awoken I am active,  
And never again will I passively observe.*

*From campuses and precincts came the initiative,  
Fed up they sought alternatives,  
In the face of bad administration,  
Locking themselves up was an exit.*

*They took what was theirs,  
No one was scared and that is why I'm with them,  
The seed has borne fruit: they had no pity,  
They sowed anarchy and harvested freedom.*

*They headed towards Heredia one October 17,  
To support the comrades from UNA,  
Minutes later my collective discovered,  
That the Social Sciences building was going to be  
occupied.*

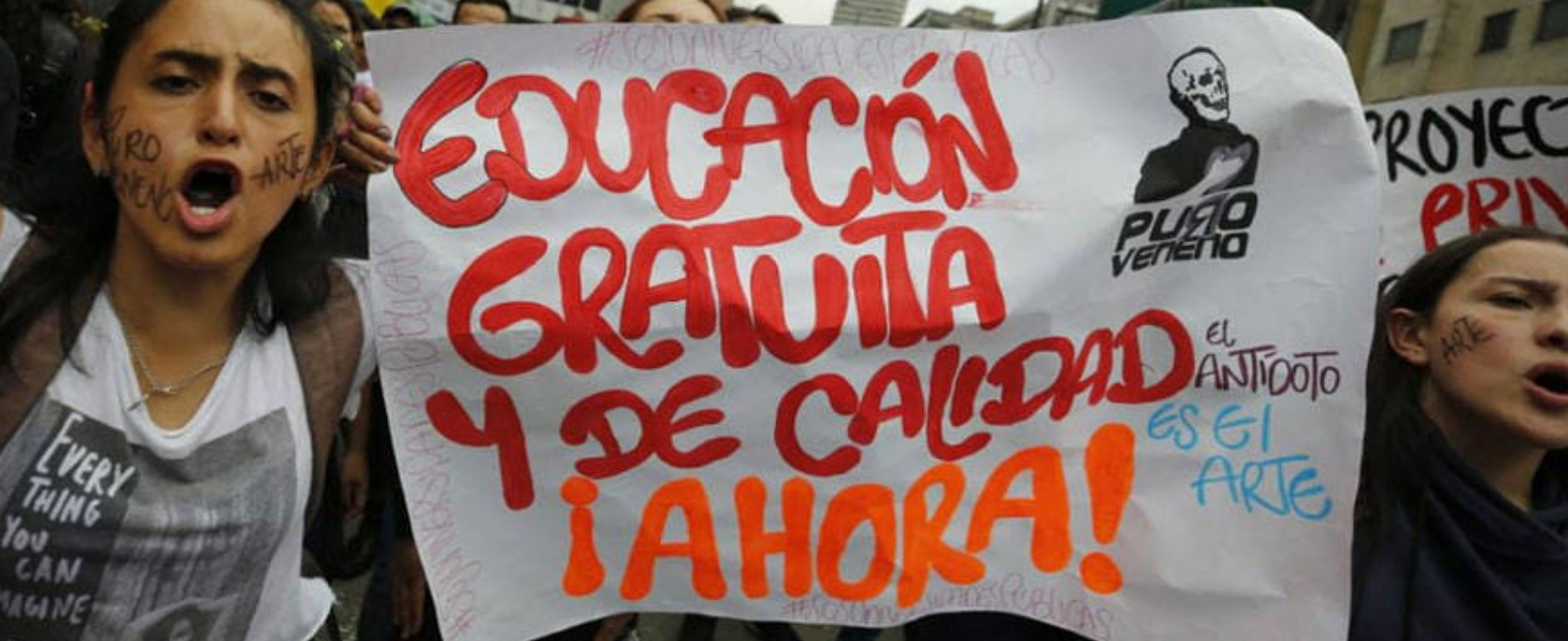
*I arrived quickly and disorder prevailed,  
This disorder that my soul so longed for,  
Because for almost 5 years the order that existed,  
Was the one that the IMF and World Bank defined.*

*Active strike, active strike, No!  
Occupy! Occupy!  
I could smell it in the air,  
The Student Movement lives, and it is no joke.*

*Commissions with missions, diversity with visions,  
Elbow to elbow among all we destroy divisions,  
Hearts with reason and millions of emotions,  
So many minds, so many bodies and revolutions.*

*A movement that has the comrades at the front,  
No more assault or abuses, a different U,  
All that's left is to accompany the struggle and to be  
conscious,  
The revolution will be feminist in all the continent.*





*Anxiety, fear, despair, and solitude,  
What this damn society has made me feel,  
Who would have said that in the occupation we would  
build  
a project that has given me back the will to live?*

*Covered faces in the UNA, security on top of us,  
Walls scream in Social, truths on the corners,  
Messages of support in all of Latin America,  
Those from below we move, those from above fall.*

*The occupation was one of awakening, of showing  
presence,  
Of struggling against oppressors and living our essence,  
My open heart spoke to you with transparency,  
I struggle because one day the sciences will be social.*

## 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)
- Caribbean Union of Teachers (CUT)
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF/Canada)
- Latin American and Caribbean Students' Organization (OCLAE)
- One representative each from the RIE and the REI

Plans developed by the Coordinating Committee are executed by IDEA employees Steve Stewart (Canada) and Maria Ramos (Mexico), as well as the committee and participating IDEA organizations

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