



“Teacher evaluation”: The solution to problems in education or an excuse to privatize it?

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As in the rest of the world,

the governments of our region are presenting “Evaluation” as the solution to the low quality of education in some of our countries, in strict adherence to the recipes dictated by international organizations.

In Peru, this “evaluation” is in full swing, but there has not yet been a single result that points to a higher quality of education. It has only justified the massive laying off of teachers.

Evaluation of teachers in Peru

The subject of teacher evaluation was first proposed in the 1980s by the United Union of Education Workers of Peru, SUTEP. It was originally framed as part of a law that tried to encourage teachers and reward them for their dedication and professional development. It all started as a list of demands that became Law 24029 (approved on December 14, 1984) and later Law 25212 (approved on May 19, 1990). They established five levels of professional development, and a system to assess the performance of teachers in the classroom,

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"Standardized evaluation = Privatization of Education". Image by Maria Trejos

with the corresponding salary increases, promotions and other outcomes.

Thus, the original intention of teacher evaluation was to be a part of the professional development of teachers, but never to be the solution for the problems in education. In order to solve the educational crisis, not only are professionals with a solid training and evaluation required, but it is also necessary to implement true educational reform. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned laws were never properly applied by the different governments, especially the entire chapter on evaluation, incentives and promotion, the requirements for which were always met with a lack of budget. The only chapters of the legislation that were faithfully interpreted were those regarding the duties and functions of teachers.

Teacher evaluation: synonym for quality education?

In fact, what is being implemented in Peru is a series of changes to labour laws and other legislation that regulates the teaching profession. It is not, however, education reform.

In order to abolish Laws 24029, 25212 and 29062 and to approve Law 29944, the current government of Ollanta Humala carried out a Fujimori-style media campaign, financed with public funds. It was actually during the Fujimori years that the first direct measures were taken to promote private education, and an attempt was made to hand control of education over to the municipalities through Legislative Decrees 26011, 26012 and 26013. But the latter failed thanks to the decisive intervention of teachers. However, what the corrupt government of Fujimori did leave as its legacy was Decree 882, which paved the way for the creation of more private institutions in both basic education (kindergarten, elementary and junior high) and higher education (institutes and universities), which by 2016 corresponded to 51% and 80%, respectively.

Later, the Alejandro Toledo administration continued the "campaign" against teachers and public education, highlighting how private education was better and blaming teachers in the public system for the "bad Peruvian education", and insisting on the need to create a law to regulate them and solve the problems with the

“...municipalization, which means to remove the responsibility for funding and management of education from the central government and pass them onto to poor municipalities, which lack the resources, so that this level of government fails. Parents, seeing the decline in school infrastructure, then opt for the low price private schools, thus favouring the privatization of education.”

teaching in public institutions. But that law could not be approved because the discussion and the debate started at the end of Alejandro Toledo's term in office.

It was during his second term in office that President Alan García Pérez doubled the offensive against teachers with the passing of Law 29062 after a dirty campaign, in collusion with mainstream media, to demonize and ridicule teachers. Teachers were called all sorts of names - lazy, neglectful, etc. Such words even came out of the mouth of the president, the son of a teacher. All of this because SUTEP had opposed a standardized test which was being called a “census assessment”. This opposition also led to government retaliation against the union. But time proved the union right, since the pseudo-assessment turned out to be yet another tool with which to attack teachers by blaming them for

being “incompetent and dumb”, and thus justifying the enactment of Law 29062 which further reduced teachers' rights and established standardized tests as the form of evaluation, with the real objective being to lay teachers off.

This law was never accepted by teachers because of a campaign run by SUTEP through which teachers were informed of the consequences to be paid if it was applied. The law was delegitimized since very few of the 360 thousand Peruvian teachers ascribed to it.

It was not until later that the government revealed its true reasons for demonizing and antagonizing the union. By implementing a fake decentralization of the education system -“municipalización”-, the federal government was no longer responsible for the cost of public education, a burden that was given to the poor

municipalities which in turn, could not afford it and thus, the implementation was doomed to fail. Parents were outraged by the neglect of the facilities and infrastructure and thus, had to take their children to low-cost private schools, something that favored a further privatization of the system. This process was later halted thanks to the pressure exerted by SUTEP and parents associations, until finally the decentralization system was cancelled during the Ollanta Humala administration.

However, the Ollanta Humala government continued attacks against teachers and public education. He is a military man who, in order to ascend to power, made populist promises he never fulfilled. He met with all the unions in the education sector, including SUTEP, and he promised there would be a single law that would regulate pensions, salaries and professional matters. That law was indeed brought in (29944) by him and the Congress, but its main purpose was to reduce the economic and labor rights of teachers and to lay teachers off, as was proven once the law was enacted.

This new legislation covering reform of the teaching profession replaced the five-tier system with an 8-level one. However, it caused a generalized decrease in level, or category, for all teachers since no teacher remained in the level granted to them by the preceding laws (24029 and 25212). The law set the age of retirement at 65 years old, which sounded positive in theory, but in reality forced sixty thousand teachers to retire all at the same time, with a miserable pension of about 650 soles (196 dollars). Ten thousand bilingual teachers were fired, without benefits or compensation, in the rural areas of the jungle, the mountains and the borders. Five thousand temporary teachers (*interino*) were dismissed through the use of a standardized test. The new legislation also eliminated the pay teachers got for

class preparation and assessment, reduced the wages of full-time teachers and eliminated job security by conditioning it to three “assessments”.

Those assessments will start as of 2017, and teachers are very concerned that the legislation will not be respected. According to the law, the assessment has to be performance-based, with a follow-up during a learning session. They fear standardized tests will be applied, as has increasingly been happening, and result in more lay-offs.

Like other governments over the last 25 years, the Ollanta Humala administration has set provisions that favor the privatization of education through public-private partnerships not only meant to improve the infrastructure, but also the management of schools. Thus, privatization is fully achieved. Another measure that is being secretly negotiated is the Agreement on the International Trade of Services (TISA). Both will be very damaging to public education.

Conclusion

As will be noted from what has been described, behind the implementation of norms to supposedly benefit teachers, such as the various laws and “evaluations” introduced over the last 25 years, there has always been the intention to establish a legal framework and to carry out actions that favor the privatization of education. That has been and still is the main objective.

Thus, it is essential to ask: has “evaluation,” and all the changes to legislation regarding teachers over the last 25 years, improved the education system? The answer is clearly ‘no’. It has only served the purpose of reducing teachers’ rights and underneath it all, of establishing standards that ensure the privatization of education.

