

Privatization:

the threat to the right to education

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond the explicit mechanism of privatization,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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