

Privatizing Trends

both “in” and “of” Education in **Argentina**¹

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(translation Carl Rosenberg)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Photo: El país

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. This trend began to decelerate in 2010.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

for the state. Of course, these reforms include the area of educational policy and significantly affect the right to education. The perspectives that regard education as being at the service of an economic model, together with those who manage the government—the CEOs⁴ of businesses and middle-management in the private sector—seek to manage public policies based on a business model.

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

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

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4. CEO: Chief Executive Officer.