

The School at the Center: the privatization of education

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With the rise of Betty DeVos to the position of Minister of Education for the Trump Administration in the US, the intention of privatizing the social right to an education at a worldwide level has become very evident. She comes from a family dedicated to catalog sales of beauty, health and wellbeing products (Amway). Amway has an international presence because of the novel way in which it promotes its services, offering the promise of financial gain for “sales leaders” who become, in effect, financially dependent.

The business woman/minister of education is determined to strengthen Charter Schools¹ –a public financing program managed by private companies. That is where Mrs. DeVos will do what she knows how to do best –manage private networks (now in the field

of education), as she does with her own company. In the meantime, she will also be tampering with school curricula to make certain she will have the type of labor force and consumers her business model requires.

In the United States, schools will be presented in a catalogue style, so that parents can choose, as consumers, the type of teachers they prefer for their children. It sounds incredible, but this is the reality that schools and teachers will be facing in our neighboring country. But children will be experiencing worse conditions, because racism and social exclusion will be increased for those who cannot afford the price of education.

With the rise of a figure who has never been involved in either politics or education, we see how plans to privatize education are materializing. Negotiators are now deciding the direction of schools. We can see how financial and cognitive capital are poised, with the same plan of expanding their cultural “anti-values” in order to (mal)form citizens, thus threatening the future of education at a global level.

Mexico is no exception, with the business sector insisting on the implementation of reforms aimed at privatizing education through a program called “The

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1. About the devastating effects on public education of Charter Schools in the US, read “Privatization of education in the United States –making life safe for the billionaire class” by Larry Kuehn.



Illustration: Daniel Carreon

School at the Center,” the backbone of the new education model. With the implementation of the model, other programs have been announced to further privatization: “Escuelas al CIEN²” and “Aprende 2.0”. All of this has opened the door to large amounts of private investment, and it has contributed to the transference of public funds to financial and cognitive capital.

“School at the center” is yet another way in which teachers are being robbed of their job security. They will be showcased on virtual sideboards, classified by their assessment ranking, so that parents/consumers can choose the highest value for their children. If you are curious, I invite you to check out websites such as “un maestro en casa” (home teacher), which are hiring agencies where pseudo- teachers offer online classes, and the students pay for them at a convenience store called OXXO³. In our consumption-driven society, teachers are not seen as human beings, but as disposable items.

2. Escuelas al CIEN is a government program that is seeking to offer Stock Exchange Bonds for the construction of school infrastructure. It is estimated that the Peña Nieto Administration will earn 53 million pesos through them. The capital and the interest will be paid to the investors over a period of 10 years, using the Federal Budget that is allocated for the building of provincial school infrastructure.

More evidence of privatization is the disappearance of rural schools. The rules of the new educational model state that schools have to be close to supervision centers. So the first step has been taken to close rural schools and concentrate students in selected locations. The question is: what will happen with the schools that are far away from the supervisors or that are located in a place that is difficult to access?

Furthermore, there is still an insistence on appointing supervisors and directors as leaders to strengthen school technical and community councils. They will also be in charge of “administrative autonomy”, which means they can now resort to public or private sources to ask for the financial support the schools will require.

It is clear that the reason the federal government refuses to have a dialog with the democratic teachers and society as a whole, to analyze school problems and find solutions for them, is that they have a commitment to private investors. The government has put itself

3. OXXO is a chain of convenience stores owned by one of the big financial groups in Mexico (Grupo Monterrey). They have stores throughout the country, which are open 24/7 and which have transformed the communities where they operate by eradicating small shops, since they cannot compete with the product mix they carry (it even includes financial services).

between a rock and a hard place because researchers and teachers have proven how unsuccessful privatizing educational reform has been. There have been four failed attempts to impose punitive assessment in the state of Michoacán. The law is not being complied with not only because it is flawed, but also because teachers refuse to abide by it.

The true intentions of the entrepreneurs are being unmasked. Even though this has been a victory for the teachers, they should not take it for granted. They must remain alert and resist privatization programs for public education like “School at the Center”, since they threaten the right of children to a public education. The business organization called Mexicanos Primero still thinks of this as a priority and the departure of their founding president Claudio X Gonzales is no guarantee of a definite victory. On the contrary, the war against education, teachers, and all thing public will escalate on a different front.

As a final reflection, we consider that the educational model that will come into effect for the next school year in 2018 is putting business people at the center, not the schools. Students ought to be the main focus and the teaching-learning process should be the priority. If that were the case, we would be making sure that the future of society did not lie in the hands of entrepreneurs, but in those of conscious citizens who are capable of dealing with the problems of the 21st century in a collective and well-organized way.

Educational workers must keep on fighting to defend public education, along with parents and social organizations. International cooperation is also required, to collectively resist privatization and to make certain that education will remain a universal right for children and young people as world institutions have proclaimed and as is demanded by peoples from all continents.



“Protest against educational reform 2016”.

Photo: Prensa latina