

ISBN: 978-9930-548-54-7

**MONITORING OF REGIONAL  
TRENDS IN THE COMMERCIALISATION  
OF EDUCATION**

# **FIVE NEOLIBERAL REFORMS THAT DISMANTLE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN EDUCATION**

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Names:	Bonilla Pacheco, Gabriela, author   Internacional de la Educación América Latina (IEAL), author   Observatorio Latinoamericano de Políticas Educativas (OLPE), author   Toner, Lucy, translator
Title:	Five neoliberal reforms that dismantle the educational system and working conditions in education : monitoring of regional trends in the commercialization of education / Gabriela Bonilla Pacheco, Internacional de la Educación América Latina (IEAL), Observatorio Latinoamericano de Políticas Educativas (OLPE) ; translation: Lucy Toner
Description:	San José, Costa Rica : Editorial Internacional de la Educación América Latina, 2023.
Identifiers:	ISBN 978-9930-548-54-7 (ebook)
Subjects:	LEMB Education - political aspects   Educational reform   Neoliberalism
Classification:	CDD 379.2 —ed. 21



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América Latina  
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Available for download in electronic format at: [www.ei-ie-al.org](http://www.ei-ie-al.org)

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Published by Editorial Internacional de la Educación América Latina in 2023.

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## List of Acronyms

**AI** Artificial Intelligence

**ANEP** Asociación Nacional de Educación Pública del Uruguay (Uruguayan National Association of Public Education)

**CEIP** Consejo de Educación Inicial y Primaria del Uruguay (Uruguayan Council of Initial and Primary Education)

**CES** Consejo de Educación Secundaria del Uruguay (Uruguayan Council of Secondary Education)

**CTEP** Consejo de Educación Técnico Profesional del Uruguay (Uruguayan Council of Vocational Technical Education)

**CFE** Consejo de Formación en Educación del Uruguay (Uruguayan Education Training Council)

**CIMA** Centro de Investigación para la Mejora de los Aprendizajes (Research Center for the Improvement of Learning, IDB)

**CNTE** Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Federation of Education Workers)

**EC** Education Commission, advises the World Bank

**ECCE** Early Childhood Care and Education

**EDU LAC** Grupo Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe (Regional Education Group for Latin America and the Caribbean)

**EDUCO** Programa Educación con Participación de la Comunidad de El Salvador (Education Programme with the Participation of the Community of El Salvador)

**EILA** Education International Latin America

**EPT** Educación Para Todos (Education for All)

**FEDISAL** Fundación para la Educación Integral Salvadoreña (Foundation for Salvadoran Comprehensive Education)

**FEIE** Fondo para la excelencia de la Investigación y la Educación (Fund for Excellence in Research and Education)

**FUSADES** Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development)

**ICTs** Information and Communication Technologies

**IDA** International Development Association - World Bank

**IDB** Inter-American Development Bank

**INEE** Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa de México (National Institute of Educational Evaluation of Mexico)

**INEVAL** Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa del Ecuador (National Institute of Educational Evaluation of Ecuador)

**IDEI** Índice de Desempeño Educativo Incluyente (Inclusive Educational Performance Index)

**IFI** International Financial Institutions

**INA** Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje de Costa Rica (Costa Rican National Institute of Learning)

**ODA** Official Development Assistance

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OLPE** Observatorio Latinoamericano de Política Educativa (Latin American Observatory of Educational Policies)

**PISA** Programme for International Student Assessment

**PPP** Public-private partnerships

**PROUNI** Programa Universidad para Todos en Brasil (University for All Program in Brazil)

**SABER** Systems Approach for Better Education Results

**SDGs** Sustainable Development Goals

**SERCE** Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (UNESCO's Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)

**SUMMA** Laboratorio de Investigación e Innovación en Educación para América Latina y el Caribe (Laboratory of Research and Innovation in Education for Latin America and the Caribbean)

**TAP** Training Assessment Project

**TERCE** Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (UNESCO's Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)

**UNESCO** United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organisation

**WB** World Bank

**WEF** World Economic Forum



# Foreword

The Latin American Observatory of Educational Policies (OLPE), part of the Education International Latin America (EILA), presents this document addressing the main characteristics of the processes of transformation of Latin American educational systems.

Previous country-by-country studies undertaken by OLPE identified the privatisation of public education systems and the increasing opening of these to commercialisation as the major tendencies.

Recent decades have clearly evidenced links between Latin American governments and the private sector with the aim of deteriorating this latter, along with working conditions for public employees. The objective of this is to turn education into a business, using public resources for private profit.

This tendency has been strengthened by the encouragement of international financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB), which for decades have promoted the privatisation of education in Latin America. Another body that has more recently become a protagonist in the discussion on educational policy is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which defines the direction of public education systems in similar terms to those proposed by the World Bank.

Currently the strategies employed by these organisations over decades can be predicted to deepen with the promotion of virtual education and the incorporation of artificial intelligence. This is added to the particular interest of international institutions, governments and private sectors in leaving behind face-to-face encounters and pedagogical exchange in classrooms.

EILA Regional Office offers this analysis to education unions—in particular our affiliates—so that they can document what is happening in this period with respect to public education systems, and relate this to the struggles that are taking place within the different countries in the region.

We hope that this document fulfils the objective of motivating organisations to think about the need to focus their strategies on defining alternative proposals for educational and pedagogical public policy, and that these allow the strengthening of their political action in accordance with the principles of the Latin American Pedagogical Movement, such that they can resist threats to the right to education.

**Combertty Rodríguez García**

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*Education International Latin America*

## 1. Introduction to the defence of the right to public education

Education unions in Latin America defend public education as a social right that must be guaranteed and funded by the state. The Latin American Pedagogical Movement (MPL) is a political-trade union tool for the elaboration of education policy proposals that can act as alternatives to those promoted by the neoliberal model. The content of this alternative policy is based on the experience and the perspective of education workers, who produce pedagogical knowledge through their work in educational institutions, and in their interactions with other teachers, administrative bodies, students, their families and communities.

The MPL promotes the idea of public education as a social right, and of rescuing the public character of education, recovering classrooms as spaces for critical thinking, the construction of individual and collective identities, and for learning through and for transformative processes.

That is why the public education curriculum has to go much further than work-centric knowledge; it must seek humanistic, scientific and technological development from a sovereign perspective; it must be guided by human rights, which teaches equality and inclusion through practice. To achieve this, our educational system must depart from the practices of neoliberal ideology, which has sold us the idea of a segmented education for a society winners and losers (Movimiento Pedagógico Latinoamericano [MPL], 2011).

### 1.1. What are the current threats to the right to public education?

Education International's Latin American Observatory of Educational Policy (OLPE) is a research tool for trade union action and the preparation of educational policy proposals. In recent years, OLPE has published and widely discussed the main tendencies with regards to the commercialisation of education in face-to-face meetings and virtual sessions.

The context in which education unions operate is characterised by neoliberal models, precarious and limited social dialogue, worsening work conditions, a history of interventions by foreign corporations and governments, all of which has been compounded more recently by clear cultural polarisation. In the context of these neoliberal policies, there is a deepening trend towards the participation of the private business sector, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and transnational NGOs in decision-making for educational policy and its management.

Certain political groups, business sectors and media sectors can be observed constantly criticising and devaluing public education. This narrative of educational crisis is functional to the agenda to commercialise education. It is functional to an entire network of international and local businesses that profit from the sustained sale of educational services that are paid for with public funds. One way to weaken the educational system is to put all its participants under suspicion: educational authorities, teaching staff and students. This perspective seeks encourage public opinion to constantly accuse, judge, measure and reprove the educational community.

In the case of education workers, the environment of suspicion is reinforced with standardised evaluation processes, monitoring inside classrooms, the criminalisation of protests, and so on.

The strategy to privatise the education system is to make it irrelevant, distant, exclusive and ineffective. We are facing a scenario of criminalisation and the weakening of the teaching career in the face of standardisation processes that make education increasingly irrelevant. This is the ideal scenario for commercialisation, privatisation, the transition towards a hybrid modality, and in general, represents the ideal conditions for the dismantling of the right to public education.

At the same time, the neoliberal policy of reducing and weakening the state is also functional to this business: if education is shown to be greatly deficient, if it is of little relevance, if students and teachers do not feel safe and recognised within the educational system, then the educational system becomes weakened, with normalisation of NGOs, churches, foundations, and corporations playing the role of the state.

Numerous OLPE studies show coincidences of approach and even of projects undertaken in partnership between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and private business groups belonging to the Red Latinoamericana para la Educación (Latin American Network for Education, REDUCA).

Among these tendencies, the OLPE has identified dynamics that are reproduced from one country to another:

**A.** Since the late 1980s, countries in the region began imposing neoliberal reforms and states began ceasing to take responsibility for social policy.

**B.** As part of this trend, ministries of education commenced relinquishing many of their functions in education policy, promoting greater participation and responsibility on behalf of non-state actors, private groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), companies, and so on.

**C.** This tendency is not exclusive to the governments of each country, but rather responds to a global legal and institutional framework that is applied on a regional and national level. Since the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, and the elaboration of The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments in the World Education Forum in 2000, global education goals have opened the door to the commercialisation of educational services. Since Dakar, the global tendency has been towards the greater indebtedness of middle- and low-income countries in order to meet the educational goals established in world forums. IDB and World Bank (WB) loans for education in Latin America, and more recently the recommendations of the OECD, contain criteria and guidelines that ultimately establish educational policy that is "financeable", and act to guide national educational processes towards reforms defined by these IFIs.

**D.** This framework includes the state of permanent indebtedness for countries and the approval of loans for education promoted by the World Bank and the IDB, loans which establish the orientation of educational reforms. Project and loan documents foresee and promote the increasing participation of non-state actors in public education. This participation has become naturalised both in the practices and approaches of ministries of education, which give continuity to public-private partnerships in the different phases of educational policy.

**E.** Ministries of education must implement the objectives established in the loans and comply with their commitments to international financial institutions, so ultimately endorsing and naturalising the growth of private businesses selling products and services directed at public education. In all countries in the region, ministries outsource private services that are paid for with public funds to cover payments for the administration of educational institutions, tuition fees, teacher training services, and the design of curricular contents, materials, evaluation systems, and more.

**F.** Business networks and business alliances are created between corporations, NGOs, religious groups, and so on, and all these benefit from public funds. Private companies selling services to the public sector do so backed by a set of regulations, agreements and accords favourable to the commercialisation of services and the promotion of private profit from the public education framework. These business networks are aligned with the Incheon Declaration and the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which call for private participation in the design, financing and even implementation of educational policy.

**G.** The United Nations has reiterated that it considers corporations and the private sector to be allies in meeting public education goals (United Nations, [UN], 2015), including with regards to financing. The document Financing for development: International development cooperation and interrelated systemic issues established that to achieve the Objectives of the 2030 Agenda, development cooperation, debt and investment resources must be unified (UN, 2019).

**H.** Another trend observable throughout the region is the existence of entities and structures such as National Councils of Education or Social Councils, which operate as supra-ministerial decision-making bodies for educational policy. In the Dominican Republic, the National Council of Education regulates processes related to the academic qualifications of teachers, teacher-student ratios, infrastructure issues and the number of school places available. The council includes the participation of a group of private actors and religious sectors alongside educational authorities.

**I.** EILA has warned that such Social Councils, Economic Councils and/or Education Councils operate as instruments to validate the educational reforms proposed by private and

other sectors. In also attending these forums, trade union organisations end up legitimising or participating in private proposals.

**J.** In addition to the strong naturalisation of the participation of private actors, international cooperation organisations and IFIs in public policy processes including education policy, recent years have seen the participation of religious groups in the management of educational institutions, in the definition of curricular contents, and in the generation of public opinion on what curricular content should include.

**K.** In this post-pandemic period, clear consolidation can be observed of the privatisation and commercialization of education within a neoliberal policy framework throughout Latin America.

These tendencies weaken the educational system, making it less relevant to working class children and paving the way for privatisation.

Along with the policy of removing responsibility for education from the state and promoting its commercialisation, there is also an increasing strategy of persecuting and attacking trade unions. Permits and licenses for trade union activities are being denied, and the right to strike and enter into collective negotiations is being violated. Education unions and their members are accused of being responsible for the deterioration of the quality of education, of representing high costs for public finances, and of excluding significant sectors of youth from the educational system.

In addition, they are accused of having conflicting interests to those of students, families and employers. At the same time, there are business groups and NGOs pushing to replace unions at the decision-making tables, seeking to make teachers' organisations invisible as legitimate actors and interlocutors in the educational sector.

The consequences of these new educational policies are obvious: they result in a deepening of the process of privatising education and an increase in its commercialisation. It is therefore urgent that the trade union movement develops strategies to strengthen and mobilise itself for action, also increasing its ability to create proposals.

In the face of this tendency, it is clear that teacher unions, and particularly EILA affiliates, are called on to confront these policies, while deepening their ability to elaborate, propose, and strengthen educational public policy that focuses on comprehensive life education and that champions human rights. Trade union strategies against the privatisation and commercialisation of education must also be elaborated from a viewpoint that is culturally and ideologically critical, and is supported by research processes as the basis for political and union action.

## 2. Four decades of dismantling the public sphere and destroying working conditions in education

In 1986, the World Bank's Education and Training Sector published a report that stated that the education sector in Latin America was a highly lucrative field and that indebtedness and the use of private services in education should be promoted as a way to achieve greater efficiency in the face of various crises. (World Bank, 1986).

In 1990, the World Bank's World Development Report 1990: Poverty proposed that public spending on education is inefficient in Latin America because all students are guaranteed free education and because teachers take up most of the budget. The same report recommends focusing the curriculum on language and mathematics (World Bank, 1990).

In 2016, the World Bank was the main lender for education in the world, while Latin America was and remains the most indebted region for education, receiving 43% of all funds that the World Bank lends—in United States dollars and with interest—to promote education reform.

In 2018, the World Bank, Latin American countries' main ally in reform and indebtedness, published a new report. This one surpasses previous reports, suggesting that when education workers mobilise, they do so in defence of "competing interests" to those of students and their parents (WB, 2018, p. 15). The document called for the establishment of "coalitions", while leaving out and isolating those who have "competing interests" with learning.

### 2.1. Why examine almost 40 years of World Bank publications?

The dispute over the right to public education is not a new struggle. It didn't start with the pandemic, nor with evangelical, conservative right-wing governments. The dispute over the right to public education has run over four decades of neoliberal experiments that have dismantled the rule of law and democracies in the region.

Educational policy is under permanent tension given the awareness of different sectors that education is central to building and reproducing different models of society. The educational system is a living environment that reflects the disputes of its time.

With the intervention and clear action of education workers, education policy has been able to strengthen its democratic character, its inclusiveness and its relevance towards contributing to social transformation. It is precisely because of their role as defenders of the educational system that teachers are constantly under attack, suffering persecution and having their work and their demands placed under suspicion.

## 2.2. Neoliberalism: Inventing stateless subjects who have no rights

The education union movement has constantly warned about the way in which neoliberal policies permeate social and cultural dynamics, affecting forms of social participation and citizen organisation.

Neoliberalism promotes the idea that human well-being can be best achieved through the maximisation of business freedoms, an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual freedom, and the absence of restrictions or obstacles to markets and free trade. According to this economic doctrine, the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to these economic exchanges, while refraining from generating any public welfare policy that “distorts” market dynamics (Harvey, 2007, p. 22).

The development of this institutional framework favourable to the economic practices described has finally come to permeate cultural and social practices.

## 2.3. Impact on the collective identity in terms of human rights

In the article “Experiments with Freedom: Milieus of the Human”, the anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2006) concludes that the expansion of capitalism has always been characterised by performing “experiments with freedom” that have led to different individual freedoms. The freedom that is given priority protection is market freedom, the freedom to consume.

Ong explains how in economic globalisation, with its de-localised and mobile workforce, the state is not willing to take care of each individual, but instead expects citizens to resort to individual resources to cope with the insecurities that this causes (Ong, 2005, p. 698). Ong also indicates that in the places showing the greatest uptake of neoliberal values, the concepts of the “entrepreneur”, of self-employed people, and those achieving individual success can also be transformed into an ideal that challenges the limits of citizenship as a collective project.

On the other hand, the masses who are excluded from their rights, are “managed” through the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and humanitarian structures that provide proof of the absence of the state. Under this dynamic, foundations, companies, organisations and faith groups form networks undertaking the non-state administration of groups of people who are classified according to needs: refugees, climate migrants, economic migrants, survivors of armed conflicts, and so on.

Faced with the neoliberal value of self-management, many countries in the Global South still defend the principle of collaboration and collective dynamics.

### 2.3.1. The naturalisation of “self-employment” and the responsibility to self-exploit

Along the same lines, the publication *Capitalism and the Death Drive* (2022), by the South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, explains how the neoliberal system no longer draws on explicit violence to consolidate its power and eliminate possible resistance, instead employing a system of “seduction”, which places the power and responsibility for their own well-being on each individual. In the workplace, this is clear through the dynamics of entrepreneurship and self-employment. While industrial capitalism took up a repressive disciplinary format in which oppressors were clearly identified and protest and resistance could be generated against an identified interlocutor:

*the neoliberal system of government has a totally different structure. The power that the system maintains is not repressive, but seductive, that is, tempting. It is not as visible as in the disciplinary regime. There is no concrete instance before us, no enemy oppressing freedom against which it would be possible to put up resistance. Neoliberalism turns the oppressed worker into a free entrepreneur, into a business of one. Today, everyone is an auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has transformed into an inner struggle against oneself. Those who fail today blame themselves and are ashamed of themselves. One problematises oneself instead of problematising society” (2022, p. 23).*

Byung-Chul Han reviews the neoliberal agenda imposed at the end of the 1990s. For Han (2022), this set of reforms represents a repressive agenda that was “sold” as a “restoring force” which through the reduction of rights and public policy, managed to “violently subject society to a radical reprogramming” in which self-exploitation and the lack of trade union organisation and political affiliation masquerade as a form of freedom.

### 2.3.2. Impact on the social fabric and ideological positioning

Neoliberal capitalism expresses itself and is nourished by “an enormous conformism and a broad consensus accompanied by states of depression and burnout [...] One applies violence against oneself instead of wanting to change society. Outward aggression, which would cause a revolution, gives way to self-aggression” (p. 25). Hence the concept of the “death drive”. This drive for death, self-responsibility, self-conflict, self-exploitation, exhaustion, burnout and repression is the seductive mechanism by which neoliberal power eliminates resistance.

In an approach focused on the importance of discourse, Elena Danilova analyses the narrative of winners and losers “used by elites for social distinction and for control” in post-Socialist Russia (2014, p. 443). Danilova points out that once the Soviet Union was dissolved, a transformation of discourse occurred, with this ideology taking on a negative connotation, being seen



as a component of the Cold War that should die with it. The author considers that, regardless of ideological and/or partisan diversity, neoliberal hegemony has penetrated the entire post-Soviet social fabric, incorporating into this its discourse and analysis of social “success” and “failure”, serving as “a mechanism for legitimising the profound social inequities that emerge or occur in the post-socialist era” (p. 443). According to Danilova, the narrative of system “losers”, people who failed to insert themselves into the market, explains the absence of social organisation and demands made of the state through public policy.

Harvey (2007) states that many proponents of neoliberal thinking occupy powerful decision-making positions, not only in business and corporate spheres, but also in educational sectors, including universities and think tanks, media organisations, and public institutions that are vital to the institutional development of countries, such as central banks, treasury departments and ministries of finance, etc. According to Harvey, this tendency towards pro-neoliberal political leadership is replicated in international structures such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Harvey concludes that as a result of this, “neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3).

### 2.3.3. Impact on the ability to debate and to create agreements

The possible slowness of the processes of dialogue and the creation of agreements makes disputes in the public sphere unattractive to the neoliberal model, which opts for fast omnipresent consensus (Mouffe, 2012), allowing the option to evade issues or to treat these as scandals, spectacles or “fake news”. Scandal, distrust and disdain towards institutions are part of the logic of development which devalues the public sphere. Neoliberalism's stance against the state (where it seeks to reduce state action to normative administration facilitating market dynamics) also disregards the value of the public sphere. In the same vein, neoliberal hegemony disdains multisectoral dialogue to achieve public policy.

The neoliberal era replaces institutions and rights with the imposition of self-managed citizenship, the uncertainties of the free market, the implantation of charity, and the almsgiving of humanitarian philanthropy. The defence of educational public policy is also a tool for the defence of the state.

### 3. Five sustained neoliberal reforms to public education

Public-private partnerships and the loans that countries take out from international banks often fall within the framework of educational reform processes. Latin America has been marked by the sustained development of at least five reform processes impacting on the comprehensive outlook of the educational system, along with working conditions. Below, analysis is made of these five reforms imposed on public education by the neoliberal model.

- Management reform: The public-private partnership model
- Curriculum reform
- Modality reform: Towards hybrid education
- Teaching career reform
- Financing model reform

The above are not the only reforms, but they represent the areas that more easily allow an analysis of the footprint of the neoliberal model on education.

#### 3.1. Educational management reform: The public-private partnership model

For several decades, education unions have denounced the public-private partnership format that is typical of neoliberalism.

In the education sector, naturalisation has occurred of the presence in and co-management of education ministries by foundations, non-governmental organisations, churches and consulting companies funded by the state or by international cooperation funds.

The OLPE (2023) has analysed the way the private sector takes advantage of and foments notions that the state is inefficient, slow and corrupt, that the public sector ignores the latest technological trends, that bureaucracy cannot act with the necessary agility, and that, because of all this, the private sector is an essential ally for public management. That is, the private sectors that become involved in public-private partnerships consolidate their legitimacy as providers and managers of services thanks to attacks discrediting public management, and the management of state institutions and/or of the governments of the day.

Such attacks on the state almost never include a complete analysis of the impact of on-going budget cuts to disable and hinder the fulfilment of its functions, with such cuts being typical mechanisms of the neoliberal ideology to weaken public management.

In this context, the private sector is promoted as the standard-bearer of agility, transparency, innovation and supposed disruptive thinking, all of which purportedly allows it to

act more efficiently and thus provide better management than the state, placing public institutions and their workers under a cloak of suspicion. Education workers do not escape from this narrative, which questions their interests, and in some countries, criminalises their demands and their struggles.

What private and business sectors prefer not to state out loud is that they earn more than any other partner in public-private partnerships: the state buys services from these on a permanent basis, and they manage to reach niche markets and consumer populations that would be unachievable without this partnership with the public sphere.

The myth has also been established that partnerships with the private sector prevent corruption, under the argument that state and public institutions are not transparent with citizens as they are only driven by political and ideological interests, and thus merely pursue purposes of servility and vote buying.

Contrary to this notion, data from the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors group show that 75% of the private philanthropic funds invested from the United States for various educational projects are channelled through non-state actors, which are not subject to accountability and transparency processes, official reports, nor payment of taxes (p. 15).

In addition, the idea is promoted that the private sector is merely a “technical” ally, and thus is devoid of ideology nor political agenda, which, is known to be false.

The OLPE has analysed the way in which:

*the private sector benefits from spreading the idea that public works and activities that are 100% public are more expensive, while public-private partnerships minimise costs. In 2016, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) accepted that there is evidence that works contracted through public-private partnerships “tend to be more expensive than exclusively public works”, both due to financing characteristics and to renegotiation costs. (OLPE, 2023, p. 10)*

Even so, the public education sector has become one of the most attractive business niches for business sectors. On the one hand, the educational system offers these a market of “consumers” made up of all age groups, all over the planet, allowing them to do business with products aimed at students from early childhood up to university professors.

The private sector can be nourished indefinitely from public funds, relying on an ongoing campaign against public management, insisting upon a supposed crisis in education, while on the other hand offering educational “products” and services that are supposed to solve this mismanagement.

It is important to continue focusing on the perversity of this model: neoliberal policy is responsible for a public education system that loses its inclusiveness and relevance, while the private business sector installs businesses that take advantage of these flaws and, on many occasions, deepen them.

### 3.1.1. Co-governing with companies, churches and cooperation agencies

Along with the naturalisation of the public-private partnership format in education, consolidation has been made of the participation of business actors in different structures and different decision-making levels related to the design of public educational policy.

In several studies on national education policy, the OLPE has identified the tendency in countries towards the operation of supra-ministerial bodies acting in educational spheres.

These Education Councils or “pacts for education” are made up of educational authorities, parents and other groups and sectors that have businesses in education, including private companies and churches. In some countries, trade unions also participate in these councils.

Table 1 lists some of the cases of National Education Councils and their composition types.

**Table 1**

**Examples of National Education Councils operating in Latin America**

Country	Law or Regulation	Composition
<b>El Salvador</b>	Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Council of Education, CONED), created by Executive Decree 57, 2015	<p>According to Article 2 of Decree 57, the CONED may be composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the academic sector,</li> <li>• think tanks (which may be private or public private),</li> <li>• NGOs operating in education,</li> <li>• people considered to be “specialists”,</li> <li>• trade union organisations,</li> <li>• churches,</li> <li>• the municipal sector,</li> <li>• student organisations,</li> <li>• media organisations,</li> <li>• international organisations and cooperation agencies.</li> </ul> <p>These actors take up voluntary, ad honorem participation. The members are organised into technical groups that work on different issues.</p>
<b>Panama</b>	Consejo Permanente Multi-Sectorial para Implementación del Compromiso Nacional (Permanent Multisectoral Council for the Implementation of the National Commitment to Education, COPEME), created by Act 59, November 1, 2018, as an advisory and consultation body attached to the Ministry	<p>“Its main function is to support the authorities in implementing the 37 state public policies and 241 lines of action agreed upon in the National Commitment for Education Dialogue” (COPEME, 2021, own translation).</p> <p>Composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Public Education (MEDUCA).</li> <li>• National Council of Private Enterprise (CoNEP).</li> <li>• Teacher Associations: Unión Nacional de Educadores de Panamá (National Union of Teachers of Panama, UNEP) and Unión Nacional de Educadores por la Calidad de la Educación (National Union of Teachers for Quality Education, UNECEP).</li> <li>• NGOs in the education sector.</li> <li>• Consejo Nacional de Trabajadores Organizados (National Council of Organized Workers, CONATO): made up of different Panamanian worker organisations.</li> <li>• Confederación Nacional de Padres de Familia de la República de Panamá (National Confederation of Parents of the Republic of Panama): This is comprised of all Parents' Federations at the national level, in</li> </ul>

	of Education (MEDUCA)	<p>addition to the Union of Associations of Parents of Private Schools, Association of Parents of Students Abroad, the National Evangelical Alliance, the National Inclusion Federation, the Panamanian Association of Psychologists, and the Panamanian Alliance for Life and the Family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Públicas y Privadas (Council of Rectors of Public and Private Universities): includes the 5 official and the 15 private universities in Panama</li> <li>• Students (pre-secondary and high school students from public and private schools): convened student representatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Republica Dominicana</b>	Consejo Nacional de Educación (National Education Council), established in Act 66-97	<p>The National Education council is “the highest decision-making organisation with regards to educational policy, and together with the Secretary of State for Education and Culture [...] it regulates the processes related to teachers’ academic qualifications, the student-teacher ratio, teaching and sports facilities and number of school places. The Council by-laws (MINERD, 2006) state that while education unions hold only one seat on the Council (for a “representative of the organisation representing the majority of teachers”), other sectors enjoy broad representation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A representative of the business sector.</li> <li>• A representative of the private sector to directly support the Secretary of State for Education, under legally recognised cooperation agreements.</li> <li>• A representative of the Dominican Bishops’ Conference.</li> <li>• A representative of the non-Catholic Christian churches.</li> <li>• A representative of Catholic private schools.</li> <li>• A representative of private non-Catholic religious schools</li> <li>• A representative of secular private schools (MINERD, 2006, p. 5)</li> </ul>

	<p>Consejo Económico y Social (Economic and Social Council), created in Act 01-12</p>	<p>The Consejo Económico y Social is “the forum for the discussion and concretisation of the National Pact for Educational Reform” (CES, 2018). It has the function to act in favour of social cohesion by representing “legitimate and supportive business and social leadership of the productive forces of the Dominican Republic.”</p> <p>Currently, the CES is composed of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25 members from the business sector</li> <li>• 7 members from the trade union and workers’ sector</li> <li>• 9 representatives of the self-described social sector, including Catholic and evangelical sectors and private universities.</li> </ul>
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*Note. Elaborated using data from OLPE 2020-2022.*

### 3.2. Curriculum reform

In times of the rise of entrepreneurship as a cultural element, curricular reform has become characterised by the reduction of educational contents and the promotion of the curriculum as a set of skills to establish learners’ places in the labour market.

The OLPE has studied the World Bank loans, as well as loans and technical cooperation from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) from 1995 to the present. There is a significant variety of loans focused on curriculum reform under the argument that educational systems are responsible for youth unemployment and poverty. Teachers are held responsible for this rather than the productive matrices generating a lack of jobs.

The push for curriculum reform continues unabated. In 2022, the IDB published the 2022 technical note IDB-TN-02516, entitled “The power of curriculum to transform education: How education systems incorporate 21st century skills to prepare students for today’s challenges”. This note was prepared in collaboration with the financial company JP Morgan and the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI). Among other things, the document mentions that curriculum reforms benefit from “strong partnerships between the private sector, the public sector and civil society [...] When reforms are inserted within larger shared visions, the probability of sustainability both socially and financially is higher” (p. 30).

Table 2 below shows a summary of these projects, comprising ten projects representing US\$950 million to undertake curricular reform. One of the most recent of these is the project

that the World Bank financed in Brazil during the Bolsonaro administration to reduce the obligatory curricular requirements for secondary school from eleven compulsory subjects to a total of four.

**Table 2**  
**Summary of IDB and World Bank projects promoting curriculum reform**

Country	Year	Composition	Name of the loan	Details of curriculum reform
<b>Guatemala Loan from the IDB</b>	2023	US\$100,000,000	Program to Support the Expansion of Secondary Education (GU-I1184)	“improve the skills of teachers in service at the secondary level through university professorships specialising in curricular areas to be prioritised by the Ministry of Education in the PADEP framework”
<b>Regional</b>	2023	US\$500,000	RG-T4136	Accelerating learning outcomes for vulnerable youths through tutoring and mentoring programs
<b>Regional</b>	2023	US\$450 000	RG- T4192	A Central American system for the recognition, validation and accreditation of basic skills
<b>Brazil Loan from the World Bank</b>	2017	US\$250 000 000	Reform of secondary education	Reducing the curriculum from thirteen subjects to three subjects: mathematics, Portuguese and English. These three compulsory subjects may be “supplemented” with one more



				subject from the areas of natural science, soft skills, technical education, math reinforcement or humanities.
<b>Uruguay Loan from IDB</b>	2016	US\$ 50 000 000	Secondary education support program and teacher training	Development and implementation of a new national curriculum framework. Design, implementation and evaluation of a strategy to expand the secondary school day.
<b>Paraguay Loan from the IDB</b>	2012	US\$ 45 000 000	Escuela Viva Program II	Increase coverage in indigenous regions. Increase school completion rates in rural and urban areas.
<b>Peru Technical Cooperation IDB</b>	2012	US\$ 600 000	Improvement of Educational Management	To provide the technical teams of the MINED and three Regional Governments the capacity to redesign their approach and methodology in key processes: planning; budget programming and execution; curriculum development; and teacher performance.
<b>El Salvador World Bank Loan</b>	2011	US\$ 60 000 000	Improvement of educational quality	"Adapting curricula to different student groups" and "teacher training for the implementation of new curricula".
<b>Regional Technical Cooperation IDB</b>	2008	US\$ 96 500	Incorporation of Technology in Education: Learning from	"To examine the current Korean education system and how it has achieved high quality standards with a focus on the

			the Korean case	importance of information technology. [...] the role of technology in science, education and e-learning, and the role of teachers in a technology-saturated classroom. Participants in the workshop will include government employees, Ministry of Education officials, National Congress officials, parliamentarians, teachers and students."
<b>El Salvador World Bank Loan</b>	2005	US\$ 85 000 000	Excellence and innovation in secondary education (ÉXITO program)	"Design of flexible educational and pedagogical models: Accelerated, semi-distance and distance education", and "Centring the curricula on Spanish, arithmetic, science and English"
<b>Paraguay Loan from the IDB</b>	2003	US\$ 23 400 000	Programme for the improvement of early childhood and preschool education	To design curricular guidelines for preschool and early childhood education.
<b>Chile Loan from the World Bank</b>	2002	US\$ 75 750 000	Lifelong training and learning project	"To finance, through a competitive fund, the vertical coordination of technical secondary school with tertiary technical-professional education, through the establishment of technological curricular disciplines. Horizontal coordination of technical secondary education and tertiary education with the labour market will

				be established through regional networks of educational institutions at technical, secondary and tertiary levels.”
<b>Uruguay Loan from the IDB</b>	2001	US\$ 75 000 000	Programme for the modernisation of secondary education and teacher training	Transforming the Second Cycle of Secondary Education (SCEM for the initials in Spanish), through curricular reform (to be less academic), so allowing a decrease in school failure and reducing dropout and repetition rates. Creating a technical team supported by consultancies and internships for the design of the new curriculum structure and the implementation of the new programs of study [...], greater diversification and flexibility of the existing curricular offer.
<b>State of Paraná, Brazil IDB loan</b>	1996	US\$ 100 000 000	Program for the improvement of secondary education in the state of Paraná	Design of a secondary school curriculum.
<b>Chile Loan from the IDB</b>	1995	US\$ 35 000 000	Project to improve the quality of secondary education	“To reformulate the thematic curriculum for both scientific-humanistic and for technical-vocational secondary schools [...], developing the evaluation capacity to monitor consistency between the recommended and the learned curriculum.”

*Elaboración con datos del Banco Mundial y del Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo.*

OLPE insists that these loans put the region's countries in debt to promote reforms that are not created with the input of people working in education, who have knowledge of the educational reality and the pedagogical needs of our countries.

For these reasons, the Latin American Pedagogical Movement defends the importance of resisting and eradicating reforms in which the region's peoples are subjected to experiments by non-pedagogical actors who use public funds to test their neoliberal theories, destroying the right to education.

### 3.3. Reform of the face-to-face modality: Weakening classroom encounters and promoting hybrid education

Currently, the IDB is generating the indebtedness of various Latin American countries in order to promote educational reforms for "hybrid" or "combined" education systems.

These systems propose mixing some face-to-face classroom spaces with non-face-to-face activities. Non-face-to-face time may be used on digital activities or otherwise. Faced with conditions of low access to connectivity and the internet, it is very likely that what is made available to the bulk of the population is an education without face-to-face nor digital activities, but is instead self-managed.

The IDB describes hybrid education as a combination of:

*face-to-face and remote education through different media such as online learning platforms, TV or radio [...] It is necessary to rethink education and develop teaching and learning models that capture the attention and interest of students to learn in different ways in each of these modalities. The different technologies should be used as tools to accelerate learning rather than as simple channels to transmit content. With less time in schools, it is essential that the development of collaboration skills among students is prioritised, both in face-to-face and remote components (IDB, 2020).*

The IDB also asserts that "new skills and teacher profiles" are needed, along with a pedagogical model focused on "autonomy in learning and in the use of time". It argues that it is necessary to "guarantee a smooth transition and find effective models so that teachers can develop these competencies."

Taking into account the experiences of educational reform, and based on the IDB's description, it can be expected that this combined or hybrid modality will require:

- transforming educational contents for much reduced face-to-face modalities.
- elimination of the number of teachers with full-time contracts, as students will not be in classrooms.

- providing training to teaching staff to work in this new format.
- in the event that there is connectivity, developing or distributing some type of digital content.

The IDB mentions the need for a “change in the regulatory framework structuring the digital transformation of education”. It warns that the implementation of this model “must go beyond the context of the pandemic.”

### 3.3.1. Financial and non-pedagogical actors against classroom encounters

The Latin American Pedagogical Movement (MPL for the initials in Spanish) considers that educational institutions should function “as spaces that guarantee rights and the full exercise of citizenship” (MPL, 2011, p. 38, own translation)

Before the pandemic, Latin America had already seen the low educational relevance of technological experiments such as “One computer per child” and public-private partnerships for digital education such as the Omar Dengo Foundation in Costa Rica and the Ceibal Foundation in Uruguay.

These experiments, far from strengthening access to technology in the classroom, generated several decades of private business in education.

Before the pandemic, the Alianza por la Digitalización de la Educación en América Latina (Alliance for the Digitalization of Education in Latin America, ADELA) was established. At that time, the Omar Dengo Foundation and the Ceibal Foundation played central roles promoting this alliance.

With the arrival of the pandemic, there was an increase in the enthusiasm of financial sectors for the promotion of educational models combining face-to-face spaces with online or distance education, known as hybrid models.

Several projects are currently being piloted in Latin America aimed at weakening face-to-face education. These projects do not prioritise the meeting of peers nor the pedagogical mediation of teachers, but rather open the door to moments of “self-learning” and/or digital interaction.

Models with less face-to-face time put at risk not only the work stability of teachers, but are certainly also the beginning of a policy of educational exclusion due to the digital divide existing in Latin American countries.

Working class children go to school and college to meet up with other people their age, to think collectively, sharing ideas and thinking critically about their reality. In addition, educational institutions are safe places providing access to food, water, professionally trained people who can support students in their learning processes, materials, laboratories, gardens, libraries, and more.

To impose non-face-to-face models is to banish children and youth from physical meeting spaces, from building identities within a community, and from accessing basic services that they do not have at home.

Nonetheless, global actors insist that digital-based education models operating with a minority of teachers and a majority of “facilitators” could serve as a “response to low resources, to increase access and learning in a cost-effective way” in order to “reach areas without schools, or where schools do not exist or are overcrowded, in refugee camps and in marginal urban areas” (EC, 2021).

During 2020, in the context of the pandemic, the IDB initiated at least four Technical Cooperation projects to design different aspects of these reforms towards hybrid education, also approving two new loans for this purpose. Table 3 lists some of these projects.

**Tabla 3**  
**IDB projects aimed at designing non-face-to-face education**

Project	Amount in USD
G-T3779: Teacher Training for Distance and Hybrid Education. Project Stage: Preparation (UNESCO Collaboration)	USD 150 000
IDB RG-T3793: Teacher Training in Digital Education and Distance Education Pedagogy in the Caribbean	USD 200 000
RG-T3754: Support for the Learning of Early Education Reading and Writing in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis. Stage of the Project: Preparation	USD 450 000
IDB RG-T3796: Dissemination and Knowledge for Technical-Vocational Education and Training Transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean	USD 500 000

*Elaborated with data from the IDB*

On multiple occasions, OLPE has warned how initiatives that propose progress in educational processes based on digital tools ignore the reality of the region and open the door to new forms of exclusion.

Neither teachers nor students will be able to take advantage of educational spaces via the internet, due to recognised data on digital exclusion in the region showing that:

- 244 million people do not have access to mobile or fixed internet services (IICA, 2021), and 40 million households have no connectivity.

- 46% of children between 5 and 12 years old (32 million children) do not have access to any connectivity for their education.
- 79% of working people in Latin America “work in activities that cannot be done via telework” (ECLAC, 2020). That is, 79% of families cannot stay at home and accompany and guide children during non-face-to-face and “self-study” schedules.
- According to ECLAC’s Regional Broadband Observatory (ORBA), 2/3 of Latin American and Caribbean countries “do not reach the download speed requirements necessary to employ digital solutions” for educational processes (ECLAC, 2020).

During the pandemic, OLPE pointed out that digital platforms and resource initiatives, as well as teacher training courses in virtual teaching methodologies, do not address the reality of Latin America. The promotion of non-face-to-face models arises from neoliberal policy whose impact is to destroy teaching work and the teaching career.

### 3.3.2. What private businesses lie in hybrid education?

In June 2023, the IDB blog published the article “Smart spending to finance quality education” (IDB, 2023), which stated modernisation to include “among others, the training of teachers for hybrid teaching, the guarantee of universal connectivity and the intentional emphasis on 21st century skills”. The IDB calculated that to this end, “the region must allocate at least US\$221 billion in the next ten years to achieve this leap”.

It is to be expected that private groups will want to take advantage of this business opportunity by designing commercial initiatives and products for both the scenario where internet connectivity exists, and that where there is none.

In scenarios where internet is accessible, private businesses can sell to the public authorities services such as:

- The development of platforms.
- The development and sale of software.
- The sale of devices (computers and phones).
- Teacher training.
- Consulting services to governments by “external teams” to manage the reform.
- The installation of connectivity networks in communities.
- The sale of training packages to teaching personnel for work in this new format.

In recent decades, both ministries of education and international cooperation agencies have purchased and financed these types of services from NGOs and private foundations.

For scenarios where there is insufficient connectivity, the transition to the hybrid model also brings business possibilities:

- Transforming educational contents for face-to-face modalities with much reduced school days or schedules.
- Eliminating the number of full-time teachers under contract, as students will not be in classrooms every day.
- Developing and distributing materials for face-to-face content under reduced schedules.

The IDB mentions the need for a “change in the regulatory framework structuring the digital transformation of education”. It warns that the implementation of this model “must go beyond the context of the pandemic.” (IDB, 2020).

### 3.3.3. Governments have already taken out loans from the IDB for digital educational management

In the report “Education in times of coronavirus”, the IDB criticises the response of educational sectors, pointing out that it was difficult for these to plan their response using technology (2020, p.4).

However, the IDB does not take responsibility for a series of projects that the Bank itself promoted even a decade before the pandemic that did not yield results in strengthening digital and technological educational structures.

The OLPE has reviewed the different educational projects in which the IDB has promoted the indebtedness of Latin American countries. These projects included improvements in the infrastructure and management systems of education ministries, training, the creation of institutional information systems, monitoring, data collection and analysis, and the installation or expansion of technology in the classroom, among others.

Some examples of these past loans, which “sought to resolve” the situations that the IDB is now criticising, are:

- In Argentina in 2008, US\$630 million for PROMEDU I, a project to support the improvement of educational equity included actions to promote technology in the classroom and the improvement of capacities of the Ministry of Education.



- In Costa Rica in 2010, US\$167 million for the project “Construction and equipment of educational infrastructure”, which included the strengthening of technological platforms.
- In the Brazilian state of Amazonas in 2013, US\$151,182,000 for the Amazonas Education Development Acceleration Program, which was to finance the equipment for educational institutions and “educational acceleration” programmes.
- In Ecuador in 2016, US\$160 million for the “Improvement of the quality of education” project, which was to finance the “virtual school” modality and teacher training in services, among others (IDB, 2016).
- In 2018, in Uruguay, a loan of US\$30 million for the “Generation C Project: Consolidating Educational Innovations for Skills and Competencies for the 21st Century” (IDB, 2018), promoting strategies for remote teaching and the Ministry of Education’s partnership with the transnational private company Global Learning Network (which sells services to the Ceibal Plan) for induction and specialisation in virtual modalities, among others.

After all this indebtedness and assumption of commitments entailing high interest rates, Latin American countries find that the IDB report “Education in times of coronavirus” denies the bank’s responsibility for its 30 years spent promoting failed experiments played within the realm of public management itself.

### 3.3.4. Global reform to the teaching career: From the “very expensive” teacher to the role of “facilitator”

As mentioned before, it has been thanks to the struggles of education workers and the educational community that it has been possible to expand the right to public education, making this more relevant to our peoples, including rural and farming communities, people of colour, and those in Indigenous territories. It is thanks to these struggles that there are more young people from working class families finishing high school and studying at university.

The global trend of making the role played by teachers invisible and denying the importance of face-to-face schooling arises from a neoliberal anti-pedagogical perspective. Like the World Bank and the OECD, neoliberal sectors want to decrease public education funding, arguing that people who work in education are “very expensive” for the public system. They promote a view of the educational process as a product that can be repeated in a standardised fashion through the use of technology, under the guidance of “facilitators” rather than teachers.

One of these actors is the Education Commission (EC), which was formed with the aim of advising the World Bank on educational financing. This Commission ceased officially functioning in July 2023.

During the seven years it operated, it generated three reports that should be paid attention to:

- The 2016 report, "The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world", proposed "a revolution in educational financing", recommending "mobilising new financing from a wide range of resources, including through the establishment of a new educational investment mechanism that helps adapt financing from multilateral development banks" (p. 9).
- The study, "Financing the Technological Education System" (Education Commission [EC], 2021), which proposes developing digitised educational systems consisting of:
  - A model of "teacher-facilitated lessons, peer-to-peer learning activities and individual work on computers."
  - For each cycle, only one fully qualified teacher is hired, who is employed only in the first "rotation".
- For the rest of the process, facilitators or "academic advisors" are sought to manage the digital classroom and answer questions (EC, 2021).
- The document "Educational Workforce Initiative" (EWI for its acronym in English), proposes to "diversify the educational workforce" and "transform an educational system into a learning system" in which "networks of schools, professionals and cross-sectoral associations use data and evidence to transform education systems into self-improving learning systems that adapt to change" (EWI-EC, 2022). This World Bank advisory commission considers that the role of teachers should become "more multifaceted and adaptable" (p. 2).

The proposals that trivialise the role of teachers very possibly arise from sectors without classroom experience and which are unaware of the reality with regards to the development of knowledge and human development from early childhood. In Latin America, low-cost private educational businesses exist, in which teachers repeat pre-designed scripts, teaching up to sixty students per classroom with the support of one tablet for each student. Some instances of low-cost schools are:

- The "Innova Schools" in Peru where students spend most of their time undertaking self-directed exercises "using digital learning tools".
- "Instituto Lumiar" in Brazil where "there are no traditional teachers, instead, half of the 'pedagogical personnel' work as advisers, mentors and coaches.

The "role of facilitator" (instead of working as a teacher) is viable as long as the curricular content follows a script that is read or reproduced without further elaboration or pedagogical mediation. These cases are examples of low-cost private schools in which the priority is not the right to education, but rather a model focused on profit. In this model, investors and owners of the educational businesses reduce operating costs by sacrificing teachers' work.

### 3.4.1. The reform of the teaching career proposed to the World Bank by the Education Commission

One of the last documents that the Education Commission produced before being decommissioned from its operations was the document “Transforming the education workforce: Learning teams for a learning generation” (EC, 2022).

This document proposes carrying out a global census of the educational labour force to provide data for the design and implementation of labour policy for this sector (p. 37). In addition, it seeks the establishment of a set of standard indicators and classifications that link the data of this population to educational outcomes.

The information that is collected is supposed to provide input on the “interdependencies among different actors who are part of the broader educational workforce at all levels (school, district, region and state) and among the different components of the education workforce life-cycle” (EC, 2022, p.37).

The document places the main responsibility for global educational results back on teaching staff, reiterating:

*Teacher quality is the single most important influence on learning outcomes at the school level. An effective teacher can make a major difference to a student's learning trajectory (...) Teachers can also impact long-term student well-being, future academic performance and economic outcomes. Several years of outstanding teaching may also improve equity, offsetting learning deficits of disadvantaged students. (p. 36)*

The Commission's document proposes that reform should establish the idea that educational systems and their workforce must ensure that students learn skills for a world of “increased automation, big data, more sophisticated Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and artificial intelligence”, and must develop “complex ways of thinking and working in increasingly complex societies” (p. 42).

The document already designates roles for the different actors in this great global reform of the teaching career. For the World Bank and NGOs, it proposes:

- That the World Bank, international donors and the Global Partnership for Education develop the diagnostic tool for the education system's workforce.
- That international agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, and donors should support governments in conducting the census process and providing platforms to share the results (p.25).

For researchers and funders of the census for reform, it proposes:

- That researchers and research funders should evaluate existing and new reform approaches.
- That census researchers and research funders “undertake systematic analyses of the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of approaches to strengthening the workforce, developing learning teams, and building learning systems” (p. 26).

For education unions, the document states that

- Members of the education workforce and their unions should actively engage in the policy-making process, pushing reform from the bottom up.
- They should lead the changes based on their needs and expertise, generating evidence of what works, and championing reforms by acting as changemakers. (p. 26).

Finally, all the information that is collected should provide a framework enabling governments, donors, funders, NGOs, service providers, and so on, to achieve:

- Better evaluation of cost models.
- Robust data on all educational workforce functions and their characteristics (e.g. gender, language, disability and location preferences).
- The cross-referencing of workforce data with educational outcomes (p. 25)
- Forecasting of the supply, demand and cost of the current and future workforce.

On several occasions, education unions have pointed out how these research processes do not necessarily arise from a formative evaluation aimed at improving educational policy, but rather are designed to carry out a “market study” to organise information about demand, facilitating the design of “educational products” for the global market.

In the case of this reform of the teaching career, the products and services to be designed may be directed towards these being implemented for teaching personnel, or even to partially or totally replace them. This latter is not such an unlikely idea once one takes into account the proposal for a Technological Education system also proposed by the Education Commission, which is aimed at an educational system with many less teachers and many more digital tools.

### 3.5. Financing model reform

On the world stage, financing trends are promoted that then impact on national and local scenarios. This paper reviews two trends in educational financing reform.

A first trend is the promotion of private financing in public education, while the second trend is the growing rhetoric in favour of a “voucher system” during election campaigns in the region.

The participation of private funders and investors in education is encouraged by the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Organisation for Economic Development Cooperation (OECD) and the recently dismantled Education Commission.

Private financing, investment funds and philanthropy have evolved their business approaches towards “social impact investing”. This is the placement of economic resources to generate an environmental or social benefit, which should also generate financial returns. Many private investors and philanthropists decide to place their resources in investment funds featuring the participation of other investors. When selecting an initiative, project, or “thematic niche”, impact investors expect to have data that motivates them and demonstrates the solidity of opportunities for business growth.

In general, investors look at whether they can “scale” the results of their investment, that is, repeat it in larger dimensions to achieve greater returns. Participation in an investment may occur through shares or equity, which allow the investor to become owners of a part of the project through different forms of debt (soft loans or flex loans, etc.).

Investors, even impact investors, are never obliged to repeat the investment if there is no economic return or if the investor considers the data received to be unconvincing, and therefore financing for educational projects is not guaranteed. Likewise, an investor may lose interest in an issue or initiative that is being funded and may then withdraw their resources at any time. When such an investor decides to withdraw from an initiative, they may request the return of their investment, as well as payment of the profit they expected to receive.

### 3.5.1. Speculating with the education budget

The notion that public policy can be financed through speculation and investor funds is anti-pedagogical, as this does not guarantee stability in the availability of resources and exerts pressure for economic performance and return on investments that is not consistent with the spirit of public policy.

The OLPE has studied the reports put out by the Education Commission, which in 2022 presented the investment fund called the “Greater Share Education Fund”. The term “share” refers to a company’s shares, but also refers to the verb to use, have or get in common with others. Of course, the name is thus meant to be a good pun.

This fund is a philanthropic proposal to bring to the world of education “the practical investment techniques and strategies used by the highest performing funds and the NGOs with the greatest impact” (EC, 2022).

Initially, the Education Commission was formed with the aim of gathering evidence to present an action agenda for global education funding. It played a key role at the World Bank 2017 Spring meetings, where it presented a proposal to establish the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFE).

In November of the previous year, the Commission had presented the report *The Learning Generation: Investing in education for a changing world*. The report announced that in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 related to quality education, “a revolution in educational financing” was required, for which it recommended “mobilising new finance from a wide range of sources, including through the establishment of a new educational investment mechanism to help scale financing from Multilateral Development Banks” (p. 15).

One of the arguments that the Commission used to attract investments from philanthropists is that 70% of students are not prepared with the skills required by the workforce, and that since the pandemic many countries have cut their investments in education.

The “Greater Share” fund therefore seeks to attract private philanthropy investment to a global fund, a solution proposed by the Education Commission to finance education since 2016.

### 3.5.2. From traditional philanthropy to impact investors

Traditional philanthropy from the 1980s and 1990s used to deliver resources without expecting their return, sometimes even without participating directly in their execution. In contrast, investors, especially impact investors, tend to participate much more actively.

They may participate in the definition of criteria to select certain projects or initiatives over others, in defining measurement indicators, and in determining the focus used to evaluate the impact of their investment. They may even decide who implements the resources and when disbursements are made, and so on.

This type of participation is already noticeable, with the Greater Share fund announcing that it seeks to “reinvent” the vision of the workforce in education, proposing testing or experimenting with educational models that can be “upscaled”.

This opens up a new modality of competition for the resources available to education. Rather than thinking about countries establishing public budgets that guarantee the right to public education, the Commission has the vision of investing in certain projects and initiatives that can show cost-efficient results, that experiment with models that are globally replicable and scalable, that are attractive enough for an investor to want to place their resources in, and above all, that they will not wish to withdraw these from should they lose interest in the “educational niche”.

### 3.5.3. Who funds the Education Commission?

According to the Commission's website, its funders include Atlassian Foundation, LEGO Foundation, Mastercard Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Echidna Giving, the NGOs Education Cannot Wait and WISE, the governments of Norway and the Netherlands, the Inter-American Development Bank, and UNICEF. For all intents and purposes, the Education Commission ceased to function as such in July 2023, and was instead integrated into the Educational Development Centre (EDC).

### 3.5.4. Philanthropy and cooperation provide a permanent platform for private actors in education

In 2017, the OLPE published an analysis of trends towards the commercialisation of education in Latin America. This analysis reviewed the way in which the United Nations was strongly promoting public-private partnerships as a global agenda.

The OLPE analyses how philanthropic and cooperation actors offer millions of dollars in funding for educational projects. These funds are accompanied by strict demands for professionalism and operational capacity (accounting structures, audits, and others), thus placing international NGOs and foundations as the main competitors for them. The entities charge fees for the administration and execution of these resources, and then hire other organisations, foundations and smaller companies with a presence in the countries to carry the projects out.

At the same time, global agreements in educational policy have shown a clear evolution towards favouring business networks in which international NGOs and foundations receive funds from cooperation agencies and from states. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, agreed that the state plays a major role in guaranteeing the right to education. This notion was to change gradually, with the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, and the 2015 Incheon Declaration with regards to the Education 2030 Agenda exerting greater pressure for states to act as co-designers, co-implementers and co-financiers of educational policy together with the participation of the private sector.

The 2014 World Investment Report entitled Investing in the Sustainable Development Goals: An Action Plan (UN, 2014) established that in order to undertake all the actions necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were established, a financing gap existed of up to US\$2.5 trillion per year for each year from 2015 to 2030.

In November 2019, the United Nations published the document Financing for Development: International Development Cooperation and Interrelated Systemic Issues as a result of the third meeting of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development,

which in turn forms part of the United Nations Trade and Development Board. This document establishes that in order to obtain the resources required to meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, it will be necessary to unify development cooperation funds and debt and investment resources, because separately these are insufficient (UN, 2019).

At the same time, the document considers that the strategies used by developing countries to attract private resources that “leverage” or supplement public budgets are losing their effectiveness. The United Nations therefore considers that in order to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the flow of funds from North-South cooperation should be invigorated and “pooled financing” should be promoted. The document additionally states that the participation of private resources in development financing may be appropriate for middle-income countries that do not meet the eligibility criteria to receive non-refundable financing.

Data from 2018, showed that official development assistance (from multilateral actors and governments) had remained at approximately US\$153 billion annually without significant increases since 2013. Of this amount, only 32% was directed towards the most vulnerable countries.

Many cooperation resources include the participation of the private sector as a requirement or condition, supposedly to guarantee aspects such as transparency and agility. But at the same time, the United Nations admits that there is a “grey” area in financing that refers to funds dedicated to intermediary costs, “administration and contracts” (UN, 2019, p. 5). This statement is not insignificant, mainly because the same report indicates that from 2013 to 2017, only 25% of development cooperation resources were channelled through state budgets. That is, 75% of the resources were channelled through cooperation agencies, foundations, NGOs and other private structures (UN, 2019, p. 6), without the possibility of being reported upon through official or public channels.

The document “Financing for Development: Cooperation for International Development and Interrelated Systemic Issues” considers that due to the “inadequacy” of financing from national and international public sources, the participation of “innovative” private financing is necessary through hybrid financing sources that coordinate donations and non-refundable funds with debt and speculative investment capital.

The contribution of private philanthropy to development cooperation financing increased from 1.9% in 2009 to 3.7% in 2017. According to OECD data quoted by the UN, the contribution of private foundations totalled US\$13.9 billion between 2015 and 2017 (UN, 2019, p. 13). The weight of these resources is more significant for some sectors than for others. This is the case for health and education, which receive 62% of private philanthropy funding. Other sectors that are the focus of these funds are agriculture and forestry (9%) and the strengthening of civil society (8%).



Africa receives 28% of the funds from private philanthropy, with Asia following with 17%, then Latin America at 8%, and Europe at 2% (UN, 2019, p. 13).

These data are important for several reasons:

- Traditional philanthropy acting in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s in most cases contributed resources without directly participating in the execution of projects.
- In contrast, today's investors and philanthropists mainly act as investors contributing speculative or debt-based funding, and these usually participate more actively. They may participate in the definition of criteria to select certain projects or initiatives over others, in the definition of measurement indicators, and of the focus to be used to decide on the impact of their investment. They may even decide on who implements the resources and when the disbursements are made, and so on.
- Secondly, as mentioned previously, 75% of the funds from the philanthropic private sector are delivered through non-public and non-state channels that are not subject to official reports, nor to accountability, transparency or tax payment processes (p. 15).
- Thirdly, given that the United Nations established the goal of mobilising US\$2.5 trillion in financing each year from 2015 to 2030, it is evident this entity will tend to promote public-private partnerships that encourage greater private participation in financing, and, alongside this, in defining the direction of public policy.

### 3.5.5. The perverse model of vouchers

The voucher system re-configures the financing dynamics of the educational system. Instead of financing the public education system so that there are places available and conditions of inclusion and permanence in educational institutions, vouchers redirect these funds to pay tuition and monthly fees in private and religious schools.

By arguing that families can make a better selection of schools, this methodology hides a scandalous use of public funds for private businesses, including the educational businesses of religious groups. The following are some points that need to be stressed about the voucher system:

**1 |** Those who defend the voucher system sell an image of happily choosing a school from a variety of good educational options. This image emphasises the power of the family as the “consumer of an educational product”, while hiding or silencing the profit and economic benefit of the owners of private and religious schools.

**2 |** Also ignored or silenced are the thousands and thousands of cases of students who are denied admission, being rejected over and over again by groups of educational institutions, generating the stigma of rejection for children and youths and their families.

**3 |** The allies of private business in education establish the myth that the voucher system gives families greater control over the education of their children, propagating the notion that public education has hidden purposes or interests that conflict with those of families.

**4 |** The voucher system increases privatisation, reducing the ability of public authorities to supervise the conditions in which students are taught, eliminating the guarantee of free meals, and also losing the ability to supervise the working conditions of teachers and support staff.

**5 |** As occurs in any business, private and religious educational institutions have the liberty of exercising the “right of admission”. Private companies and religious companies are not obliged to accept the admission of all students regardless of ethnic origin, social class, educational record, etc. For example, a religious school may deny access to students from the LGBTQIA+ community or students of other faiths. Private schools may also reject the admission of students with curricular adequacy needs, so as to avoid negative effects on their “ranking” or evaluation results.

**6 |** When a family receives public funds to enrol their children in a private secular or religious school that perpetuates these forms of discrimination, public funds are thus supporting businesses that engage in practices of inequality. The voucher system not only weakens the public system, but destroys the notion of a space for integration and learning coexistence between diverse people from differing family contexts.

**7 |** Working conditions are pedagogical conditions, because the conditions in which people exercise their work directly impact pedagogical results. If a teacher is persecuted for participating in a trade union or for the contents he or she teaches, this affects the pedagogical conditions for students.

**8 |** Private and religious educational institutions participating in voucher systems may implement varied employment policies, worsening the working conditions and the job stability of teachers.

**9 |** Voucher systems use the support of public funds for an educational model that does not conform to the vision of public policy, social integration, nor to a transformative educational project to educate children and youth in a way that instils principles of solidarity, human rights and democratic practices.

Vouchers limit the democratic exercise of being part of a diverse educational community within educational institutions that include teaching personnel as part of the community, and who enjoy decent working conditions.

### 3.5.6. The impact of vouchers on educational inequality and discrimination in the United States

In countries such as the United States, where the voucher system has been denounced by the teaching unions of that country, there are very striking forms of inequality and discrimination arising from this model.

The voucher model in the United States has led to a network of private schools that implement arbitrary practices of student access and enrolment, in terms of the coverage of curricular content and in the recruitment and working conditions of teachers, among others. Data collected by Cowen (2023) show:

- In Arizona, more than 75% of initial voucher applicants had never attended a public school, either because they were students entering the education system for the first time or because they were already in a private school before receiving a voucher.
- Many of the proponents of voucher systems promote these as systems competing with the public system, and foment migration from that system towards their own. These advocates are usually private groups and church leaders with an interest in promoting parallel systems to the public one.
- In Texas, laws are being pushed to make it harder for students to abandon the voucher system to transfer to the public system. A currently proposed draft law in this state restricts students' eligibility to enrol in public schools for at least one year.
- The private schools that typically use the voucher system are usually high-risk private providers with financial difficulties that often take advantage of the opportunity of a fiscal bailout to remain open for a few more years.
- In Wisconsin, 41% of voucher schools have closed since the program's inception in 1990. This includes the large number of temporary schools that open just to take advantage of the new voucher payment. For these emerging schools, the average survival time is only 4 years before their doors close for good.
- In Indiana, Louisiana and Wisconsin, about 20% of students drop out of voucher programs each year, either because they forgo the payment or because the schools expel them. In Florida, that figure rises to 30% per year. Students who drop out of voucher programs tend to be students of colour (black, Hispanic, Asian, etc.), low-income students, and in first place, students with academic difficulties.

- Other forms of exclusion identified in the voucher system are exclusion based on sexual orientation. In Florida, a voucher-funded school made national headlines recently when it banned the enrolment of LGBTQIA+ students. In Indiana, pre-pandemic estimates showed that more than US\$16 million in taxpayer funds had gone to voucher schools with explicit anti-LGBTQIA+ admissions rules.
- Voucher schools also rarely enrol students with special academic needs. Special needs children tend to need more resources than vouchers can provide, which can also be problematic in public schools. Nonetheless, public schools are at least required by federal law to enrol and attend to children with special needs, something private schools can and frequently do avoid.

On analysing all the challenges to accessing education through these programmes, it is clear that under this model the choice of enrolling in a particular school is not really in the hands of the parents, but rather of the schools themselves.

### 3.5.7. What the countries' laws say about educational financing

In Latin America there exist sets of laws, regulations, programmes and initiatives that have naturalised and facilitated the delivery of public funds to private groups selling educational services.

In these cases, the delivery of public funds to private groups defunds the public education system, weakening it and hindering the achievement of inclusion and equity. In the last twenty years, there are many countries and educational authorities that have allocated millions of dollars' worth of public funds to private businesses in education.

According to OLPE data:

- By 2016, the Educación para Todos programme (PROUNI) in Brazil had transferred up to US \$400 million dollars to private universities through vouchers (OLPE-IEAL, 2023).
- In Colombia, in 2019, the Ser Pilo Paga program cost the Colombian state more than US\$320 million dollars to pay vouchers to students attending private educational institutions in the country's major cities, since 79% of the recipients were enrolled in private universities in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali (OLPE-IEAL, 2021).

Table 4 summarises certain legislation that facilitates the delivery of public funds to private groups managing services that go from enrolment to content projects and teacher training.

**Table 4 Laws that enable the use of public funds to pay private groups for educational projects or services**

Country	Law	Details of the legislation
<b>Paraguay</b>	Act 4758 creates the Administration of the Trust Fund for Excellence in Education and Research (FEEI for the initials in Spanish)	<p>Act 4758 of 2012 establishes the destination of compensatory funds for the transfer of energy from Paraguay to Brazil through the Itaipu dam, creating the National Fund for Public Investment and Development (FONACIDE for the initials in Spanish) and the Fund for Education and Research Excellence (FEEI for the initials in Spanish).</p> <p>The FEEI may not finance any expenditure arising from the public education system, nor does it supplement the national education budget, but rather is a fund to finance the execution of programs and projects submitted by private groups, foundations, and so on. With these criteria and eligibility, the FEEI promotes and facilitates the financing of projects, programs and initiatives of non-state actors that seek to generate business networks related to public education.</p> <p>In April 2020, the FEEI reported that US\$323 million dollars had been invested in programs in these areas (OLPE, 2022).</p>
<b>Colombia</b>	Act No. 715 of 2001 created the National System of Participation	<p>Act 715 of 2001 created the National System of Participation. The specific destination for the education sector is called “participation for education” (p. 2). Act 715 of 2001 establishes that 58.5% of the funds from the General System of Participation are to be used for education in Colombian territories. 24.5% is intended for education and 17% for other general-purpose resources.</p>

		<p>In the General Participation System, the education sector is disaggregated into the provision of services and of school canteens.</p> <p>Article 27 empowers municipalities to “hire the provision of services from state or non-state entities, which provide educational services of recognised trajectory and suitability, with due accreditation, using resources from the General System of Participation” (p. 22, own translation). Article 13 of this law reinforces the notion that the purchase of services from third parties implies the more expeditious delivery of these, and even the better handling of funds.</p>
<b>Brazil</b>	Act 11,096/2005 establishing the Universidad para Todos Program in Brazil (PROUNI).	<p>The PROUNI program promotes university admission for students from vulnerable families, especially favouring black, mixed race, Indigenous and rural students. PROUNI scholarships are aimed at people who have completed secondary education in public schools, or even in private schools as recipients of scholarships. PROUNI also provides scholarships to teachers working in the public education network.</p> <p>OLPE (2018) analysed that “PROUNI pays off a historical debt in terms of access and coverage” but at the same time “generates a new private business niche in the tertiary education sector, as it delivers scholarships or vouchers that can be used to finance university studies in private educational institutions.” It further states “in 2016 alone, the Brazilian Ministry of Education reported that through PROUNI it delivered vouchers totalling US\$400 million dollars” (OLPE, 2018, p. 20, own translation)</p>
<b>El Salvador</b>	El Salvador Educado Plan (PESE for the initials in Spanish)	PESE considers that the search for funds should increase and the use of current spending should be redefined and prioritized.

		<p>PESE aspires “to finance education with its resources and not with higher levels of debt, which compromises the economic sustainability of future generations. For this reason, the state’s resources should be supplemented by other sources arising from international cooperation and innovative financing mechanisms” (CONED, 2016, p. 26, own translation).</p>
<b>Panamá</b>	<p>Act 389 of 2017 modifies Act 40 of 2010 (Law regulating the Universal Scholarship Program).</p>	<p>It allows students from private educational institutions to also access the Universal Scholarship Fund granted by the state.</p> <p>In the year in which the reform to the Universal Scholarship was approved, there were 740 private schools and colleges registered in Panama. In this country, people under the age of 17 represent 30% of the population. The opening of funding to families buying educational services from the private sector can provoke “competition” for the funds available between families using private sector services and those in the public sector. Given the availability of public funds for families purchasing services from private schools and colleges, educational institutions may go on to increase tuition costs. In other words, speculation may be generated. In addition, the knowledge that public funds are available may stimulate an increase in low-cost private schools, as well as increases in tuition fees for those already existing (OLPE, 2021).</p>

#### 4. Regional IDB: Education reforms coincide with the educational criteria of banks

Analysing the implications of the IDB's projects, technical cooperation efforts and loans for digital education and curriculum reform is essential to identify the insurmountable distances between the social right to education and the policies promoted by this institution in the area of education.

The education unions affiliated to EILA have denounced the fact that educational policy promoted in the region in recent decades has been designed by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Organization for Economic Development Cooperation (OECD).

Of all these, the IDB in particular has shown great capacity to influence and direct educational policy in the region. Even in those countries where public funds exceed funding from IDB loans and technical cooperation projects, governments have adopted this institution's approach in designing and implementing their educational policies and programs.

Guidelines implemented by educational authorities throughout the region include seeking extended working days, standardised teacher evaluation, the refusal to reduce the number of students per group, and persistently holding teaching staff to be responsible for educational results.

These are the central axes of the Inter-American Development Bank's Document for the Sector framework for education and early childhood development (2016), which guides its 2010-2020 institutional strategy and its actions in the field of education in Latin America over the last decade.

Demonstrating even more clearly how the IDB's perspective has permeated the current state of education policies in the region, besides reading the sectoral framework, the document *¿Qué hace el BID en Educación?* (What does the IDB do in Education?) gives evidence of the financial approach taken, far removed from the world of education and pedagogy.

The document *¿Qué hace el BID en Educación?* (What does the IDB do in Education?) lists 5 criteria that the IDB considers as "factors for success" in education:

- Ambitious goals guide educational services
- Students come in to the education system ready to learn
- Students have access to effective teachers
- Schools have the right resources and are able to use them for learning
- Graduates have the necessary skills to be successful in the job market



Both the language and the approach of these five criteria demonstrate that the IDB does not base its actions with regards to education on the social right to public education, nor does it understand education to be a process or a system. Despite this, it has transformed standardised educational policies throughout the region, and can be witnessed in national, provincial and municipal policies.

Table 5 lists the five success factors, with a brief summary of how these have been implemented in the countries of Latin America.

**Table 5**  
**IDB's Criteria**

Success Criteria established by the IDB	¿Cómo se traduce la mirada del BID en las políticas nacionales?
<p><b>1.</b> "Ambitious goals guide educational services": Establishing "educational services" oriented by "ambitious goals"; to this end, standards are set for both students and teachers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational policy documents integrate the term "quality".</li> <li>• Standardised evaluation for teachers and students.</li> <li>• Promotion of individual incentives according to results.</li> <li>• Participation in PISA tests and other standardised tests.</li> <li>• Creation of new information systems, tallying of hours worked, etc.</li> <li>• Promotion of autonomous evaluation institutes as decentralised entities.</li> <li>• Promotion of "citizen observatories" monitoring student results.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> "Students come in to the educational system ready to learn":</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of businesses selling preschool and early childhood care services.</li> </ul>

<p>This refers to early childhood coverage such that students come in to the “educational system ready to learn”. In its proposals, the IDB assigns early childhood education the responsibility of ensuring that students have better job opportunities in adult life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool becoming compulsory as a requirement to enter primary school.</li> <li>• Standardized tests from the first levels of primary school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.</b> “Students have access to effective teachers”: This commences with “a significant transformation of the teaching career”. The IDB continues to hold teaching staff responsible for students' results, and even insists that it is not necessary or a priority to reduce the number of students per classroom if there is a “quality” teacher (IDB, 2016, p. 9).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reforms to the teaching career.</li> <li>• Elimination of career ladders and other laws that protect job stability and the profession.</li> <li>• Linking wage increases and work stability to student results.</li> <li>• Concentration of decisions on management personnel, promotion of managerial training for principals.</li> <li>• Teacher training is limited to specific content instruction methodologies addressing standardized tests (IDB, 2016, p. 5).</li> <li>• Programs to attract laureate students and professionals from various fields to teaching activities.</li> <li>• Resistance to decreasing the number of students per group, arguing that large groups “function well when the teacher has adequate mastery of the subject and controls discipline in the classroom” (West and Woessmann, 2003, cited by IDB, 2016, p. 9).</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.</b> “Schools have the appropriate resources and are able to use these for learning”: That educational institutions have the appropriate infrastructure. The document emphasizes not laboratories, cafeterias, libraries or meeting rooms, but mainly access to information and communication technology.</p> <p><b>5.</b> “Graduates have the skills necessary to be successful in the labour market”: That the educational system guarantees the skills “necessary for successful insertion into the labour market and to contribute to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loans to educational authorities to purchase digital platforms.</li> <li>• One “laptop” per student programs.</li> <li>• Promotion of public-private partnerships for the purchase of equipment and the installation of computer laboratories.</li> <li>• Narratives on how ICT improves “the quality of learning” (IDB, 2013).</li> <li>• Elimination of subjects from the secondary school curriculum.</li> <li>• Alignment of educational content with employment skills.</li> <li>• Promoting dual training.</li> <li>• Promotion of courses on soft skills, and of private</li> </ul>

<p>society productively.” This criterion holds the educational process exclusively responsible for the unemployment situation, ignoring the impact of productive development and employment</p>	<p>service provision of these contents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Publication of documents, research and papers that hold the education system responsible for youth and adult unemployment.</li> <li>▪ Promotion of speeches about the uncertainty of the future.</li> </ul>
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*Note. Elaborated with data from the IDB*

The IDB’s Sector Framework on Education supports two positions that deepen the commercial orientation of public education.

The first is its emphasis on the view of individual “success” when “the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful throughout life” are acquired, denying the weight of other policy related to the economy, production, employment, care, and so on.

The second is that it blames families and “poor households” where students “receive little stimulation” given that “this is of great importance for all aspects of development.” It also holds families responsible for student desertion, stating that “parents may not sufficiently motivate their children to stay in school, prioritising their starting work at an early age” (IDB, 2016, p. 2).

The IDB’s Sector Framework states that families can change their behaviour if “information is provided to parents about the economic returns of high-quality schooling and about the effectiveness of the schools their children attend” (IDB, 2016, p. 3). This approach demonstrates that the IDB will continue to promote policies and strategies that encourage payment or co-payment in education, to the detriment of the right to free public education.

## 5. The figure of the teacher: A key component in the dispute over educational model

From the perspective of neoliberal reform, teachers are one more component that can be subjected to market processes and the dynamics of product exchange.

The World Bank (2017) has been emphatic in holding teachers responsible for educational results, stating that not achieving good educational results is a form of “lack of transparency” on behalf of teaching staff. This position plays down the impact of the different conditions of exclusion and inequality that students live under, which also affect the educational experience. That is why insistence on the “responsibility” of public officials, in this case teachers, tends to occur within a very limited perspective of the educational process.

In the World Bank's report, *Learning to realize education's promise* (2018), there is a distinct tone of suspicion placed on teachers, along with a call for families to distance themselves, positioning themselves as “stakeholders” with “competing interests” to teaching staff. This report suggests that teachers oppose educational reforms promoted by actors such as the World Bank because these would “play against” them. The report similarly places a cloak of suspicion against organised action and negotiations carried out by education workers. The report indicates that teaching staff represent one of the “potential losers” and as such:

*tend to be more aware of what is at stake for them and, in many cases, are better organised to act collectively. As a result, many systems are stuck in low learning traps, characterised by low accountability and high inequality. (p. 15)*

The report goes on to analyse the role of teachers in transparency processes with respect to educational outcomes, and with regards to teachers' handling of information. It speculates that teachers may not wish to manage information in a transparent fashion, nor to see improvement of educational conditions because:

*they are constantly pressured to deliver other services for more powerful players. As actors [they] juggle multiple objectives, relying on each other in an environment of uncertainty, low social trust, and risk aversion. (p. 15)*

Finally, without presenting any innovative arguments, to instead repeat what the institution has been asserting since the 1990s, the report recommends the use of:

*pecuniary and nonpecuniary incentives to improve the motivation of teachers, ensuring that the incentivised actions are within teachers' capacity. Education systems typically neither reward teachers for performing well nor penalise them for performing poorly. (p. 22)*

During the pandemic, while the education sector was making enormous efforts to maintain pedagogical continuity, the World Bank published an article stating that public workers constitute a privileged group since they have labour protections and salaries up to 20% higher than those of the private sector. That same article asserted that, in the wake of the pandemic,

many countries “will have to make important reforms in the public sector in order to better manage the next crisis”, reforms that cannot omit the education sector, which represents 30% of the public sector.

At the same time, the Bank called on the education sector to “make up for lost time” by seeking “greater support and better management to do so efficiently”, so announcing new conditional debt measures for Latin American countries.

To deal with the impact of the crisis in the most immediate term, many countries took out new loans from the IDB and the World Bank. These actors once again have the door open in the region, with conservative governments leading many of the countries. In April 2020, barely a month after the announcement of the pandemic, the governments of Uruguay and Peru were already announcing cuts in public sector salaries.

The response to the pandemic and the management of educational policy during the health emergency were eminently political and ideological. Trends towards a business perspective and commercialisation did not emerge during the pandemic, but nonetheless these found in the pandemic a niche favourable to their consolidation, with states relinquishing their responsibility to guarantee rights, including the right to public education.

The narrative of permanent accusation towards teachers, with continuous suspicion directed at public education institutions, seeks to open a distance between the educational community and those working in education. It also seeks to promote conditions to generate more business in education, more public-private partnerships and more interference from business groups in educational processes.

Some of these trends evident in the region are discussed below.

### **5.1. Casting suspicion, controlling and reforming: REDUCA's business agenda for teachers and schools**

The OLPE and the education unions have analysed several dozen national and international projects that subject education workers to processes of:

- control.
- discipline.
- evaluation.
- criminalisation.
- re-education.

The educational services market offers products for all these processes, and business sectors have not been left behind.

The business structures influencing educational policy through the REDUCA platform are coordinated in terms of their strategy of constantly criticising teachers and public schools.

The organisations that make up REDUCA are: Proyecto Educar 2050, from Argentina; Todos pela Educação, from Brazil; Educación 2020, from Chile; Fundación Empresarios por la Educación, from Colombia; Fundación Omar Dengo, from Costa Rica; Grupo FARO, from Ecuador; Empresarios por la Educación, from Guatemala; FEREMA, from Honduras; Mexicanos Primero, from Mexico; Unidos por la Educación, from Panama; Juntos por la Educación, from Paraguay; Empresarios por la Educación, from Peru; Educa, from the Dominican Republic; Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo, from El Salvador; and Eduy21 from Uruguay.

Experiments in surveillance and supposed “transparency” for citizens and families bring with them an accusative tone against teaching personnel and additionally are functional to proposing new businesses led by business sectors.

Some examples of this practice are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**Practices of the members of REDUCA directed at the control and criminalisation of teachers**

Country	Type of practice of persecution, control or criminalisation
Mexico	<p>Taking teachers and institutions to court:  Mexicanos Primero is an organisation that brings together business sector and civil society organisations that want to become actors in educational policy, as opposed to the trade union sector. In a previous publication, OLPE has analysed Mexicanos Primero's promotion of the Enlace test, which is based on the Index of Inclusive Educational Performance (IDEI for the initials in Spanish) and uses business achievement indicators such as effectiveness, permanence, supervision, the participation of civil society in schools, and teacher professionalisation. Each province or department receives a grade from the Enlace test, with concerns being raised with regards to anti-union and politicised use of such grades (OLPE, 2019).</p> <p>The group of private Mexican entrepreneurs published the document, <i>Ahora es cuando</i>, 2012-2024 (Now is When, 2012-2024), which they promoted for use as a basis for educational reform, provoking the opposition of teachers at that time. The document mentions the need to undertake these changes, indicating that reform of the National Legal Order should commence by 2013, with amendments to the General Education Law and related legislation to reestablish the responsibilities of federal and state authorities, and of communities and families, and that these should be legally enforceable if necessary. (p. 30)</p> <p>The same document proposes centralising information related to teaching personnel and making this available to the population. It demands that the political sector publish a Single Register of Teachers containing updated, reliable data on identity, academic level, training, job position and performance of each teacher working in compulsory education. It asserts this establishes the minimum bases of governance for the system, so that the budgeting can be controlled to serve the efficient planning of adjustments and expansion. (p. 38).</p>

<p><b>Paraguay</b></p>	<p>Observatorio Educativo Ciudadano:</p> <p>The Juntos por la Educación group is made up of entrepreneurs and civil organisations. Its document <i>Propuesta para la Agenda Educativa</i> (Proposal for the Educational Agenda, 2013) calls for a “new educational social contract” oriented around accountability in education. The proposal places a strong emphasis on evaluation processes and data management for educational institutions: out of a total of thirty actions proposed for the short and medium term, twenty-two relate to evaluation processes and data management at different levels.</p> <p>The Observatorio Educativo Ciudadano (Citizens' Educational Observatory) is an initiative of Juntos por la Educación and the Educa Paraguay Project. Included among the Observatory's partners are UNICEF, Alda Foundation, Fe y Alegría Foundation, and the OMAPA Foundation. Among other things, the Observatory gathers public data on educational financing, the structure of the Paraguayan Ministry of Education and Culture, and Paraguayan results in international tests. The Observatory's tool “Reporte semanal de días de clases” (Weekly Report of School Days) asks families to upload information monitoring the days when classes are held and when they are not, requesting a detailed record by district, school, times when classes were not held, and so on.</p> <p>This tool may generate a false notion of “participation” or “transparency” in education policy simply by means of a culture of control and data monitoring.</p>
<p><b>Dominican Republic</b></p>	<p>EDUCA, an organization that brings together the business sector and civil society, has published several documents that have been examined by OLPE. The 2016 publication <i>La calidad del gasto educativo</i> (The quality of educational spending) makes an exploratory analysis of the validity of the 4% dedicated to education, “the efficiency of education spending”, specifically in terms of teacher salaries (p. 53), suggesting that incentives such as salary increases should be linked to student performance (p. 134).</p> <p>Businesses thus put forth their proposals for educational reform, recommending that the Paraguayan Ministry of Education (MINERD) should cease withholding 1% of salaries for forwarding to the teachers' union (ADP) and to savings and credit cooperatives. In addition, it proposes “eliminating the provision that the MINERD act as the withholding agent for salaries of Ministry personnel in favour of third parties, outside of that which is provided for by law” (p. 133, own translation). This recommendation can be interpreted as a call by the business sector for the government to eliminate collection of the fee that is transferred to the union.</p>



In other cases, business groups exist that are dedicated to proposing systemic reforms in educational policy. These initiatives include adjustments to the pension system, reduction of trade union participation in pedagogical decisions, the elaboration of education programmes and budget formulation.

Table 7 provides some of the main reforms proposed by the business sector through REDUCA.

**Table 7**  
**Examples of reforms proposed by the business sector**

País	Reforma propuesta por sectores empresariales afiliados a REDUCA
<b>Perú</b>	<p>La Asociación Empresarios por la Educación es una articulación del sector privado. Al revisar los proyectos que desarrolla, se puede observar que ha establecido alianzas en procesos de diseño pedagógico, distribución de herramientas tecnológicas, material didáctico e incluso de formación y acompañamiento a docentes, directores y madres y padres de familia.</p> <p>En el año 2016, REDUCA publica el informe “Situación educacional en el Perú: una mirada desde los principales indicadores educativos”. Entre otras cosas, plantea “La institucionalización de la evaluación como práctica docente colectiva y del aprendizaje de la experiencia de manera continua; es decir, que toda la comunidad educativa aprenda a mirarse y a valorar la evaluación como una oportunidad” (EDUCA, 2016, p. 12) y “promover la evaluación de los centros educativos y de docentes y directivos” (p. 26). Además, promueve generar “iniciativas en conjunto con MINE-DUC para alinear la política de intervención de las empresas” mediante el modelo de alianza público-privada y tener incidencia en los gobiernos locales para que sus autoridades de educación “asuman las estrategias y metodologías educativas que aplicamos de manera que las adopten como política de sus escuelas” (p. 26).</p>
<b>República Dominicana</b>	<p>EDUCA publicó el documento “Formación y carrera docente: profesión que cambia vidas”, que es una memoria del XIX Congreso Internacional de Educación - Aprendo 2015. Uno de los datos que se incluyen en el documento es un análisis de uso del tiempo en las aulas, luego de la implementación de la jornada extendida en República Dominicana.</p>

	<p>El documento señala que en los centros de Jornada Extendida (tanto en primaria como en secundaria), el personal docente no dedica el 100% del tiempo a tareas académicas, sino el 65% y 73% respectivamente. Por eso, considera que el estado dominicano debe recurrir a alianzas público-privadas que ofrezcan los servicios educativos necesarios para la jornada extendida.</p> <p>Esta es una postura a favor del comercio educativo y del lucro privado con los fondos públicos, coherente con la defensa que ha hecho EDUCA del aumento de la inversión pública en educación al 4% del PIB. En ese sentido, el hecho de que haya fondos públicos disponibles facilita la compra de servicios a terceros (outsourcing).</p>
<p><b>Uruguay</b></p>	<p>Eduy21 es una fundación que se describe a sí misma como una iniciativa ciudadana sin posición político partidaria. Este organismo ha propuesto e impulsado una reforma educativa que coincide con lo que habían recomendado para Uruguay la OCDE (2016) y la Confederación de Cámaras Empresariales de Uruguay, y que luego se aprobó mediante la Ley de Urgente Consideración (LUC).</p> <p>En la publicación llamada “Libro Abierto: Propuestas para apoyar el acuerdo educativo” (Eduy21, 2018) propone un nuevo estatuto docente que elimine el régimen actual de la elección de horas y que base la carrera docente en los premios individuales y el mérito.</p> <p>Eduy21 ha propuesto transformar el marco curricular para una nueva jerarquización de las asignaturas, que cada centro educativo tenga “autonomía”, y pueda “rendir cuentas” al tiempo que recurre al mecanismo de “contrapartidas y un conjunto de apoyos” (Eduy 21, Presentación Corporativa, p. 12). Las posturas del grupo Eduy21 han brindado insumos a la propia Confederación de Cámaras Empresariales del Uruguay (CCE).</p> <p>En el 2018, la Confederación publicó el documento “Desafíos en materia de competitividad: Una mirada desde la óptica empresarial” (CCE, 2018). En él proponía “una transformación estructural en el modelo educacional: implementando las propuestas del libro abierto de Eduy21” y profundizar la “articulación entre la educación media y la formación profesional, y de alcanzar mecanismos de certificación de competencias laborales” (p. 5).</p>

## 6. Digitised education: The IDB and World Bank proposals for the most impoverished populations

The sectors interested in promoting digitised education and reducing physical classroom time took note during the pandemic: connectivity is necessary to furthering digital and distance education projects.

It therefore should come as no surprise that in October 2022, the World Bank, the IDB and Inter-American Dialogue's Education Program advisory group published the document, *Educational connectivity in complex areas: A call to action to solve connectivity gaps in the region*.

The document analyses the opportunities for private connectivity businesses in complex areas, which are "areas of low population density, that are distant from urban centres or are isolated due to their geography—regions of difficult access, in particular rural areas", to promote "connecting up schools and homes for educational purposes" (IDB, 2022, p. 5).

The IDB, the World Bank and the Inter-American Dialogue program do not propose improving face-to-face public education. What they seek is the generation of conditions by the state to install private businesses providing connectivity, access to technological equipment and digital products for education.

In other words, the interest of these sectors is to facilitate a niche for businesses at the expense of the right to education. On this occasion, this is to be achieved by means of connectivity and the promotion of an educational model that would leave children isolated at home without professional pedagogical support nor a meeting space for learning in community with their peers. Among the products that are expected to be produced and piloted (given proof of concept) are the methodologies facilitating both the monitoring of students and of the administrative management, and the evaluation of learning, all through digital channels.

The report proposes that states and their authorities should ensure:

- "Reduction of demands for subsidies to respond to unmet connectivity needs in complex areas.
- "The creation of incentives (whether fiscal or regulatory) to boost private investment for better connectivity in rural areas.
- "The recommendation of models of norms and incentives to municipal entities to modernise local construction and passive telecommunications infrastructure regulations.
- "Establishing the appropriate balance between collection and connectivity objectives.
- "Generating spectrum bidding processes, which represent an important instrument in promoting the expansion of networks, including service obligations in areas of low population density" (IDB, 2022, p. 5, own translation).

In general, the document aims at having public investment boost or leverage “private investment and maximize the provision of meaningful connectivity.” At the same time, it recommends avoiding subsidies and “favouring the search for complementarity with investments of private origin in order to cover last-mile gaps and reduce fixed costs” that commercial operating companies would have to incur (p. 8, own translation).

In the elaboration of these proposals, there is notable participation of actors that have already been active in promoting business and public-private partnerships in favour of the digitisation of public education, such as the Ceibal Plan, Facebook, the transnational Telefónica, Edu-Tech and the Coursera group.

IDB's document on connectivity should not be taken lightly or in isolation; it must be read in the context of other global voices that are advocating in favour of the same outcomes. For example, the previously mentioned study, Financing for the EdTech Ecosystem (EC, 2021), proposes progress in digitised educational systems.

The Education Commission calculated the following volume of public and private investment to promote this digital education model in the 2021-2030 period:

- US\$1.4 trillion for the universalisation of digital learning.
- US\$428 billion for universal connectivity (affordable data usage).
- US\$46 billion for the delivery of digital education services (p. 18).

This should be read in the context of other businesses coming to Latin America with force, such as digital platforms and educational tutors based on artificial intelligence.

## 6.1. The Case of Khan Academy

Khan Academy is a transnational company offering standardised digital education products. Its products are offered in English, Russian, Cambodian, Korean, French, Hindi, Spanish and Portuguese (Khan Academy, 2024).

These digital products include daily lesson plans, formats and guides for district planning, and a guide to distance learning for parents and caregivers, among others. To use Khan Academy products, students, teachers and families must register to its platform.

In 2022-2023, the Khan Academy worldwide report indicated that it had 13.7 million students, 490,000 teachers and 718,000 parents registered to its platform. When teachers register, they have access to more than 7000 pre-designed lessons and more than 400 books. They can assign lessons to their students and track the data on students' use of materials.

The transnational does not charge users; that is, its business model does not depend on selling products to students, teachers or families. What Khan Academy does have is a network of funders who invest in the platform.

Among its 2023 funding partners was a group that invested over a million dollars each: Google, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, ExxonMobil Foundation, Overdeck Family Foundation, Siegel Family Endowment, Stand Together Trust, Walmart, Windsong Trust, Yass Foundation for Education, Amgen Foundation, Intuit and MathWorks.

Twelve other partners donated between a quarter million and a million dollars each (Khan Academy, 2023, p. 41), while more than 500 partners donated lesser amounts.

In order to develop the volume of products offered in different languages, the Khan Academy format is based on standardised materials that are reproduced in different languages. Internationally, Khan Academy has teams working in India, Brazil and Peru that are dedicated to finding partners and promoting the products to local education authorities.

### 6.1.1. What might interest all these partners in investing in a platform that as yet sells no products?

To understand the product value behind this “free” offer of digital tools, it is necessary to think about how digital products are built.

The greatest value for the production of digital tools is having ongoing updated data on product usage, performance, failures, information on what makes a person stop using the product, information on what makes a person want to keep consuming it, and so on.

It can thus be understood that all users of the Khan Academy platform constantly deliver data to product development teams. In other words, the users become the permanent laboratory for developing and adapting the products of multiple suppliers.

Based on the user experience, adaptation is made of contents, steps and presentation logistics. That is, usage ends up guiding and influencing the pedagogical agenda of the products.

The Khan Academy platform offers an important forum for experimentation and the testing of digital educational products. All the movements and practice undertaken by more than 13 million students and other users are registered on the platform, providing input to develop new “tailored” educational products.

In other words, the free service is really being paid for by thousands of terabytes of information that students, teachers and families provide to the platform about their own practices and behaviours with regards to the educational materials. Table 8 shows the diversity of users and the products that are developed, tested and improved through the platform.

**Table 8**  
**The Khan Academy's main educational digital products**

Detail	
<b>Expanding the scope of products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13.7 million new students added globally</li> <li>• 6.7 million downloads of Khan Academy Kids</li> <li>• 7.7 billion learning minutes in total in 2022-23, including 1.2 billion minutes in Khan Academy Kids</li> </ul>
<b>Increase in the content offered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New financial education course</li> <li>• Basic concepts of algebra in American sign language (ASL)</li> </ul>
<b>Increased consumption and use of the products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch was made of Khanmigo, a tutor and teaching assistant powered by artificial intelligence.</li> <li>• Khan Academy's district program grew 13% year-over-year, reaching 945,000 children in the USA.</li> <li>• Annual increase in very active students (more than 18 hours of learning per year) through district partnerships, 40% inter-annual.</li> <li>• Expansion of the accreditation program to almost double the size, allowing even more students to receive transferable credits for their learning. Khan Academy's accreditation program is conducted with Howard University and the National Educational Equity Lab, offering university algebra to high school students. This gives students credits to advance in degrees from that university.</li> </ul>

*Note. Khan Academy, 2024.*

### 6.1.2. Pedagogical adaptation based on users

In 2023, Khan Academy along with its investors commenced piloting a product that was highly anticipated by the business market in education: a digital tutor powered by Artificial Intelligence. Named "Khanmigo", this is an Artificial Intelligence system that:

helps students understand the content and complete practice tasks. When students are stuck, Khanmigo guides them through structured problem solving, empowering them to find the answer. (Khan Academy, 2023).

In 2013, Khan Academy signed an Alliance with Fundação Lemann in Brazil, which took on the commitment to distribute the digital products within the public school network. That same year, Khan Academy sought partners in Mexico, signing an agreement with Carlos Slim for the dissemination of digital material.

### 6.2. A trade union and pedagogical position on the development and use of Artificial Intelligence

Faced with the development of digital products that incorporate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the trade union movement has many contributions to make to debates on this technology. These include the need to decolonise the internet, making visible and adding underrepresented populations to digital databases, preventing gender and ethnic biases in AI and other digital developments, guaranteeing digital tools for translation into Indigenous languages, data sovereignty, public policy proposals to prevent gender-based digital violence, auditing and improving the science of data use to minimise the reproduction of biases, and so on. All these debates require the input and perspective of trade union organisations, and OLPE has therefore undertaken an analysis in this regard.

AI is the ability of a computer or machine to perform tasks and activities that can be done only by resorting to exercises considered exclusive to human intelligence, such as problem solving and decision making. In other words, AI is the automation of activities considered to be human mental tasks.

In order for computers and machines to mimic these human tasks, algorithms are designed. Algorithms are commands for the use of data and information, which allows AI systems to relate certain inputs to produce new information and to thus "make decisions".

Data feeding algorithmic decisions arise from databases that may have biases (with underrepresentation of data from populations from the Global South, women, Indigenous and rural populations, and with over-representation of data from the population with access to the internet and technology, which is predominantly male, white, urban and from the Global

North). Thus, algorithms inherit and reproduce the prejudices of human decision-makers, repeating pre-existing patterns of exclusion and inequality (OLPE, 2023).

The normalisation of these biases occurs mainly because the figure of the Western white man is taken as the default data source or parameter, and also because the programming of algorithms is not expressly governed by legislation or protocols aimed at correcting biases, avoiding discrimination, nor prioritising diversity in the sources or parameters of the data.

Algorithms are programmed by people and human teams, which may normalise biases and forms of discrimination in all processes that are supported by automated digital developments.

It is precisely in the process of programming algorithms and information management that the greatest ethical problems can be generated. These can create AI processes full of biases that end up functioning as new forms of discrimination.

On the other hand, the Internet of Things (IoT) is the use of remote commands, via internet, for remote technology management (turning on house lights remotely, turning on clothes washers remotely, etc.). This includes domestic work robots, patient care robots, robot dogs, and self-driving cars, as well as lethal autonomous weapons systems, among others.

In the case of AI and the Internet of Things, there are no clear policies to define the “cyber protections” included in products that are put up for sale, such that these are being marketed without regulatory processes in place. There are also no global corporate responsibility policies guiding the technology developed by private corporations.

Seven ethical risks in the development and use of AI in public education are reviewed below.

### 6.2.1. Artificial intelligence, public policy and private decision making

Neither Latin American countries nor the United States have policies that set limits on how private companies may develop or commercialise AI. It is thus being developed and positioned in the market without being regulated by criteria that takes into account human, political, cultural and economic rights.

At the same time, AI technology requires very high investment and expertise that, to date, is almost exclusively available to military entities and predominantly private companies.

In fact, the entire AI research and development budget of the five US military technology companies combined does not exceed 50% of the research and development budget of Microsoft, Google and Apple.



In this sense, in the absence of legislation, AI is being developed as a private good for public consumption. The use of research and development in technology is being left in the hands of private corporations.

### 6.2.2. Bias-based technology

AI is programmed using algorithms that allow computers or computerised systems to act like human intelligence. AI may reproduce biases based on race, gender and age, as it may be programmed based on the facial measurements of certain ethnic groups or ages, leaving out the facial features of other ethnic groups, women, or elderly people, etc.

What's the problem with biases in facial recognition? Currently, in many places facial recognition technology is responsible for allowing people access to enter buildings or means of transport, delivering medicines, accounting for attendance, etc. When such technology is programmed to recognise only one type of face with one type of dimensions, it can deny access to certain places, preventing the delivery of medication or failing to register such peoples' attendance at the workplace, etc. This can be corrected by having clear AI programming protocols to prevent these biases.

Another bias has to do with access to AI, the possibilities of purchasing this technology, and consuming and using AI goods and experiences.

### 6.2.3. AI, control and surveillance

An increase may occur in the use of AI for mass surveillance and monitoring by governments towards people in certain geographical areas or during political conflict, and so on.

This leads to a form of discrimination due to the differentiated use of control and surveillance systems on the movement of people and communities, generating new forms of geographical discrimination.

At the same time, the development of more accessible over-the-counter technologies can increase the notion that people may exercise surveillance and control processes over neighbours, peers, relatives, among others, without clear ethical or privacy parameters.

The absence of public policy on AI and AI trade regulation may imply new risks, leading to violence and persecution in our societies.

#### 6.2.4. Lack of data privacy

AI records and stores information or fragments of information. This information includes: mobility practices, behaviour and consumption patterns, support and socialisation patterns, and even information about people's private conversations.

In most cases, the way in which this information is stored, managed and even marketed is unknown. There are high risks of information mishandling and leaks. The exposure or sale of data may generate unethical practices of control, persecution or profiling for commercial purposes.

A simple example is the integration of AI, data and healthcare. That is, data on people's health is no longer governed by the criterion of confidentiality between health professionals and their patients, but instead passes into the hands of the companies developing technology.

#### 6.2.5. Social isolation

AI can tend towards isolating practices that weaken active and effective inclusion in society, as well as participation in citizenship processes and movements. Links with social groups may be replaced by links with artificial intelligence systems.

#### 6.2.6. Discrimination in access to employment positions

Facial recognition and voice recognition systems are also being used in the selection of job candidates. AI systems are programmed to select candidates with a tone of voice or particular facial measurements for certain jobs. Gender- or ethnicity-based biases can thus be reproduced, with the programming of the AI system to select candidates with a lower-pitched voices (usually men) and specific facial features (e.g. Caucasian or white) for higher-paying jobs.

#### 6.2.7. Inequity

There are people making decisions about the way algorithms are programmed, and about the use of the information and data employed by AI. In addition, there are people making decisions on how and when to apply AI.

When these decisions are not guided by public policy designed from a perspective of inclusion and equity, new social gaps may be generated.

On the other hand, inequality can be generated between societies in which legislation exists upholding a human rights perspective in AI management and those with gaps continuing to exist in this area. Companies may thus behave ethically in some countries and unethically in others.

We have already seen this example in the case of data storage.

For example, in the European Union, companies that collect and sell data on mobile phone usage must inform users about the way in which this data will be stored and used, such that users have the opportunity to accept or reject this management by the company. Meanwhile, in the United States and Latin America, such protections do not exist.

### 6.2.8. The use of AI in the field of education

When considering the use of AI in the field of education, all these gaps in management and regulation, as well as all risks of bias, control and surveillance, inequality of access, and corporate-centred production and development are applicable. In May 2019, UNESCO held the conference “Artificial intelligence and Education, Planning education in the AI Era: Lead the leap”. Discussions that arose regarding the use of AI in education include:

**A |** Some government education sectors consider that AI technology can make teachers’ lives simpler, “revolutionising classrooms”, and that progress should occur promptly in “artificial intelligence literacy” (UNESCO, 2019).

**B |** UNESCO has pointed out that AI can be expected to cause changes in the labour market, which much be met by changes in curriculum design and teaching practices.

**C |** In general, technology is not a problem if it is regulated and if this regulation occurs in response to wide-ranging inclusive debate that upholds clear notions of human rights and public policy. However, as previously mentioned, there exists a gap in the field of Artificial Intelligence.

**D |** Limitations of access to AI and the possibilities of purchasing, consuming and using AI goods and experiences can also pose a problem to the education sector.

**E |** Biases may occur in the very process of planning and designing technology, for the provision of support for classroom exercises and for curricular development.

**F |** Early childhood educational technology offers interactive programs in which children must select options on a screen, allowing them to progress through the content.

**G |** It should be remembered that AI and the Internet of Things (IoT) are programmed to create “simple and fast experiences”. Computer programs can collect information on what subject items children master and those for which they require more time or do not achieve correct answers, and can then redesign the curriculum and contents based on this. That is,

AI computer programs can make “intuitive” decisions to remove certain contents from the curriculum.

In view of the implementation of digital solutions in education, some pending discussions include:

- A |** Promotion of research into teacher and student burnout in virtual modalities.
- B |** Deepening should occur of the curricular and pedagogical relevance of the virtual modality and of educational technologies. In 2020, some emergency approaches were provided, but it was not possible to create a pedagogical proposal using educational technology.
- C |** Legislation must be made to protect working conditions in the virtual mode, establishing time limits, data access costs, and access to equipment (computers, telephones, etc.).
- D |** There is no transparency as to what is done with the data generated when teachers and students use apps and platforms “donated” by Google, Microsoft, Telefónica-Movistar, etc. How is this data used? Is it being sold? Is it being stored? By whom? Who buys it? Are behavioural profiles created from this data? What are the implications of such profiles?
- E |** In the same vein, it is vital that jobs in the education sector are protected and the right to social dialogue is safeguarded. EILA’s education unions have defended the importance of promoting the local and regional production and design of education technology, with the participation of teachers, public universities, ministries of education and ministries of science and technology, among others.
- F |** In the case of education technology, there should be clarity with regards to how data is collected, stored and distributed, as well as clear regulations on the handling of sensitive data. A security and privacy policy for educational technology should include information structures for data protection, and students, teachers and families should be informed of this.

The Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP) establishes some minimum steps required for responsible data management that are important to take into account:

- Communicate to the user what type of data is being generated when using a platform or web browser, etc.
- Inform users how this data is collected.
- Inform users how this data is saved or stored.
- Inform users about what maintenance is provided to the storage tools.

- Inform users whether the data is destroyed or deleted from storage.
- Inform users about the access infrastructure: who has access to viewing the data stored?

### 6.2.9. People working in the AI industry

Another area of discussion should be the working conditions of digital workers. Due to its production dynamics, the work of data mining, programming and web development often takes the form of unregulated work.

- Although large technology and AI development companies have their own workforce teams, many other companies are subcontracted to fulfil a series of tasks (user experience design, platform art design, programming design, data extraction, etc.). (González et al., 2023)

- In recent years, workers from Latin America and the Caribbean have been identified as significant contributors to digital development work, digital platform work, etc.

- Many of these job opportunities are typically outsourced to professional services, which are performed from home or in hybrid models that mix on-site and remote work.

- This modality generates a segregation and isolation of workers, which can delay union organisation, while favouring exploitation and burnout.

- Traditionally, men have held a greater number of higher-paid positions in the digital industry. This has to do with the sexual division of labour and with forms of exclusion from early childhood, when boys and girls are socialised to grow up with more or less interest in one or another productive task.

- Being a mostly male field, the area of digital and technological production can be exclusionary and reproduce forms of discrimination against women workers.

- This has serious implications since the digital industry may end up reproducing biases and discrimination within the digital products themselves.

- When women manage to insert themselves into the digital development industry, they are typically also overloaded with care tasks, which generates longer working hours, greater stress and physical exhaustion, among others.

### 6.2.10. A pedagogical perspective on protection of the right to public education in the digital and AI era

Based on this scenario, OLPE has drawn up a list of practices and demands that can contribute to the protection of the right to public education in the context of progress in digital AI technology:

- Establishment of processes of dialogue and reflection on AI in decision-making areas in public education at all levels.
- Promotion of regulations on the use of AI in curriculum design.
- Promotion of regulatory criteria on the way in which AI is used to design educational content and its integration into classroom processes.
- Regulation of the participation of private corporations in pilot projects with students and public educational institutions.
- The establishment of a regulatory framework of forms of collaboration of the education sector in AI research and development processes.
- Safeguarding public participation, especially that of universities, in technology research and development processes.
- Definition of the use of AI in teacher recruitment processes.
- AI public policy criteria are required for technology regulation, labour market regulation and regulation of the scope of interaction of human experience with AI.
- Protection of the working conditions of teachers in the AI era.
- Guarantee of training programs provided by the state so that educational personnel can work effectively with AI.
- Definition of the way learning using AI is to be evaluated.
- Guarantee of access to free public free information so that Latin American youth can participate in the AI labour market, including spaces for young women, and rural, black and Indigenous youth.
- Leading current debate on ethics in AI and the IoT.
- University programs are required to prepare professionals who master AI.
- Visibility and education policy must be created with regards to the risks of data use and storage.
- Guarantee of the participation of teachers and trade unions in the processes of developing regulatory frameworks for AI in educational policy.
- Elaboration of proposals as to strategies and practices to decrease the ongoing threat of bias in AI.

## 7. In conclusion

There is systematic participation of non-state groups and, even more, of groups with interests in profiting from and doing business through education, who sit at decision-making tables on educational policy. These actors include business networks, international co-operation actors, educational business oligopolies, foundations belonging to transnational corporations, representatives of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and more recently, actors from faith groups, mainly evangelical and philanthropy groups.

OLPE has also identified the trend to play down of the concept of “civil society”, with business sectors with clearly commercial agendas being convened to participate in forums to define educational policy as if they represented civil society.

At the same time, many ministries of education have been permeated by the neoliberal thought, which equate public policy with a business strategy focused on non-state efficiency, such that they are closer to NGOs and companies, and do not recognise the role of education unions as legitimate actors who should lead social dialogue in educational policy.

The consequences of these new educational policies are obvious: they deepen the privatisation of education and increase its commercialisation. It is therefore urgent that the trade union movement develops strategies to strengthen and mobilise itself for action, increasing its ability to create policy proposals.

In the face of these tendencies, it is clear that teacher unions, particularly EILA affiliates, are called on to confront these policies, while increasing their ability to elaborate and strengthen proposals for educational public policy that focuses on comprehensive life education, with an approach that champions human rights. Trade union strategies against the privatisation and commercialisation of education must also be elaborated from a viewpoint that is culturally and ideologically critical, and supported by research processes for political and trade union action.

To this end, unions can find great strength in the strategy of the Latin American Pedagogical Movement to continue working in favour of a pedagogical and educational proposal that can serve as an alternative to the dominant model.

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