

The public education we need in the new period*

Adriana Puiggrós ¹

Translation: Carl Rosenberg

Summary: To answer the question “What kind of education is needed in the new period after the pandemic?”, it is necessary to recognize the active role teachers have played in education in the current context, helping students and working so that the pandemic does not deepen inequalities even further. To design this new education, we must draw on the experience and learning we have had in the context of the pandemic as we continue to combat various forms of privatization such as *tertiarization*, *charterization* and technological companies’ control of education and to recover the role of the state as the guarantor of the right to education.

We have learned from this pandemic that we are all being attacked by the same enemy. Going beyond social, cultural, ethnic and gender differences, it is clear that we are all part of the same overall whole, humanity. From this perspective, expanding coordination among teachers throughout the world is highly relevant. Issues of global importance also impact education, and we must take action.

Teachers are being expected by some governments to show up to schools without the necessary health and safety conditions, which are our right, being provided for. Nevertheless, teachers themselves have already taken the initiative of reaching out to the most vulnerable students in the midst of this pandemic, so that already-existing inequalities are not deepened.

This is our most important task. We must demand that governments ensure that the inequalities which

1. Professor at the National Pedagogic University and Consulting Professor at the University of Buenos Aires



already exist in our society are not deepened—both the great differences between countries and those between various sectors within countries. The pandemic must not become a new element of inequality. We must consider the differences in technological knowledge and its potential among various countries. For example, if we compare Silicon Valley with a community in the Argentine-Paraguay jungle, we will find enormous technological differences which must be taken into account.

We must work to ensure that virtual education reaches everyone. In Latin America, in order to develop virtual educational activities, connection networks need to be completed so that the whole of society has free access. It is often teachers who have been solving problems with the internet by purchasing computers and programs, among other expenses, and teachers have spontaneously learned an enormous amount about technology. It is now urgent that governments recognize and systematize the forms of knowledge that teachers have acquired through personal effort.

On the other hand, I want to emphasize how important it is that we teachers take control of technology and not the reverse. I want to highlight this point because several decades ago, large corporations discovered education as a potential market, one with an infinite clientele which reproduced by itself with enormous profits. In this sense, large corporations are not just interested in acquiring private schools, but also in penetrating the space of public education, which is dealt with for the most part by governments. Corporations seek to continue profiting in various ways, one of them being so-called *tertiarization*, that is to say, privatizing functions of the public education system.

Some foundations and NGOs, presenting themselves as if they had philanthropic goals, offer rapid courses for training “social leaders,” with the idea of substituting these for teachers trained in normal schools, teacher training colleges and universities. This rapid substitution is a powerful instrument: on one hand, teacher training is appropriated and on the other these “leaders” or “new” educators are used to ideologically penetrate public education and accustom society to the idea of teachers becoming simple tutors or mentors of an education based on technology.

Privatization takes many forms. With *tertiarization*, the administration of many public schools lies with companies, packages of contents or evaluations of students and teachers are purchased and management of digital platforms is ceded to business. Another well-known form of privatization is *charterization* which means that communities assume the costs of schools which should be the role of the government. There are many other privatization strategies. The damage is enormous since the state is the only authority which can guarantee the right to education, a right which belongs to the population as a whole as do the rights of teachers.

Nevertheless, we are learning a lot from the process that we are currently living through. We must be aware of what we’ve learned because when we return to school, when the moment is right, it will be with a new rhythm, combining in-person and virtual activities. We must strengthen ourselves as teachers. To achieve this, the role of unions is very important, synthesizing all these forms of learning, presenting proposals for a new education so that it is we who found the new schools which will be more just and less unequal.