The Dangers of Institutionalizing Online Education:
The impact on teaching work*

**María de la Luz Arriaga**[1]
Translated by Wendy Santizo

Summary: This article addresses the dangers of the institutionalization of online education and its impact on teachers' work. Taking into consideration that what we are facing is a new reality, not a new normality, it is necessary to rethink education. In the context of the pandemic, governments and educational authorities imposed the closure of schools and virtual education through computer platforms or with the use of television, reinforcing the privatization processes that were already underway. They also gave rise to other types of privatization processes.

To start off we need to characterize the current moment as a historic moment worldwide. A moment in which the Covid19 pandemic has revealed the collapse of the neoliberal capitalist system and the failure of its policies of dispossessing rights and devastating the environment. It has also highlighted the fragility of education systems and the failure of competency-based models.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17,106,000 people have tested positive with Covid19 in the world, and 668,000 people have reportedly died of the virus as of July 31, 2020. Although this is explained by the severity of the illness, it is also a product of the deterioration of living and working conditions of great masses of the population as well as the dismantling of public healthcare systems around the world. For 30 years, we have been repeatedly told that private is better than public and that in the public sector we have dismal quality, corruption and lack of capacity.

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1. Professor Faculty of Economics UNAM. Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education, Mexican Section.
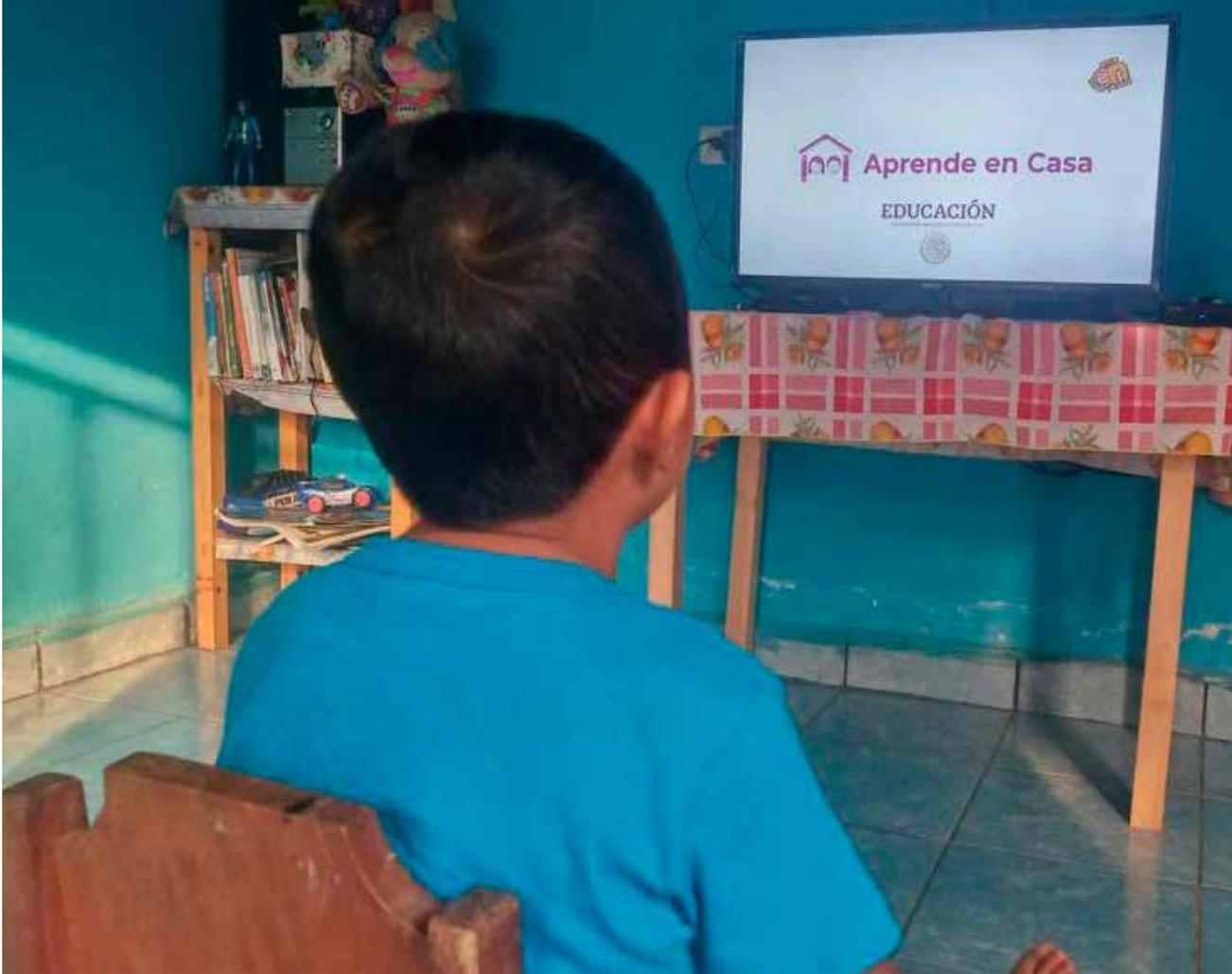
However, in these 30 years of neoliberalism, we have seen how education models, particularly those based on competencies, were clearly designed to educate students to satisfy the needs of the market, through individualism, exacerbated competency, standardization and external evaluation of the learning-teaching processes. This type of education, as well as the science and technology that it promotes, has not served to resolve the great national or world problems, as has been demonstrated over the past few months of the health emergency.
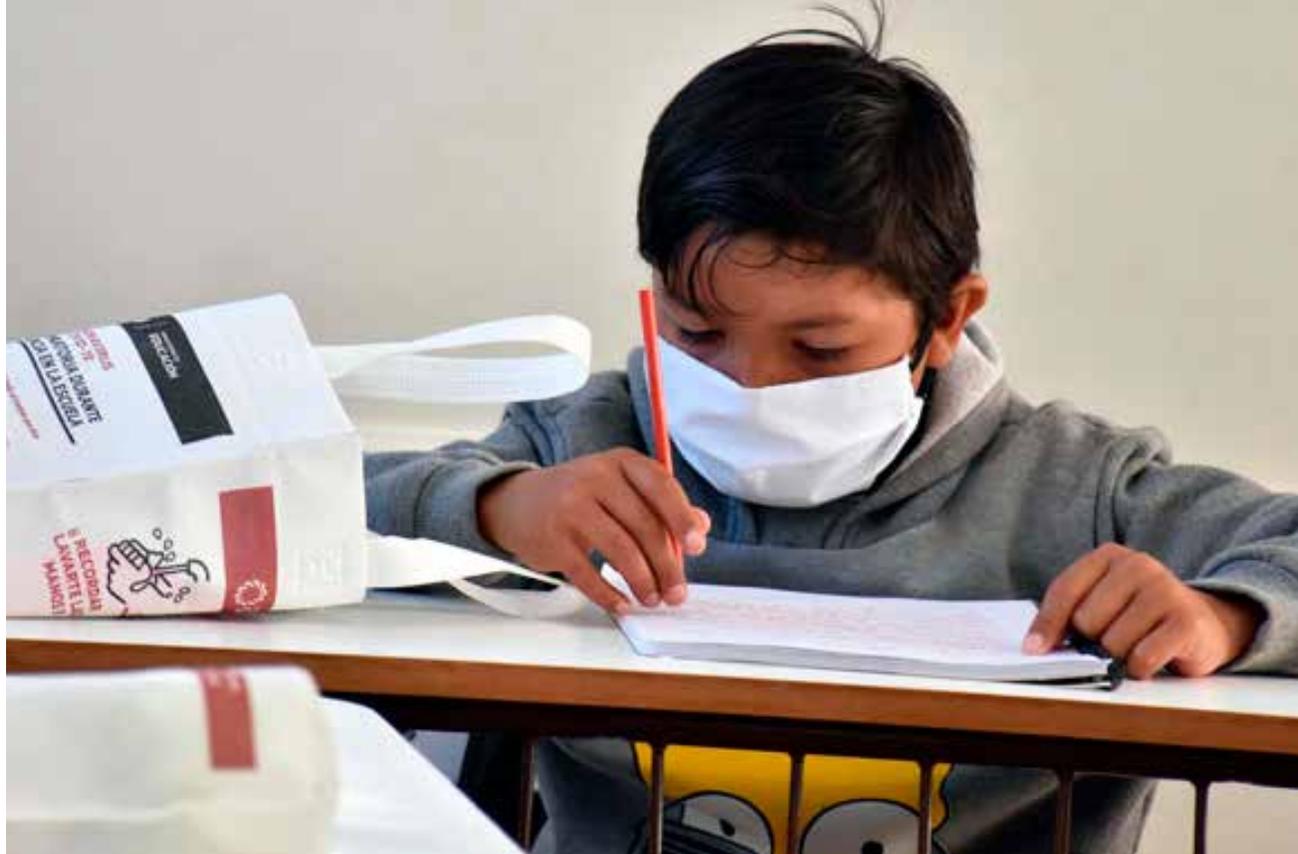
In the two previous webinars organized by the IDEA Network, we posited two main ideas. The first is the greater vulnerability of society to control and surveillance by the empire of large communication and information transnationals. Secondly, we heard that online education disrupts teachers' working conditions, transforming teaching work into online tasks through the use of technologies. This has increased working hours, deregulated and flexibilized teaching work and reduced in relative terms the salaries received by education workers, all of which in turn affects our health.

And the boundary between work life and personal or family life is dissolved.

Why is it important to talk about the dangers of institutionalizing online education and its impact on teaching work? Mainly because we need to rethink education. We are in a new historical moment and it is the responsibility of education actors and their organizations to face this reality. But it is also the state's role and that of the entire society to construct a pedagogy for social transformation and freedom as a creative, critical and humanistic process for the development of life in community. This is essential if we want to overcome the current economic crisis and social devastation.

In education we are facing an alarming situation. In July 2020, the UN Secretary General warned of the danger of a generational catastrophe due to the closing of schools and its impact on a billion students worldwide. This is the size of the challenge we are facing.

We are also faced with authoritarian and technocratic decisions which go against the collective will of teachers and their unions to find a solution to the cu-

rrent challenges and demands made by society, as well as against common sense given the failure of neoliberal policies in education. Education authorities imposed school closures and online education through virtual platforms or through TV, reinforcing privatization policies already underway and creating new types of privatization where the centrality of the school is displaced, where pedagogy is absent and where teachers' labour is stripped of its reason for being. That is, to be a main social subject in the act of education.

In basic education in Mexico, which spans pre-school to high-school, what is being imposed is a program called "Learning at home" which will provide courses through national TV during the 2020-2021 school year. For post-secondary education, so-called hybrid models are planned which combine face to face courses with virtual platforms, but because of health and safety concerns it is likely they will be completely virtual. The Mexican education system is federal and not decentralized as in the US or Canada.

For that school year, the secretary of public education had previously reached an agreement with four well-known businessman from the monopoly groups who control the television channels, that 30 million children and youth would attend school through TV

and radio with classes broadcast from 8am to 7pm, for which the companies would receive about 400 million pesos (about twenty-two and a half million US dollars), in spite of the fact that the digital spectrum and TV and radio frequencies are property of the nation.

It seems important to ask here - what will the role of teachers be? We will basically be turned into markers of homework and agents of the control and rating of academic progress. The authorities have not said who will be developing the learning content, nor what the cost of that will be.

For many years in Mexico there has been a high-school distance education program designed for rural communities called "Telesecundaria". Teachers play an important role because the students are not isolated. They meet, study and are challenged by their teachers, and all this learning cannot take place without the proper preparation and the will to go beyond the classes that are broadcast on TV.

A hybrid model is proposed for the universities but the majority of schools will provide courses 100% online, even schools such as the faculties of medicine, science, and chemistry.

We are facing a new reality about which we were not consulted, nor were communities. We recognize

there are different impacts on teaching work in the two government strategies, in basic and higher education, but the lengthening of the work day, intensification of work load, increased stress, inequality in access to digital tools and the lack of training in their use are common to both.

We have also identified the issue of depriving teachers of their reason for being; the absence of pedagogy in online policies can be seen in light of the loss of the centrality of schools. The responsibility for learning is transferred onto individuals. Learning at home is "an individual endeavour" and it stops being the responsibility of society and the state as its representative and is moved into the private realm of the home and the family. Furthermore teachers stop being a key actor in the education process, and the focus shifts to the work produced rather than on learning itself.

Schools can be important generators of culture and of communities of learning and of refuge, like the sanctuary schools in the United States that countered Trump's offensive against migrant communities. This is what we must recover - schools embedded in their communities. Teachers' unions and social organizations are already working on this such as the CNTE (National Coordinator of Education Workers) in Michoacan,

Oaxaca and Veracruz in Mexico. In Chicago the CTU is an example of community work and the struggle to defend education.

What we are facing is a new reality, not a new normality. There is renewed dispute and therefore a need to reinforce the organization and democratic participation of education workers. It can be both a challenge as well as an opportunity to rethink education. We don't want education like before, but what we are being offered is even worse.

At this moment, we need to discuss the role of the school, of teachers and their unions, colleges or social organizations. Can ICTs (information and communication technologies) be used to advance towards a liberating education? What are the working conditions in this transformation project? How can we defend our autonomy and creativity as teachers?

The IDEA Network has organized webinars to help define a common agenda. We are proposing an international campaign of local, provincial, national or institutional actions but always in the context of international solidarity, asserting education as a social right in a pedagogy for the liberation of our peoples as proposed by Paulo Freire.