

Changes to teaching work and school organization

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Teaching work during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a transformation in teachers' work in Ecuador through the development of digital platforms by the education community (students, parents and teachers). Some students were able to use WhatsApp, Teams, Zoom and other digital platforms to continue their work. Students who did not have access to the internet had the option to meet with teachers face-to-face and use information centres to pick up their learning guides and do their assignments. However, thousands of students could not continue studying, including cases of entire families who were forced to migrate to other cities in the country.

Teachers turned their homes into digital classrooms. They worked up to 16 hours a day, since they had to

communicate with students and parents, review homework, plan lessons and participate in meetings with other teachers in their schools, assist online training and take snapshots of the classes to send to the school's principal and to the School District as proof of the work carried out.

A significant change was the participation of families in the education process, particularly parents, grandparents and older siblings. At home they developed the role of education assistants, receiving online classes next to their children, grandchildren or brothers and sisters and actively participating in homework. Ultimately, homes took on a greater commitment to children's education.

The Ministry of Education designed the Education Plan "Learning together at home", where worksheets and learning guides were created, as well as student portfolios and evaluations. These materials were developed by bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education who did not

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take into account the reality of the schools or teachers who had to adapt each one to their own contexts.

Teachers had to invest in the internet, data plans and computers as well as working a greater number of hours. The government of President Lenin Moreno said that “education will have special treatment; since classes are developed virtually, only one hour will be reduced” which meant “an impact of 8.33% in the monthly salary” (Moreno 2020), and thus the reduction of teachers' wages. Their work devalued through the reduction of the total payroll, the resources were then redirected to paying the external debt to comply with the International Monetary Fund.

Teaching work after the pandemic - Alarming data

The numbers in the education system show that 90,000 students stopped attending school during the pandemic

(El Universo, 2021). For the 2023-2024 school year 53,346 students did not register in the Costa region. According to National Police reports, 1,326 students left the classroom to join criminal gangs. Police “state that children and adolescents were recruited by criminal gangs to commit contract killings and robberies” (Primicias, 2023). Due to the criminalization of youth, information provided by the National Police must be read with caution, as we consider this demonstrates a social issue of increased violence in the country and is an expression of the particular exclusion and inequality affecting youth.

Focus on learning

Upon the return to classes the first action by teachers was to get back to teaching so students could access educational contents which were not fully covered during the pandemic. The majority of students could

not recall basic operations and presented difficulties in reading comprehension.

There was a strong impact in the Ecuadorian education system. According to surveys carried out by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, in homes that maintained education online, 70% claim that they learned less (UNICEF, 2022). This was even worse for those students who returned to class but had not stayed connected during the pandemic.

Changes to the Education Law

Ecuadorian teachers had to resort to two hunger strikes to attain the approval of a series of reforms to the Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI) that would improve the quality of education and the living conditions of educators. Among the reforms to the LOEI we find provisions to protect children and adolescents, assigning specific tasks to the Departments of Student Counseling (DECE) that must function in every public school. It also lays out the investment of 6% of the GDP for early, basic and secondary education; ensures free

connectivity for the education community; guarantees an inclusive, quality education for which multidisciplinary teams must be created, to advise and accompany teachers, students and families; equalizes teachers wages with those of the public sector (only teachers had not had to access pay equity since 2017) and reintegrates teachers who were disconnected during the pandemic.

The Ministry of Education did not understand the new reality in education and is currently breaching the law by not assigning the costs needed to increase the DECEs in the schools, once again placing the workload on teachers and forcing them to remain in schools eight working hours. They are also putting up obstacles to teachers' access to pay equity (11,000 teachers are excluded).

Keeping parents involved

The challenge for Ecuadorian teachers is to reinvolve families in the educational process. What occurred during the pandemic was important; in the post-pandemic period activities such as reading together as a family



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can contribute to the proper functioning of school governance. In the new school scenario, it is vital to count on the support of parents in the educational process, above all by monitoring their educational representatives and participating in the discussion regarding the future of education.

The role of teachers

At this moment in time, teachers have a special role to play as they assume their work as part of the process of transformation that our society requires. Schools must stay connected to the community and teachers must assume their commitment to liberation and not just a welfare model of education.

Teachers must reinvent themselves. Yes, there's a need to increase training in the use of new technologies, but it's also also important to develop pedagogical tasks that take into account the active participation of students and encourage critical and

questioning thinking. Here we find ourselves with a dilemma - educators must either assert and sustain the capitalist system or contribute to the liberating process of the peoples. It is time that teachers strengthen their unity, organization and struggle in order to contribute to the liberation of the workers, youth and peoples of Ecuador.

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