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Observatorio Latinoamericano de
Políticas Educativas

A trade union and Latin American perspective on the OECD recommendations on education

A gateway to the commercialization
of education



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EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL LATIN AMERICA (EILA)

REGIONAL OFFICE, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

Ph. (506) 2234-8404

Website www.ei-ie-al.org

Post Office Box 1867-2050

Webpage www.educacionpublica.org

Email america.latina@ei-ie-al.org

Observatory www.observatorioeducacion.org

COORDINATION TEAM OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE EILA

Combertty Rodríguez (Senior Regional Coordinator EILA)

Gabriela Sancho (EILA Regional Coordinator)

Editing: Lucía Zúñiga Solano | Translation: Lucy Toner | Design: Estudio Casarli, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Table of contents

Foreword	7
Introduction	8
I. Clarification	10
II. Preface	11
III. What is the OECD?	12
1. The OECD: Its roadmap for education in Latin America	13
2. The OECD and experimentation with educational financing	17
3. The OECD as a promoter of public-private partnerships to commercialize education	20
4. The future scenarios for education: Do these emerge from the course of history or has the OECD itself promoted them with allied actors?	22
5. The OECD and the business of standardized assessment	31
6. The OECD and the potential private business in skills for work	35
7. The OECD and education for new ways of working	37
8. The OECD and the loss of the public purpose of higher education	40
9. By way of conclusion	45
References	48
ANNEX 1	52

List of Acronyms

APP *Public-private partnership*

IDB *Inter-American Development Bank*

EDUCO *Programa de Educación con participación de la Comunidad / Education Program with Community Participation*

PROHECO *Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria / Honduran Community Education Program)*

OECD *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.*

PISA *Program for International Student Assessment*

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

Foreword

In this document, Education International Latin America addresses the advancement of the commercialization of education and policies favoring private profit with public education funds in the region. Along these lines, the Latin American Observatory of Educational Policy (OLPE) has made an extensive bibliographic review of the different recommendations made by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the field of educational policy in our countries. From the moment of its founding in 1960, the OECD set out to promote flows of capital, the expansion of markets and the intensification of the expansion of world trade.

This objective is also expressed in the recommendations it makes to countries in the field of education. The publication *A trade union and Latin American perspective on the OECD recommendations on education: A gateway to the commercialization of education* reviews a set of policies promoted by the OECD in the region on issues as diverse as financing, curriculum, educational administration, assessment, tertiary education, the private provision of educational services, teaching degrees and even the participation of working people in decision-making forums.

This publication shows how all recommendations made are aligned with the OECD's fundamental purpose: to promote trade exchanges. At the same time, examples are provided to demonstrate the points of coincidence between the recommendations made by the OECD in the field of education with the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, and with educational reforms promoted and sustained by loans and projects from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. **This document proposes the observation of an international institutional framework around an agenda that opens the door to increased weakening of the public education system in favor of the commercialization of education.**

Since the OECD's policies are of mandatory compliance for its member countries, the increase in membership of Latin American countries of this body requires an important discussion for the education sector in Latin America, as this represents the increasing influence on public policy of an organization that has promoted and continues to promote conditions favorable to the commercialization of public education.

This publication makes a new contribution to the definition of union political strategy, as well as the representing vital input to the elaboration of an alternative educational proposal within the framework of the Latin American Pedagogical Movement, which has been led by Education International Latin America since 2011.

Combertty Rodríguez García

Principal Regional Coordinator

Education International Latin America

Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Latin American Observatory of Educational Policies (OLPE), belonging to Education International Latin America (EILA), a regional body that brings together teaching union organizations affiliated to Education International in Latin American countries.

For this reason, the document collects contributions on the topics debated in EILA-affiliated trade union organizations. This is the collective subject that the documents of international institutions tend to ignore, or even worse, to characterize as an obstacle to be removed so that the objectives pursued by the World Bank and the OECD can be achieved without interference.

This characterization coincides with that the hegemonic discourse seeks to install through major multimedia conglomerates that try to portray as common sense the idea that trade unions and trade unionists are harmful to society. To this end, it is often argued that their activism in defense of public education impedes the progress of deregulation that clears the way for business community initiatives. If, as is noted in the preface, the weakening of the public system is necessary to promote the emergence of the business sector, it is clear that those of us who, from our teacher organizations, defend the social right to education are located on the opposite side of the fence.

The truth is that this is an old dispute. There's nothing new about it. Vocabularies and outward appearances change, but the background remains the same. In fact, at the beginning of Pinochet's coup in Chile supported by the United States government, the Chilean general prohibited the unionization of teaching staff by Supreme Decree. Years later, in an interview in the newspaper Clarín, the authors of the educational reform in this country recognized that "without the dictatorship and without a state of siege, these changes would have been impossible."

What did change is that this dominant discourse, laid out in documents belonging to the OECD, the World Bank and other organizations, is now presented to the citizenry as if it were something new.

Calls for the modernization of educational systems made by global education entities are seasoned with allusions to the emergence of artificial intelligence and the impact of the scientific technological revolution on the future of our societies. The effect of this factor is undeniable. However, there is an unsurmountable distance between that and proposing, as if it were part of the same package, the need to incorporate strategic alliances with the business sector, ceasing the operation of long-standing state bureaucracies by giving more freedom to educational entrepreneurship, and archiving as a thing of the past conceptions maintaining the indelible role of the state in guaranteeing education as a right available to each and every citizen.

In Latin America, this confrontation between those of us who defend the role of the state as a guarantor of equal opportunities against those defending the incursion of the free market into education, continues to mark a line of ongoing, burning dispute in all countries in the region. There are dramatic ebbs and flows as governments alternate from those with agendas that make pendulum swings from proposals aimed at defunding educational systems to make way for the market, to governments applying a social agenda in which the concept of social investment replaces that of fiscal expenditure.

The most striking expression of these pendulum swings is the distance between Bolsonaro's Brazil and Lula's Brazil. Certainly, beyond the intentions stated in the documents of the OECD and other international organizations, experience at least in this region shows that every time neoliberals hold government, educational investment has regressed and an accentuation

of segmentation occurs that reproduces in the educational system the inequalities of social models marked by the concentration of wealth and the growth of poverty. This reduces the OECD goals to statements of good intentions that should be postponed periodically. There is no empirical evidence that there has ever existed a Latin American country in which the application of neoliberal recipes has expanded the social right to education.

This criticism carried out by teacher unions as to the failure of the globalization model, that deepens the inequality gap and deprives educational institutions of their status as instruments at the service of upward social mobility, places us, from the dominant perspective, as one of the sectors that obstructs the model promoted by the organizations of global governance.

This position has engendered ongoing costs. Proof of these are the attacks directed against trade unionism in many Latin American countries. Multimedia corporations, foundations financed by the business sector and neoliberal political parties often pillory unions and those who represent them.

In this combative scenario, the unions representing Latin American educators are determined not to limit ourselves to merely defending against corporate interests, under the conviction that, if there is no right to quality education for our children and youth, nor will there be for our teachers.

This is the *raison d'être* of the Latin American Pedagogical Movement and the reason behind our active participation in the global campaign promoted by the Education International (EI) against the commercialization of education. This initiative, led by EI president, David Edwards, and Angelo Gavrielatos, has allowed us to convene academics and researchers from prestigious universities, under whose advice we have carried out re-

search to reveal the cogs and gears moved by powerful business groups that, in each of our countries, promote the globalization model. These investigations have led to the publication of texts that our unions have used to establish a voice in the educational debate that, in general, had been absent: that of the teachers themselves, whose knowledge and expertise seem to have no value for the technocrats who postulate the need to listen to civil society, yet exclude those working in the classrooms and the unions that represent them.

This OLPE report aims to shed light on the logic behind the OECD's discourse and its promotion of the primary role that it claims the business sector should play within our educational systems. All this we have undertaken from the perspective of that collective subject made up of educational organizations, and we are proud to express the point of view of those who everyday put body and soul into their work in the classroom.

Hugo Yasky

*President of the Regional Committee
Education International Latin America*

I. Clarification

The reference section of this document provides the details of the sources consulted.

In the case of OECD publications, for the preparation of this analysis the following titles were read and may be cited or paraphrased with the bibliographic reference:

- + The Secretary-General's Strategic Orientations for the 2023-24 Biennium.
- + *Trends Shaping Education*,
- + Our Global Reach,
- + OECD Convention,
- + *Skills Studies: Innovative and Entrepreneurial Universities in Latin America, 2022 (OECD/IDB)*,
- + *COVID-19 and developing countries: Policies and partnerships to respond, reset and rebuild better, Policy Statement by the Members of the Governing Board of the OECD Development*,
- + *Strategic Education Governance*,
- + *SEG Project Plan and organizational framework*,
- + Governance of Skills Systems: As prepared by the OECD for the G20 Joint Education and Employment Working Group,
- + OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Mexico 2012,
- + *Governing complex education systems*,
- + *How much does PISA cost*,
- + The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning.
- + A Skills beyond School Review of Costa Rica,
- + *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning, UNESCO/OECD*,
- + Reviews of school resources: Uruguay 2016,
- + Reviews of National Policies for Education: Education in Colombia,
- + Reviews of National Policies for Education: Education in Costa Rica,
- + *Public-Private Partnerships: In Pursuit of Risk Sharing and Value for Money*.

For more details on these publications, please review the reference section, in which other sources reviewed are also listed.

II. Preface

In June 2022, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published its Strategic Orientations for the 2023-24 Biennium, which sets out the guidelines for the work to be done by the OECD and its member countries that the education sector should not ignore.

These strategic guidelines make it clear that reforms in education will continue to advance towards favoring an apprenticeship system for employment, replacing comprehensive educational systems and increasing the participation of private and business sectors, further entrenching standardized assessment processes and the centralization of data held on both teachers and students, as well as strengthening digital, online and self-administered education alternatives.

This document (OECD, 2022) places emphasis on labor market policies, highlighting the central role of education in generating the skills and competencies expected by this market, and facilitating the upskilling and reskilling of those who are already involved in the labor market and those who have already completed educational and training processes.

On the other hand, the OECD has been making progress in the promotion and dissemination of possible education scenarios aimed at dismantling the educational system, deregulating the teaching profession and freeing up the creation of educational content and modalities as commodities subject to market demands (OECD, 2020).

The OECD considers that a strong democracy is one that promotes business and the exchange of goods. This view directly opposes the perspective guiding the work of the Latin American Observatory of Educational Policy (OLPE) and Education International Latin America, who consider that the main tool necessary to build social cohesion and strengthen democracies should be robust public policy, which is capable of regulating and even limiting business and the exchange of goods, with a state that acts as the guarantor, financier and implementer of public policy.

Consequently, the education unions of Latin America consider that the promotion of policies favorable to the commercialization of education and the participation of non-state actors in the definition of public policy endanger the exercise of law and weaken the sense of system, along with the public conviction that the right to education should be safeguarded.

III. What is the OECD?

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was established on December 14, 1960, in Paris, France, with the participation of sixteen European countries (including the United Kingdom and Ireland), Turkey and the United States. On its foundation, its objective was to ensure the strength and prosperity of economies “to achieve the objectives of the United Nations, to safeguard individual freedoms and to increase general welfare” (OECD, 1960).

OECD countries and their key partners account for about 80% of global trade and investment. The organization establishes standards, norms and initiatives with which it proposes to “guide and implement reforms in more than 100 countries around the world” on the basis of values shared by these countries (OECD, 2022).

As a way to achieve the strengthening of economies, this organization proposes broad-based cooperation and “the intensification of the expansion of world trade [...] to improve international economic relations” (OECD, 1960).

Paragraphs d and e of Article II of the Convention establishing the OECD state that the countries that make up the OECD:

- d)** pursue their efforts to reduce or abolish obstacles to the exchange of goods and services and current payments and maintain and extend the liberalization of capital movements;
 - e)** contribute to the economic development of both Member and non-member countries in the process of economic development by appropriate means and, in particular, by the flow of capital to those countries, having regard to the importance to their economies of receiving technical assistance and of securing expanding export markets. (OECD, 1960)
- For its part, Article V dictates that:

“In order to achieve its objectives, the organization may:

- a)** make decisions which, unless otherwise provided for, shall be binding to all members;
- b)** make recommendations to the members” (OECD, 1960).

That is, since its inception, the OECD has set out to grow and to affiliate new members, in addition to generating guidelines and recommendations for mandatory compliance. Because of its institutional nature, it is clear that the OECD prioritizes the promotion of business and trade.

1. The OECD: Its roadmap for education in Latin America

One of the main ways the OECD's presence is felt in education policy is through the sale of standardized assessment instruments, represented by the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) tests. The OECD has positioned itself as an actor that promotes reforms in educational policy in the countries of the Global South that seek to join this economic cooperation bloc or that have already joined it.

This involvement became clearer than ever in 2015 with the participation of the OECD in the meeting of the World Education Forum in the city of Incheon, where the educational goals were established that were relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. This process made it still more evident that the OECD set out to define the approach to be taken in this matter.

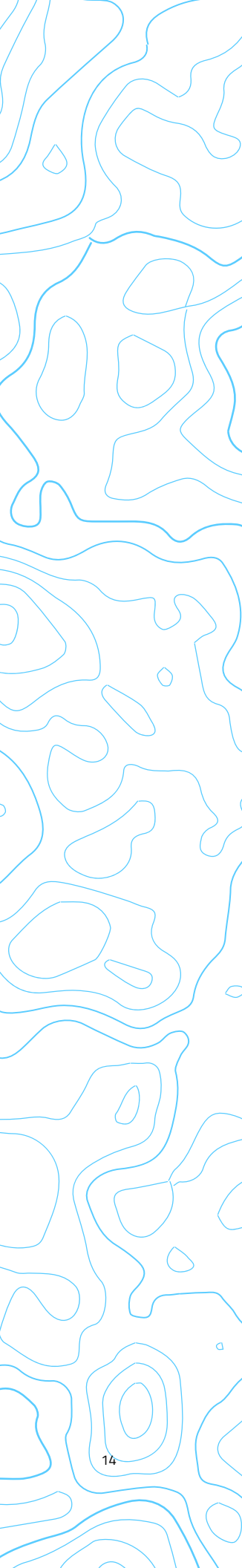
Among other actions, the OECD calls on countries to make educational reforms focused on the purchase of services from the private sector with public funds, even describing private groups as “end users of the public budget” (OECD, 2017). In addition, it highlights the design of results-based budgets, changes to the conditions for the free public education, the reduction and standardization of the curriculum, a decrease in the number of years of the period for secondary school, and the closure of schools and the relocation of students.

In this sense, from Latin America it can be observed that the OECD is aligned with the World Bank's global and regional policy to defund public education, reduce the presence of the state, and increase private participation in educational policy. The documentation reviewed by the OLPE shows significant coincidences between the positions of the World Bank, the OECD and the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank), with regard to recommending and promoting the participation of the private sector in the provision of educational services as the norm, as well as developing increasingly sophisticated mechanisms and business models.

In turn, these positions coincide with several aspects of the educational agenda promoted by international cooperation entities, for example, USAID (United States Cooperation Agency), the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals, which have an emphasis on public-private partnerships.

This alignment between the OECD and the World Bank is easily observed when reviewing the theses presented by the World Bank in its *1990 State of Poverty Report* (WB, 1990). This report established a set of recommendations aimed at defunding universal access to education, as well as the reduction of the public sector.

Some of the theses of this report were: that states should guarantee free public health and education services only for the “poorest people” (p. 76); that it is strategic to use the services of the private sector as an ally in achieving greater coverage in these services (p. 84); and that the funds earmarked for higher education should be reviewed, as the World Bank considered



these to be “very great”, disproportionate to the size of the beneficiary population, and greater than the resources allocated to secondary or primary schooling (p. 79). Finally, this report considered that public sector salaries make state spending more inefficient (p. 77). These theses published in 1990 have not shown any innovation, and on the contrary, have remained unchanged in the policies that the World Bank has promoted in Latin America over the last thirty-two years. Indeed, the OECD has taken them up once more in its policy documents for the region.

OECD publications from 2008 to 2022 feature recommendations on education policy that amount to threats against the right to education.

With special emphasis on the reports *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning* (OCDE, 2017), *OECD Reviews of the Labor Market and Social Policies: Costa Rica* (2017), and the OECD and National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEEd) joint report, *Reviews of school resources: Uruguay 2016*, the following consistent recommendations have been listed by the OECD:

- a.** That countries reduce the scope of free education, such that this be free only for the most vulnerable students, while everyone who can afford to do so, should pay. This document reviews the recommendations set forth in the document *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2018), in which the OECD states that the countries of the Global South must rethink the scope of free public education and safeguard this only for those who cannot afford to pay (p. 14). In other words, free education should not be a universal policy. In addition, the inclusion of other actors as potential funders of education is promoted. This is a kind of experimental policy for educational financing, which puts **the stability and institutionality of education budgets at risk**.
- b.** Increasing the involvement of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and, in general, the participation of companies and private groups in the provision of public educational services, with an emphasis on the provision of early childhood services. Private groups are considered to be “end users of the public budget” (OECD, 2017). Attention should be paid to the fact that 91% of education financing in OECD countries comes from public funds, although this 91% is not necessarily executed exclusively by state or public actors, with private actors also participating (OECD, 2017, p. 60).
- c.** Increasing the participation of the private business sector and NGOs in the design of educational policy and the related decision-making. Specifically, the OECD, in accordance with the World Bank and the 2030 Agenda, proposes that the private sector should participate in the design of the educational curriculum and in the implementation of training for employment. The 2030 Agenda is clear in inviting the **“private sector, philanthropic organiza-**

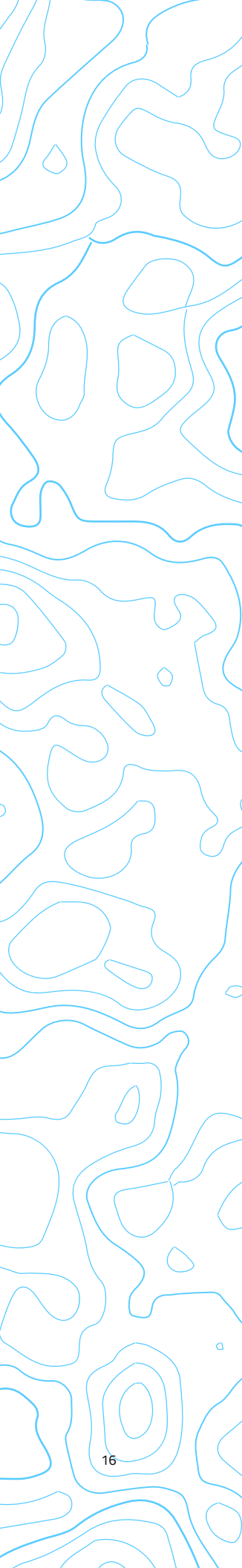
tions and foundations" to "fulfill an important function [by using] their expertise, innovative approaches, business experience and financial resources to strengthen public education" (UN, 2015, p.58). As part of that invitation, the 2030 Agenda proposes a role for the private sector that involves helping education and vocational training planners to understand labor market trends and skills needs, facilitating the transition from school to work, and promoting innovative approaches to the challenges posed by education (UN, 2015, p. 59)

Along the same lines, in the document *OECD Reviews on the Labor Market and Social Policies: Costa Rica*, the OECD urges Costa Rica to seek "closer cooperation with social partners by, for example, providing employers with incentives to participate more closely in the development of training as determined by demand" (OECD, p. 25).

d. While, on the one hand, greater participation of the private sector in education policy is promoted, the OECD publication, *Reviews of school resources: Uruguay 2016*, recommends reviewing the participation of people working in education in certain decision-making forums because the organization considers that there is a risk of conflict of interest in the development of educational policy. The text in question suggests that the direct participation of teachers in the administration of the educational system is questionable since, inevitably, these have vested interests. This practice allows corporate interests to influence the development of educational policy. The risk is that some educational policies may be biased to favor the interests of the teachers. As a result, the education system risks being more focused on them than on students (OECD, 2016, p.11).

This message from the OECD recommending review of the participation of teachers in decision-making forums may have an impact on the participation of trade unions, feeding in to anti-union positions in different countries, so affecting freedom of association and the exercise of democracy in general.

e. That countries become increasingly involved in standardized assessment processes such as PISA tests (Program for International Student Assessment) It is important to note that each country participating in the PISA tests pays between €75,000 and €300,000 to the OECD for participation rights (OECD; 2022). There are generally up to 90 countries participating in the test, given that both member countries and countries rated as "associates" are invited to do so. Thus, in a year in which all countries participate, up to €27 million could be paid for the right to participate in the PISA tests (OECD, 2022). Standardized assessment is not free of private profit processes and also generates business networks at the expense of public education.



In 2014, the OECD announced that it assigned the Pearson company the contract to develop the test instrument that would be implemented in 2018 (PRWEB, 2014). This topic shall be returned to later in this document.

f. That countries move forward with standardized evaluation of teaching staff and that they establish new evaluation bodies that are not under the authority of ministries of education.

g. That countries reduce the educational curriculum, prioritizing language and mathematics (subjects that are quantifiable with PISA tests), that the business sector actively participates in defining contents, and that progress is made in a design of educational options by content units or independent courses that each student can choose.

h. That countries design educational budgets linked to students by educational institution and/or results.

i. That countries reduce the budget for higher education and restrict the scope of free tuition in public universities, as well as allocating university budgets to the secondary and primary levels, so generating competition for the educational budget.

j. That the countries of the Global South make progress in systems of learning centered on the needs of the labor market, as opposed to education systems with broader academic contents.

This set of theses or quasi-permanent recommendations may be supplemented as new OECD documents emerge. Some of these recommendations are discussed in more detail below, based on examples from documents and publications cited.

2. The OECD and experimentation with educational financing

The OECD may not generate the same analyses for European countries as for Latin America. In many of the OECD documents, a neoliberal approach can be observed: the notion has been installed that social policy and public services are expensive and should be focused and “efficient”. The OLPE considers the OECD’s recommendations regarding educational financing to be experiments that risk the stability and institutionality of the education budget.

For example, in the documents for the region, the OECD calls for an assessment of the cost of public sector employees, reviewing the construction of budgets and their allocation and, most especially, calling on the private sector to take up a central role in decision-making and in the implementation of public policy.

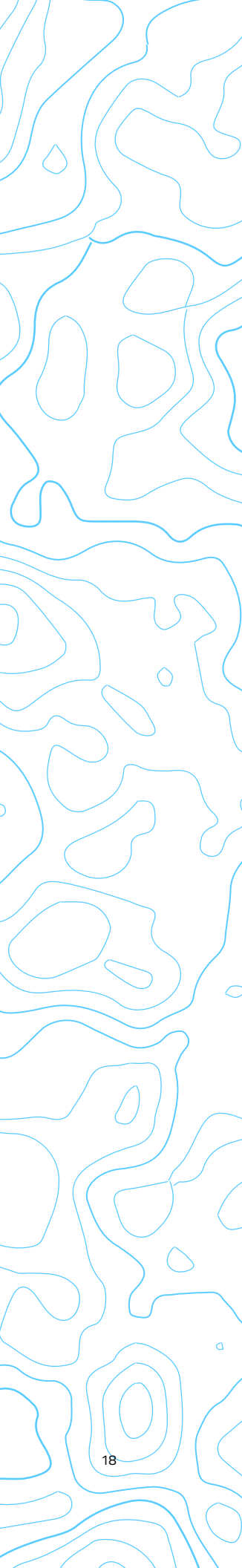
In a specific report made in 2016 on Colombia called Education in Colombia. Review of National Education Policies, the OECD stated that the business sector must take up a leadership role in the process of educational decentralization (p. 255). The report proposes the development of a new national curriculum project, in which local governments play a central role (p. 42), that deepens the process of decentralization and creates incentive mechanisms for local governments showing greater ability in providing educational services.

As a way to support decentralization in the country, the OECD recommends continuing with a “strategy to subsidize the private schooling of children from public schools and colleges in the effort to increase the number of students enrolled” (OECD, 2016, p. 44).

In the same report, the OECD called for civil society to become more involved in decision-making on education and even to assume “part of the costs” of the educational process (p. 256). This thesis is reinforced in the report Education at a Glance (OECD, 2018), in which the OECD states that the countries of the Global South must rethink free education, proposing that free public education should only be directed at those who cannot afford to pay, or even only those who cannot resort to private education (p. 14).

In this sense, it proposes transforming public educational policy into a policy focusing on welfare, and not seeing this as a broad right under a universal approach that contributes to social cohesion and integration; this impoverishes a country’s capacity to strengthen democratic institutions and mechanisms.

In the case of Costa Rica (OECD, 2017), the OECD recommends a “significant change in the design, financing and execution of educational policies” (p. 5), criticizing the fact that Costa Rica’s investment in education (8% of the GDP) is even higher than that of many countries. This document calls for the need to guarantee a change in governance and educational financing and suggests looking for more profitable delivery mechanisms, as well as reducing administrative complexity and promoting the services of private operators (p. 10).



In the case of Uruguay, the OECD also recommends reforming the construction of educational budgets to make decisions about investment using achievement indicators. The document's proposal that Uruguay implement a discretionary funding formula, such as per-student funding, is worrisome. These types of financing-per-student strategies have been seen in Chile and in the USA (using "vouchers") and have proven to be a way of weakening public education, as this generates wide funding gaps between educational institutions.

Moreover, the OECD report *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning* (2017) calls for free (not necessarily public) education to be focused on the population at greatest risk of exclusion and poverty, while establishing mechanisms for all the families who can afford to pay for education to do so.

That is, this is a route to turn public educational policy into policy focused on welfare, rather than seeing it as a broad right that should be granted a universal approach. This view of public education as a welfare tool is consistent with some proposals made in the 2030 Agenda adopted at Incheon, the first global meeting on education in which the OECD participated.

In addition to this, the report states that

As sources of financing are becoming more diverse, an increasingly numerous set of actors in the education system is also managing to influence spending decisions. In many countries, sub-central governments have emerged as important stakeholders in the allocation and administration of educational financing, and thus individual educational institutions are gaining greater financial autonomy and private educational providers are becoming important end-users of public spending. (p. 6)

This means that it is accepted and encouraged that the education budget not be seen to be a state responsibility, and even, should be rightly at the mercy of donations and temporary cooperation agendas and the like.

The position advocating the reduction and de-institutionalization of public investment in education is not limited to the OECD. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the main source of loans for Latin American governments, has also recommended reducing and focusing education resources.

Once again, there are coincidences between the OECD's position and the 2030 Agenda. Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education also makes the call that educational financing from developed countries, traditional and emerging donors, middle-income countries and international funding mechanisms increase funding for education and support the implementation of the agenda according to the needs and priorities of the countries. This view of education as another service, and not as a process of social cohesion and integration, is also present in the report *Time to Act: Latin America and the Caribbean Facing*

Strong Challenges (IDB, 2016). This document recommends focusing social spending on the neediest groups, so reducing and focusing resources and putting countries at the mercy of this type of experimentation. The document states:

It may be in the interest of countries to reassess such expenditures and ensure that they are getting the highest levels of efficiency and services. This is particularly desirable for expenditures on education and health, which tend to account for a large part of the expenditure. There may be considerable room to improve efficiency or, in other words, to lend the same level of services at a lower cost. Above all, there seems to be an important space to re-evaluate social spending policies in order to ensure that they exclusively benefit those who really need it. (p. 44)

These institutions have a clear impact on public policy in the region. For this reason, the insistence on reducing the resources available for education, as well as limiting free universal access to education as a right, blurs the function of public education as a tool to build integration and equity.

Many governments are already taking up this OECD recommendation to focus public education on the sectors of the population that cannot afford private education. Examples of this type are discussed in more depth in the section on higher education.



3. The OECD as a promoter of public-private partnerships to commercialize education

The public-private partnerships (PPP) model has been implemented by all governments in the region either to design, execute or finance one or several phases of their educational policy. PPPs are entities that allow states to subcontract third-party services to undertake different activities. Although PPPs initially emerged to play a powerful role in the field of infrastructure (the construction of roads, ports, hospitals, etc.), they have expanded to the field of public service management.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008) has one of the few definitions that mentions the pro-profit nature of the private parties in a partnership. The OECD defines public-private partnerships as:

an agreement between the government and one or more private partners (including funders and operators) under which the private partner delivers a service in such a way that the governmental service objectives are aligned with those of private profit, and in which the effectiveness of this alignment depends on the sufficient transfer of risk to the private partners. (2008, p. 12)

The OECD considers PPPs to be a form of public service that redefine the roles of the private and public sectors. The OECD believes that PPPs can bring greater sources of private financing to public services (although financing here does not mean funds, but rather loans).

An example of the promotion of the participation of the private sector in the provision of educational services is the recommendation made by the OECD to Costa Rica to prioritize the expansion of the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector by promoting payments of public funds to private providers. This recommendation is found in *OECD Reviews of National Policies for Education: Education in Costa Rica* (OECD, 2017, p. 17).

Among the main arguments of the OECD in favor of PPPs is the explanation that states have a limited capacity to provide services with the necessary scope and that, when they do have said capacity, this is usually slower and more bureaucratic than private sector capacities. This position of the OECD coincides with the 2030 Agenda Action Plan (2015) launched within the framework of the Incheon Declaration. This plan proposes that the private sector should play a role in making educational content relevant (p.14) and calls for more resources to be guaranteed to this area, including cooperation funds and funds from emerging sources to finance education.

During 2020, the first year of the pandemic, the OECD Development Center published the document *COVID-19 and developing countries: Policies and partnerships to respond, reset and rebuild better. Policy Statement by the Members of the Governing Board of the OECD Development Centre* (OECD, 2020). As measures to respond to the economic and employment

crisis generated by the pandemic, the OECD proposed strengthening skills for employment in developing countries, reorganizing production chains through adaptation to digital economies, and promoting education systems by focusing on technological solutions (OECD, 2020).

Despite the fact that the region has already spent more than thirty years allocating public resources to pay private groups for educational services, every time criticism is raised against education results, these are limited to criticizing the state, and never the infinite universe of private businesses that profit from public education. This means that, although business groups are actors linked to management and educational services, narratives of blame focus on public management.

Analyses made by the OLPE and Latin American education unions consider that the systematic purchase of services from private actors, and the participation of business foundations and non-state actors in public policy decisions does not strengthen the sense of public education as a right. On the contrary, the practice of public-private partnerships seems to arise instead from an ideological view that is benefitted by doing business and gaining influence and control over the right to education.



4. The future scenarios for education: Do these emerge from the course of history or has the OECD itself promoted them with allied actors?

In 2020, in the context of the pandemic, the OECD published an analysis of the future of education, *Back to the Future of Education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling*. In 2022, a new OECD publication entitled *Trends Shaping Education* (OECD, 2022) reexamined the analysis made of these four scenarios, emphasizing the message that it is crucial to review these scenarios to “prepare” for a future that “is going to surprise us” (OECD, 2022, p.9). It is considered that these scenarios may possibly emerge over the coming period of fifteen to twenty years.

Despite the message that the OECD wants to convey, the four scenarios, presented as if they were novel and simply the results of current circumstances, could rather be the product of several years — and even decades — of promotion and implementation of OECD recommendations and policies, financed and promoted by other allies that coincide with this organization in terms of educational policy and management, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank.

This section reviews these four scenarios and contrasts them with current policies implemented in Latin America, in order to contribute to thinking about whether the OECD's predictions about the possibly “surprising” educational future (2022) may, in fact be the product of a design that is currently underway with the participation of public authorities, private groups and multilateral organizations.

The **first possible scenario** focuses on a reality in which public-private partnerships and international cooperation efforts have more weight than national institutions. Among other factors, this scenario is characterized by a school service with extended hours, existing under a public-private partnership model, following a standard global curriculum, with the private sector and non-state actors actively participating in the provision of educational services.

In the second scenario, education services are outsourced to private providers and community initiatives, directly coordinated by families (this is reminiscent of World Bank initiatives such as the Community-Based Education Program (PROHECO) in Honduras and the EDUCO program in El Salvador).

A **third scenario** presented by the OECD consists of schools acting as learning hubs, eliminating uniformity of the curriculum and extending the “recognition of competencies” while establishing diversity and a multiplicity of forms of teacher recruitment.

The **fourth possible scenario** foresees a future in which education is “tailor-made” to market needs such that curriculum structures are eliminated, educational systems are dis-

mantled, and teachers design classes and offer courses based on predictive information obtained from data processed by artificial intelligence using algorithms.

In all scenarios, the participation of private options, the deregulation of services, free market competition and the dependence on teaching staff are prioritized according to the dynamics of service consumption.

As can be seen in Table 1, no scenario contemplates public systems as the form of management and administration of education. It is important to note that access to free universal education and the right to job stability for teachers and workers in the education sector are eliminated. None of the scenarios mention freedom of association or the protection of regulated working hours.

Table 1 should be read carefully, because these scenarios mark the dissolution of public educational policy, the standardization of the curriculum taken to a maximum point of global application, the elimination of the management of public authorities, and finally, they are imbued with transactional market and consumer dynamics which replace the notion of the right to education.

In addition to the cases detailed in Table 1, some of the scenarios proposed by the OECD as forming part of a future that may “take us by surprise” are already contained within the World Bank recommendations (2018) in the report, *Learning to realize education's promise*. This already establishes progress in the transition of educational systems towards mechanisms of administration of the learning of competencies and of the acquisition of tools for employment, so coinciding with the OECD's scenarios three and four. The World Bank report also coincides with scenario two in proposing the greater promotion of the participation of “civil society” coalitions and the business sector in educational processes (World Bank, 2018).

Next, the scenarios are presented along with details such as some objectives and roles foreseen for the stakeholders, the organization of the management structure, the role of the teaching workforce, and, finally, the geopolitical dynamics that may occur in every scenario.

Although the OECD proposes these scenarios as something in the future that may arise from present circumstances, the OLPE considers that, through these recommendations, the OECD has already been promoting policies that favor these scenarios, and even contributing to their acceleration.

Table 1 provides a summary of the OECD descriptions with respect to these possible scenarios.

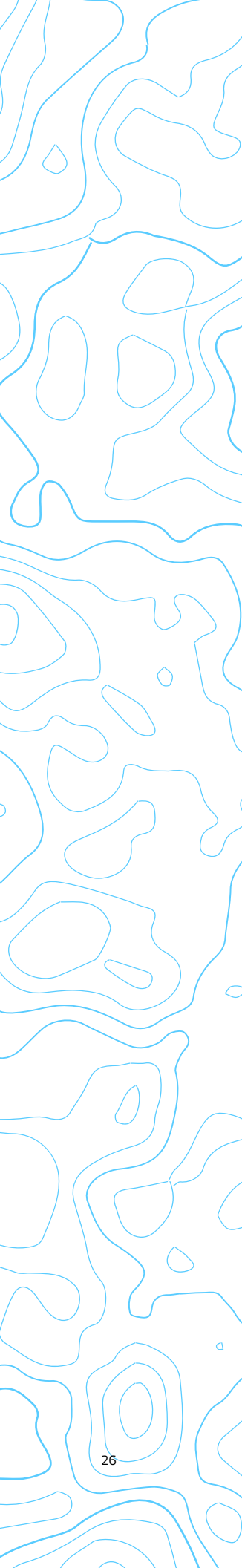
Table 1. Four future scenarios of education according to the OECD

Future education scenario predicted by the OECD	Objectives and roles	Organization and structures	Teaching workforce	Governance and geopolitics
<p>Scenario one</p> <p>Public-private partnerships and international cooperation efforts have more weight than national institutions.</p>	<p>All countries implement the same curriculum and share assessment tools.</p>	<p>International public-private partnerships support digital learning environments. Countries share learning resources and data. There is room to innovate with regards to teacher-student interaction.</p>	<p>More personalized learning models change teachers' work environments, as well as their initial and ongoing training and professional development processes. There is a marked division of tasks and professional profiles in schools, which can offer services thanks to economies of scale.</p>	<p>Public institutions play a role, but there is greater emphasis on public-private partnerships and international collaboration.</p>
<p>Scenario two</p> <p>Outsourcing of education: Private providers and community initiatives in direct contact with families</p>	<p>Greater participation of families and the community and private initiatives that arise as alternatives to traditional schooling. Strong role of supply and demand and supposed freedom of choice. Those buying a service can look for tailor-made options and those offering services can design something of value in the market.</p>	<p>The presence of public institutions is reduced.</p> <p>A heterogeneous multiplicity of content options, service hours and even modalities and costs coexist.</p>	<p>Multiplicity of teaching profiles and hiring agreements. Differing implications for teachers and their status. Digital platforms enable the emergence of collectives or groups of professionals on a temporary basis (<i>GIG Economy</i>).</p>	<p>Autonomy and self-organization.</p> <p>School systems compete in a national and global market.</p>

<p>Scenario three</p> <p>Schools as hubs or learning centers, and communities involved in educational self-management</p>	<p>Approved degree systems are replaced with a system of the recognition of competencies.</p> <p>The comprehensive and uniform nature of the curriculum is eliminated: local stakeholders and communities can develop the contents that they consider of value.</p>	<p>Lack of pedagogical uniformity. Experimentation and pedagogical diversity are promoted based on different education pathways.</p> <p>There is an emphasis on the concept of relationships and collaborations within education ecosystems.</p>	<p>Groups of teachers organized in networks coexist with a multiplicity of actors providing educational options. Education takes place through networks, partnerships, agreements, and business networks with third parties such as technology providers, libraries, etc.</p>	<p>Strong focus on decision making at the local level.</p> <p>Self-organization of partnerships.</p>
<p>Scenario four</p> <p>The educational process is “tailor-made” according to data processed by artificial intelligence using algorithms.</p>	<p>Knowledge is evaluated and certified digitally and immediately. Curriculum structures are eliminated, with educational systems being dismantled.</p>	<p>Technological models and artificial intelligence (AI) are used to solve problems. On dismantling educational systems, the educational infrastructure must be re-signified: the boundaries between education, leisure and work time are erased.</p>	<p>The role of governments and public entities is not clearly projected in the face of a range of options that has already been resolved by communities and the market. The more traditional role of teachers disappears. Consumers of education will produce the teaching roles required via their demand, acting as Prosumers. <i>Prosumers.</i></p>	<p>Education is de-institutionalized and schools are dismantled.</p> <p>Action is based on governance derived from global data and global technology.</p>

Note. Own elaboration based on OECD data, 2020.





Scenarios may coexist according to the capabilities of countries, business forces, and international lobbying.

Examples of initiatives that both the OECD and other multilateral organizations have already prioritized in the region include curriculum deregulation of the type mentioned in scenario two, certified competency-based education mentioned in scenario three, management based on a global data system as foreseen in scenario four, and the leadership of the private sector in the management of educational policy seen in scenario one. Another example of the scenario four proposal of “tailor-made” educational processes can be seen in Latin America in trends in which groups of private or business actors design products aimed at families or educational communities, thereby establishing direct relationships with these communities.

In Paraguay, the Juntos por la Educación de Paraguay business platform launched the Citizen Educational Observatory as

an initiative to promote and consolidate citizen participation and advocacy in the definition, implementation and monitoring of educational policies [...] to empower the different stakeholders in the decision-making processes in a responsible and critical way. (own translation, JxE web page, 2018)

Similarly, in Peru the Empresarios por la Educación Group designs and implements contents addressing emotional skills for teachers (ExE Peru, 2020, p. 20).

This range of products designed by private actors has an influence on the way work is done in the classroom and on the approach taken to content. The role of the state becomes “blurred” and the business sector and foundations can play a role because governments of a neo-liberal bent absent themselves from their role of guaranteeing the right to education.

Below, Table 2 presents examples of educational strategies and/or policies implemented in the region that coincide with the future scenarios described by the OECD. At the same time, these strategies and policies are also promoted and financed with loans and projects by the World Bank and the IDB.

The OLPE proposes reviewing these examples in Table 2 carefully because they show how the four future scenarios described by the OECD should neither be considered “surprising” nor as the result of natural processes or social demand, but rather are based on a process designed and supported by the lobbying of business actors, with financing from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, and a series of recommendations by the OECD itself.

Table 2. The “future” scenarios predicted by the OECD that have already been experienced in the past and in the present

Future education scenario predicted by the OECD	How has this supposed “future” scenario already been manifested in the past in Latin America?
<p>Scenario 1:</p> <p>Public-private partnerships and international cooperation efforts have more weight than national institutions.</p> <p>Countries share learning resources and data. International public-private partnerships support digital learning environments.</p>	<p>The participation of the private sector in the design, promotion and dissemination of educational technologies is not new, nor is the promotion of projects that do not have a public policy focus and that instead rely on the permanent dynamic of public-private partnerships. In this context, these technologies were not relevant to guaranteeing the right to public education. For example, in 2007, the Ceibal Plan was launched in Uruguay with the support of an IDB loan. The Plan was meant to guarantee “a set of programs, educational resources and teacher training that transforms the way teaching and learning is implemented.” The Ceibal Plan is developed by the Ceibal Foundation group, which, in turn, buys educational services and resources from Global Learning Network, a transnational private company that sells pre-designed curricular content and training courses.</p> <p>In 2008, the One Computer per Child program, devised by Nicholas Negroponte with the support of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab was promoted in Latin America. The project was implemented in Peru, Mexico, Uruguay (Ceibal Plan), Dominican Republic, Costa Rica (Quirós Tanzi Foundation), Nicaragua (Zamora Teheéan Foundation), and Paraguay (Paraguay Educa). Most countries have reported deplorable results. On the one hand, the project did not foresee the maintenance requirements of the computers and before very long these were obsolete in terms connectivity, access to the cloud and other educational resources.</p> <p>Another example of how scenario one already exists in Latin America and has already shown poor results is the experience of the Omar Dengo Foundation (FOD for the initials in Spanish) in Costa Rica, a private institution that since 1998 has received state funds to run the Educational Informatics Program (FOD, 2018). Despite the more than twenty years of public resources dedicated to this private foundation, at the time of the pandemic the programs developed by the FOD were incapable of guaranteeing educational continuity.</p> <p>Finally, the proposal seen in scenario one of public-private partnerships offering virtual education coincides with that proposed by the Alianza por la Digitalización de la Educación en Latinoamérica (ADELA), which met in Costa Rica in 2019. The Ceibal Foundation Study Center, together with the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEEd for the initials in Spanish) and the Education Division of the Inter-American Development Bank supported the creation of this partnership to promote a lobby in the region and in the business sector for ICT evaluation and design, given the need to generate “specific guidelines to design and implement monitoring and evaluation processes for technology policies in education” (FC, 2019, p. 1).</p>



**Scenario two:
Outsourcing
of education:
Private providers
and community
initiatives in
direct contact
with families**

The presence of public institutions is reduced.

A heterogeneous multiplicity of content options, service hours and even modalities and costs coexist.

Scenario two is about digital platforms enabling the emergence of professional collectives or groups on a temporary basis, with curriculum deregulation deepening and a multitude of content options, modalities and costs, while school systems compete in a national and global market (OECD, 2022, p.13). Examples of this scenario can already be observed in the region. On the one hand, in 2017, the World Bank approved a loan for US\$250 million for the Federal government of Brazil to promote a reform that reduces the secondary schooling curriculum structure (WB, 2022, p. 14), while incorporating hybrid, virtual and face-to-face education models that coexist in different municipalities and/or states in the country. Another example occurred in August 2020, when the Peruvian government approved Technical Standard 326, opening up the possibility for basic education institutions to be managed by private entities without headquarters in Peru, as well as by international cooperation organizations established abroad (MINEDU, 2020, Technical Standard). That is, a company in China or a religious association in Panama or any other educational institution in any country in the world can manage a school at the basic education level remotely, so favoring transnational commerce in education. This is a form of “competing in a national or global market”.

**Scenario three:
Schools as hubs
or learning
centers, with
communities
involved in
processes of
educational self-
management**

Scenario three is based on educational contexts in which the comprehensive and uniform nature of the curriculum is eliminated, while local actors and communities undertake self-managed processes (OECD, 2022, p. 14). An example of this was already promoted in the region in El Salvador in 1991 with funds from the World Bank and USAID which created the Community-Based Education Program, EDUCO with the objective of “generating a self-managed process, controlled and managed by parents through forms of communal and school organization” (EILA, 2021, p. 7). According to this program, Community Education Associations (ACE for the initials in Spanish) were to hire and monitor teachers, as well as guarantee the operating conditions of the institutions. Another case of “self-management” is currently being observed in Uruguay, this time in terms of teaching approaches, through the purchase of services from the Global Learning Network company. This company sells content packages, providing tools for teaching, management and assessment. On its website, the company claims to offer “a framework for the action and implementation of the new pedagogies” (RGA, 2022). Global Learning Network’s 2020 Institutional Report indicates that in “2020, 671 institutions in the 19 departments formed part of the Global Network” (RGA, 2021, p. 6). In an entry on its web page dated November 24, 2021, it listed “almost 800 Uruguayan institutions promoting this educational approach”.

Scenario four:

The educational process is "tailor-made" according to data processed by artificial intelligence using algorithms.

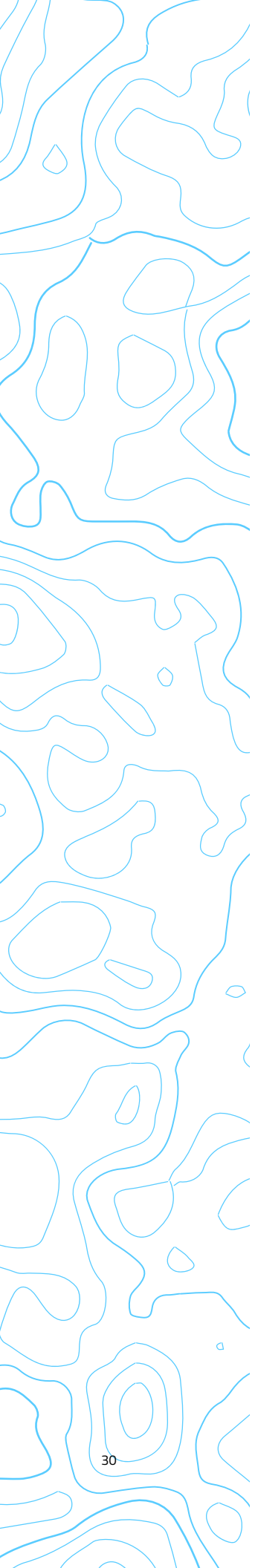
Scenario 4 presents a scenario in which the role of governments and public entities is not clearly projected in the face of educational options already established by communities and by the market (OECD, 2022, p.14).

For English-speaking countries, the transnational company Pearson offers services of "online schools". The company's web page offers digital products that go "from full-service schools with teachers provided to pick-and-choose courses and consultative services." (Pearson, 2022).

In addition, in Latin America there are trends in which groups of private and business actors design products aimed at families or educational communities, thereby establishing a direct relationship with these communities. In Paraguay, the Juntos por la Educación de Paraguay business platform launched the Citizen Educational Observatory as an initiative to promote and consolidate citizen participation and advocacy in the definition, implementation and monitoring of educational policies [...] to empower the different stakeholders in responsible and critical decision-making processes. (own translation, JxE web page, 2018)

Similarly, in Peru, the Empresarios por la Educación group designs and implements emotional skills contents aimed at teachers (ExE Peru, 2020, p.20), while in Colombia, the Escuela Nueva Volvamos a la Gente Foundation (FEN) also designs and implements pedagogical tools, additionally making available a "virtual campus" with tools for classroom work, learning guides for the pedagogical model promoted by the Escuela Nueva Foundation, and advice for educational micro-institutions. This foundation is active in Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Mexico, Panama, Peru and the Dominican Republic and its partners include the World Bank, USAID and the International Organization for Migration. This range of products designed by private actors has an influence on the way work is done in the classroom and on the approach taken to content. The role of the state becomes "blurred" and the business sector and foundations can play roles because governments of a neoliberal bent absent themselves from their role of guaranteeing the right to education.

Note. Own elaboration with data from OECD 2022, EILA 2018 and EILA 2021.



The objective of contrasting these already observed experiences in the region with the OECD's four "future" scenarios that we might find "surprising" is to demonstrate that these future scenarios are not unknown, but have already had at least partial manifestations through projects that have already been implemented.

At the same time, the OLPE proposes contributing to the discussion on how these scenarios seem to perceive education as the service of installing skills or to act as an intermediary path to employment, so moving away from the pedagogical understanding of the educational process. This pedagogical understanding sees education to be a process of socialization, of the construction of collective knowledge and the acquisition of tools to think about oneself in a social, cultural and economic context, which requires time for the construction of people as subjects of knowledge in relation to their context.

5. The OECD and the business of standardized assessment

As was observed in Table 1, in the future scenarios for education, standardized data and the construction of a global data system become necessary to enable a system for the sale of educational services.

The intensive policy of standardized assessment, applied to both teachers and students, has been on the educational and the financing agendas of both the IDB and the World Bank. The OECD has also promoted an assessment agenda, recommending countries create educational evaluation institutions that are not governed by ministries of education.

As mentioned above, standardized assessment is not cost-free. The OECD web portal reports fees of approximately €75,000 to €300,000 (euros) per country to participate in the PISA test (Program for International Student Assessment). Although these tests are administered every three years, participation in them involves paying for four consecutive years. According to the OECD, a total of seventy countries participate in the PISA test.

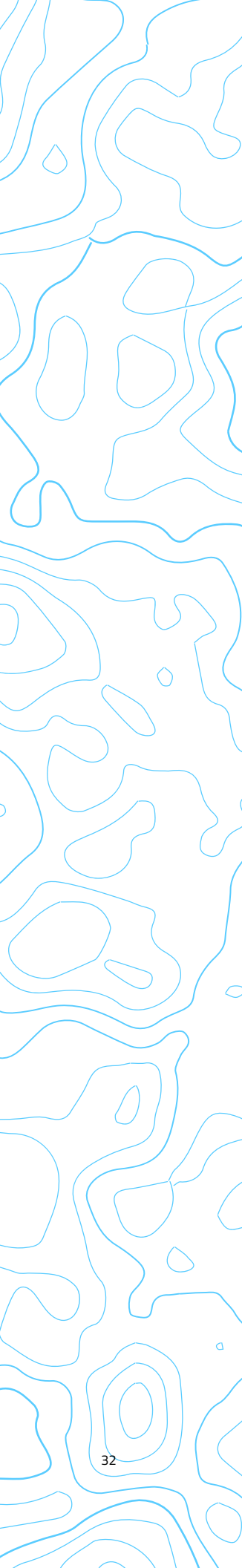
The payment gives the right of access to the assessment instrument and to a document with analysis of the results. The ministry of education of each country bears the costs of administering the test to its students (allocating the responsible staff, ensuring computers and connectivity, etc.).

A monetary approximation of the costs of these tests on a global level can be obtained by multiplying the number of countries (seventy), by the number of years they are committed to administer the test for (four), by the minimum yearly fee of €70,000 (euros). This yields a result of €19.6 million (euros) for the test in a single subject in this group of countries.

5.1 Pearson, OECD and the double standard of “transparency”

Both the design of the assessment instruments and the administration of the test usually go through subcontracting or outsourcing processes. For example, in 2018, the OECD hired the Pearson Group for the design of the PISA Test framework, an evaluation with worldwide coverage.

The private transnational company Pearson is one of the leading producers in the world of books of content for schools, colleges and universities. Pearson announces the sale of educational content, digital books and other services permanently on its web page. For primary and secondary schooling levels, the transnational company offers products with *market-leading content and customized learning tools designed for your students, customized to meet the specific needs of your district or state. MathXL® for School and MyMathLab® for School offer students personalized instruction and practice.* (Pearson, 2022)



On being hired in 2018 to design the PISA test framework, Pearson was to become both a content producer and the actor designing the assessment of these contents. Even so, the OECD sees no conflict of interest in Pearson, a private transnational that produces educational books and sells various educational content products for schools and colleges, also designing the framework of the test. This could be read as an inconsistency in the way the OECD usually speaks in favor of transparency in management, although this is mainly when talking about the public sector.

These requests for the transparency of the public sector can be observed in the document OECD Reviews of School Resources: Uruguay 2016, in which the OECD recommends reviewing the participation of education workers in certain decision-making forums because it considers that there is a risk of conflict of interest in the development of educational policy. The text in question states that

Direct participation of teachers in the administration of the educational system is questionable, given that, inevitably, there are vested interests. This practice allows corporate interests to influence the development of educational policy. The risk is that some educational policies may be biased to favor the interests of the teachers. As a result, the education system runs the risk of being more focused on them than on the students. (OECD, 2016, p.11)

As stated previously, the OECD and the World Bank coincide on several points. Precisely this view that the interests of the teaching sector go against the interests of students can also be found in the World Bank report, Learning to Realize Education's Promise, published by the World Bank in 2018. In general, this report proposes a change of approach to educational processes in developing countries: the interest is no longer on educational systems as those responsible for a comprehensive process, but on mechanisms for the administration and assessment of learning skills and competencies.

5.2 OECD, the World Bank and the danger of anti-teaching narratives

The World Bank report *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* contains two concepts that are worrisome. One of these concepts is that the participation of teachers and administrative staff generates a lack of balance in the system, which could affect quality. Another concept is that teachers have sectoral interests, which could weigh more than their interest in the learning process, and similarly, students' parents would benefit from a better organized balance in this area. This approach taken up in the World Bank report seems to be aligned with the OECD's proposal that there could be a supposed "bias" in education policy when teachers participate in decision-making for this area.

It is important to review this in detail. Specifically, on sectoral interests, the report *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* states

Teachers and other education professionals, even when motivated by a sense of vocation, may also struggle to maintain job security and protect their income. None of this means that the actors in the field of education are not interested in the learning process, but rather that competing interests can weigh more than interests aligned around learning, especially in the case of poorly managed systems. (World Bank, 2018, p. 13)

In addition to this, the report *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* highlights the World Bank's interest in supporting students' parents to organize themselves to participate in decision-making in schools. It is striking that the document proposes that these parents' organizations could potentially oppose or act as counterweights to teachers' organizations. The report thus proposes reviewing the organizational capacity of families, specifically explaining

Parents are usually not organized to participate in debates at the system level [...] They also may worry about the potential ramifications for their children or themselves of opposing interests such as teachers, bureaucrats, or politicians. (World Bank, 2018, p. 15)

This call is consistent with another concern mentioned in the document referring to the effects of reforms in terms of the orientation of the educational process of learning. The bank identifies the -students, their families, and the business sector as winners of these reforms (p. 15). Without making a direct mention of the trade union movement, the document makes it clear that the losers are education workers. For example, the document explains that "unlike these potential beneficiaries of the reforms, the potential losers tend to be more aware of what is at stake for them and, in many cases, they are usually better organized to act collectively" (p.15).

The Bank describes the lowest-performing education systems as "systems that are trapped in a balance with a low level of learning" (p. 15). This balance refers to the place occupied for learning within the framework of the relationships and interests of competing actors, such as teachers, administrative staff, the business sector, political figures, donors, etc. (p. 14). The World Bank's interest is to support actions to bring these systems from



low-learning balances to “higher-quality balances” (p. 15).

Finally, this idea of supposed competing interests and the idea of “balancing” the forces in educational communities would seem to make it sensible to promote and disseminate standardized assessment as a solution for the improvement of learning, as is the case with the promotion of the PISA Test.

Along these lines of encouraging evaluation, OECD publications, such as *Education in Costa Rica* (OECD, 2017), recommended setting high standards for teachers and aligning approaches to teaching processes in all sectors around quality standards (p. 13). The OECD recommends that Costa Rica establish a twelve-year teacher appraisal system, with annual appraisals being performed, which establishes the conditions for external evaluations. In addition, it recommends strengthening the profession of school supervision and making up teams of supervisors (p. 14).

In general, the OECD considers the number of staff assigned to evaluation tasks in education systems are insufficient. It therefore urges countries to create entities responsible for the establishment of quality standards and the development of teaching policy.

The OLPE considers it necessary that the OECD and the World Bank, as actors with high participation in countries’ educational policies, should move away from narratives that open the door to systematic attacks against teaching staff, as well as the promotion of evaluation processes as tools to control a supposed “imbalance” due to alleged “sectoral interests”.

Promoting standardized assessment while attacking teachers generates a dangerous discourse that is not only anti-pedagogical, but can be used by governments wishing to worsen working conditions and investment in the public education sector.

6. The OECD and the potential private business in skills for work

Continuing on the theme of the promotion of PISA tests, analysis is made below of the new initiatives proposed by the OECD for standardized data collection and analysis.

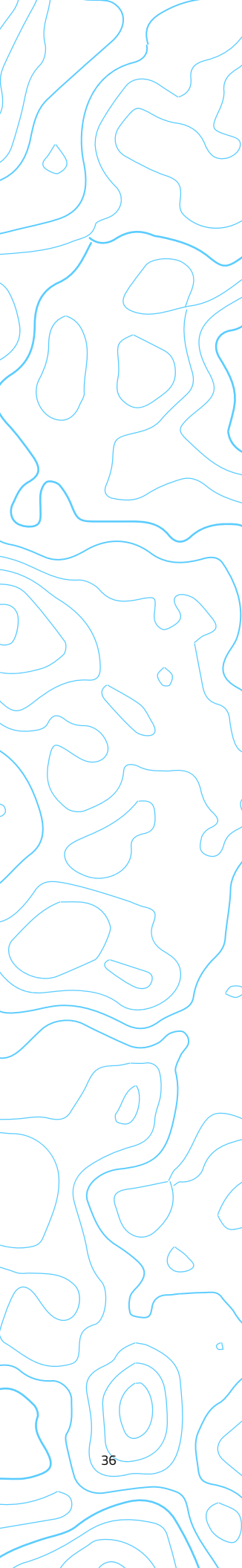
The document *The Secretary-General's Strategic Orientations for the 2023-24 Biennium* (Report of the OECD Ministerial-level Meeting held in Paris in June 2022) reiterates the OECD's view on enabling and promoting the participation of business sectors in "lifelong learning", "skills training" and "skills adaptation" policies for employment (OECD, 2022, p.7). Additionally, the 2023-2024 strategies include the development of a *Global Skills Survey*, the data from which is to be used to support countries in identifying "the barriers to the workforce" and to generate a monitoring system of "progress, opportunities and results" in terms of the state of workforce skills.

Taking into account that by nature, the OECD is an organization focused on accelerating the market, it is consistent that it grants the private business sector – that is, non-state actors – a central role. These types of policies that promote education centered on skills tends to favor the emergence of private businesses offering informal educational options.

What has been observed in the region is the emergence of companies, NGOs, private universities, para-university institutes and others that sell free-standing courses based on a wide range of technical, technological knowledge or soft skills, without offering formal education. Additionally, a multitude of courses of this type have emerged on virtual platforms. In the case of international or transnational offerings, most of these courses are not recognized by the formal accrediting education authorities in the countries of the region. An example of this is the case of Costa Rica, with more than 55 private universities and 27 private para-university institutes for a population of four million people (OLPE, 2021).

Although the scholarship fund receives contributions from the business sector, it also receives public funds. To date, the Costa Rican Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Institute of Learning), a public institution with a presence throughout the country, has a robust offering of courses and the capacity to respond to demand for technical training, yet the law has already opened the door for the transfer of public funds to private entities.

These types of non-formal education businesses can generate an environment conducive to private profit with public funds since, in order to fulfill the mandates of education and training for employment for the so-called most vulnerable populations, institutions and public bodies may create scholarship systems to finance the training of people in private schools with public funds.



This is observed in Costa Rica where Law No. 9728, the Law of Education and Dual Technical Training specifies in Article 4, Paragraph i of the General Regulations of the Special Scholarship Fund for Dual Technical Education and Training, that when there is no public training on offer, the National Institute of Learning is obliged to create an “exceptional benefit to be offered to students to cover the investment of the tuition and the respective monthly payments” at the private institution providing the training in question (INA, 2021, Article 4, paragraph 1, Regulations of Law No. 9728).

As the OLPE stated previously, private business sectors in alliance with international actors monitor and evaluate the state of education because this facilitates offering a set of services, materials and supposed solutions to improve the results of such evaluations.

Due to this, in view of that set out in *The Secretary-General's Strategic Orientations for the 2023-24 Biennium* for the educational sector, it can be expected that more pressure by the OECD will be put on countries to establish systems of evaluation and the permanent monitoring of teaching performance, along with increased private options for evaluation, training, reskilling and upskilling.

Private educational options and the consequent purchase of services, either by educational institutions using cooperation funds or even by people working in the education sector, is to be expected for the entire region on taking into account the clear example provided in the pandemic of the global trend of promoting the training, re-skilling and up-skilling of teachers via private actors, mainly for content related to technological innovation, 21st-century skills and soft skills (OLPE, 2020 and OLPE 2021).

This was observed in the Law of Urgent Consideration (LUC) in Uruguay, in which, via Article 84, paragraph 11, the Ministry of Education and Culture created the National Program of Strengthening the Teaching Profession. This is to be coordinated with the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEEd for the initials in Spanish) and proposes, through a permanent evaluation process, supporting the “development of support and improvement policies” (LUC, 2021, Art. 84).

7. The OECD and education for new ways of working

The OECD 2022 publication, Trends Shaping Education, accepts that low-paid, informal (unregistered) jobs that reduce the well-being of working people may continue to grow in the future, mainly for working people with a low or medium levels of employment skills (OECD, 2022, 2, p.38).

The paper reviews how information and communication technologies are provoking change in business models, labor regulations and policies in general, favoring hiring done by contract and jobs for indefinite periods, offered and performed via digital platforms used to hire freelance services from different economic activities and/or industries (this is known as the GIG economy). In the face of these changes, the OECD considers that it is crucial to offer a robust system of “lifelong learning”, which allows adaptation to the demands of a labor market based on deregulation and informality.

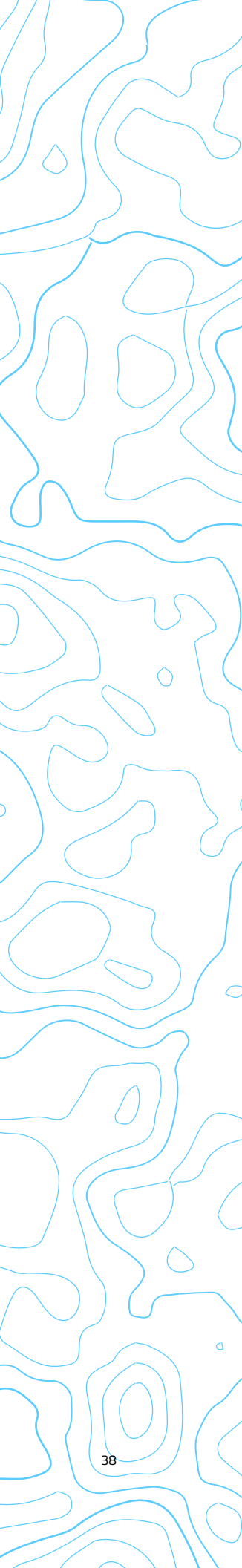
At the same time, the OECD draws attention to the role it alleges that high school education should assume, and that may not be occurring, namely of encouraging people to undertake multiple and diverse jobs in the future. It states that to this end action strategies should be thought out so that the educational system can better respond to this reality of labor irregularity (p. 39).

In the same vein of placing on the educational system the task of training working people to insert themselves into a deregulated digital economy, the document considers that the role of teachers could also be significantly modified with these changes and movements in education systems.

Once again, this approach reduces educational systems to simple rites of passage on a way to employment. Furthermore, the OECD's perspective does not take into account the multiple efforts underway in the world for the GIG economy to also observe labor standards and to respect freedom of association. An example of these efforts was the union created by Amazon workers in New York in April 2022 (CNBC TECH, 2022).

To better understand the complexity of this analysis of poor-quality, often informal jobs put up for discussion by the OECD in Trends Shaping Education, it is important to take a look at the publication Innovative and Entrepreneurial Universities in Latin America, published in May 2022, in partnership with the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

The document reviews eleven case studies of universities implementing contents and careers related to entrepreneurship in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and Mexico. The document reviews the way many countries have introduced content related to entrepreneurship since the first years of study. Now there is also increased international collaboration in tertiary education institutions, both private and public, to help build en-



entrepreneurial mindsets through a pedagogical commitment designed with this purpose (OECD and IDB, 2022, p. 34).

Training for entrepreneurship should provide contents on the start-up and administration of businesses or companies, financing, business plans, accounting, management of human resources, leadership, innovation, self-efficacy, appetite for risk and tolerance to uncertainty, among others (p.34).

Universities play a role in promoting and strengthening nearby entrepreneurial ecosystems. The OECD-IDB publication therefore considers that universities can make much more progress in formal and informal curricular options with regards to entrepreneurship contents, recommending the promotion of university policies to:

- Increase mandatory courses in entrepreneurship content for all students, with an emphasis on business and engineering schools.
- Connect the different institutional experiences to promote teaching and learning in entrepreneurship, thus going beyond the limits of business and engineering schools.
- Promote training in entrepreneurship and innovation for students at doctoral levels, as input for them to start their own businesses (p. 44).
- Generate incentive systems for faculties, teachers and students to join entrepreneurship initiatives (p. 21).

The document proposes that universities act as promoters of networks (that “connect with the connectors”) and also sees entrepreneurship ventures as opportunities that are closer to communities (OECD and IDB, 2022, p. 21).

The advantages available to universities by becoming promoters and leaders of entrepreneurship are:

- They can generate additional resources through collaboration and through project proposals capable of raising funds.
- They can achieve permanent funding flows and resource mobilization for entrepreneurship initiatives in universities (OECD and IDB, 2022, p. 21).

As was observed in the case of primary education, the role of universities is reduced to promoting business opportunities.

In contrast, data for Latin America show that 75% of startups (technological and innovative enterprises) usually go bankrupt and/or close down before they have achieved two years

of operation. The main reason for this is that many initiatives arise as subsistence ventures, without the resources required to sustain themselves for the time before they generate profits, and the period of building up experience for optimal business performance. When it comes to women-led ventures, these have additional challenges in terms of access to capital, as women have less access to credit (no more than 2% available in the world) at the same time as having additional burdens of care and family responsibilities.

Making public universities promoters of entrepreneurship in the region brings them closer to acting as kinds of self-employment and self-financing incubators. This approach seems to reveal that the OECD prefers not to understand the role public education plays in empowering a country with productive and industrial sovereignty, based on a system of labor rights and guarantees for working people.



8. The OECD and the loss of the public purpose of higher education

Continuing with our analysis of the OECD's attempt to reduce the role of higher education, below consideration is made of another of its permanent recommendations; withdrawing funds currently dedicated to the most advanced levels of education and redirecting these to the most initial levels of primary and secondary education (OECD, 2018, p. 37).

Examples of these recommendations can be found in the OECD report, *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning* (2017), in which the organization establishes an imbalance in the resources delivered between the different levels of education; and in the report *Education in Costa Rica* (OECD, 2017), in which a "significant change in the design, financing and execution of educational policies" is recommended (OECD, 2017, p. 5). Similarly, the call is made for a reduction in university investment in favor of that in preschool, primary and secondary school (OECD, 2017, p. 18).

The same report, *Education in Costa Rica* (OECD, 2017), criticizes public investment in higher education and the absence of a link between the allocation of university budgets and results (OECD, 2017, p.19). It also indicates that the costs of public spending on university education, channeled through the Special Fund for the Financing of Tertiary Education (FEES for the initials in Spanish), are increasing in an unsustainable manner, when what should be sought is a reduction in university investment in favor of preschool, primary and secondary schooling. The document states that

Public universities use this funding to heavily subsidize tuition (so that students pay very low fees in public universities) and to offer scholarships (received by almost half of the students of public universities) [...] These financing agreements are both unsustainable and inequitable. Public expenditure on tertiary education has roughly doubled as a proportion of the (fast-growing) GDP since 2000 and at 1.5% is now well above that of most OECD countries. Public subsidy will not be able to support the future anticipated growth in tertiary participation to the same degree. On equity, the majority of students who benefit from public universities are from wealthier backgrounds. (OECD, 2017, p. 30

The OECD also criticizes the lack of a body in the country capable of promoting reform in the entire tertiary education sector, both private and public. It considers that in the country *there is no way of developing and implementing new policies on issues like student finance, tertiary quality, or meeting the needs of a fast-changing economy. This fails to provide a sound foundation for the development of a competitive, high-quality tertiary sector. (OECD, 2017, p. 31)*

As can be seen, this 2017 OECD publication repeats exactly the thesis put out by the World Bank in 1990, renewing the call to countries of the Global South to defund tertiary

education and redirect these funds to primary and secondary levels, so generating, once again, an artificial dispute between the different levels of the educational system.

These types of recommendations generate a tension between the different levels of education, opening up a contradiction in the educational project within countries. Recommending the neglect of higher education has a clearly political tinge and is a way of promoting the defunding and dismantling of sovereign research projects and the production of knowledge from within Latin America.

The public-private partnership model for higher education has found one of its main niches in Brazil. The Education for All program (PROUNI), was created by Law 11,096 in 2005. The program financed the degrees of students in private universities, in whole or in part, using private funds. According to the research of Traina and Calderón (2015), in the first five years of the program private universities increased their enrollment by at least 473,000 students, with tuition fees financed with public funds. In 2010, private universities received 1,002,019 new enrollments. Of these, 47% were financed with public funds (Traina and Calderón, 2015, p. 92). In 2016, the Brazilian Ministry of Education transferred up to US\$400 million in “vouchers” to private universities.

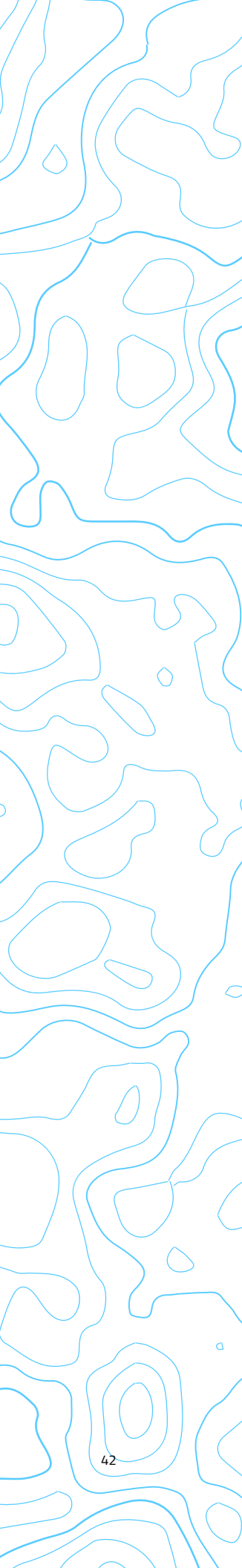
Public-private partnership reforms and the participation of the private sector in the areas of educational policy design are not minor issues, nor is the role of the OECD. This latter has increasingly ventured into the educational field, because it is one of the areas in which the market can most grow internationally via different service models.

8.1 Higher education for G20 countries

The OECD G20 Regulatory Framework includes the document, *Governance of Skills Systems: as prepared by the OECD for the G20 Joint Education and Employment Working Group*. Among other actions, this document recommends: 1) Evaluating an increase in school autonomy in terms of resources, curriculum, evaluation, school admission and disciplinary policy, accompanied by accountability systems and strengthened school directorates; 2) Establishing new institutions in charge of educational improvement; and 3) Innovating governance and aiming financing towards greater performance (OECD, 2018).

Specifically for **higher education in G20 countries, the OECD proposes that:**

Market mechanisms influence higher education systems: Institutions can compete for students, staff, research income, etc. Students (consumers) have the freedom to choose



a supplier and a product, and suppliers have the freedom to enter the market, choose the products to deliver and set their price... Demand-driven systems strengthen market mechanisms and, as a result, students and their families behave more as consumers, making more demands on higher education institutions. (p. 14)

Once again, the OLPE considers that these types of recommendations pave the way for processes that deepen the commercialization of education.

8.2 The OECD and the reduction of the educational curriculum

As shown in Table 1, the most radical scenario proposed by the OECD is that which de-structures the curriculum and dismantles the school infrastructure, since educational institutions disappear from societies.

For the Latin American Pedagogical Movement, the educational curriculum is a tool to be used to construct democracy. The curriculum and teaching approaches should facilitate a critical outlook on reality in students and, especially, a commitment to uniting with their peers to transform this reality. From the point of view of Latin American education unions, the curriculum should place students before broad, diverse contents that are linked to the history of their communities, their countries and the world; it should allow them to think about themselves in relation to their community, in a way that embraces the present, the past and the future of their environment.

For the OECD, the value of curriculum content is different. For the countries of the Global South, both the OECD and the World Bank promote reduced curricula with a focus on language and math, with easily assessable contents.

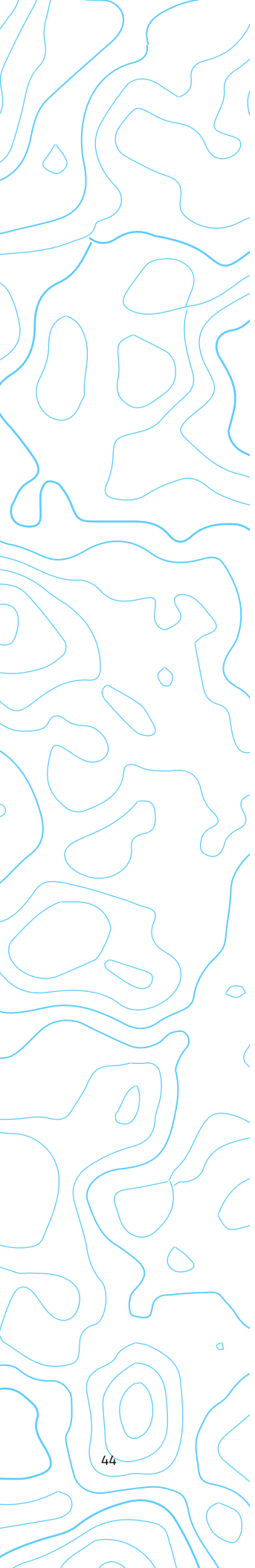
This is observed in the document *Education 2030: The future of education and skills* (OECD, 2018), which launches an exercise in the design of a standard, scalable educational curriculum with a global perspective (which can be replicated over time and increased in volume).

The OECD established a working group with the task of establishing the design principles to generate curriculum reform that is “relevant in different countries over time” (OECD, 2018, p.6). These principles now promoted by the OECD for curriculum design anywhere in the world propose adhering to the following characteristics:

- **Alignment:** The curriculum must be aligned with the teaching and assessment practices. Although the desired technology does not exist to assess many results, new assessment methods can be resorted to and new tools must be generated to value student outcomes and actions which the document states can be difficult to measure.
- **Flexibility:** The notion of the curriculum should progress from being “predetermined and static” to “adaptable and dynamic”. Schools and teachers must update and align the curriculum in accordance with changes in society and according to individual needs.
- **Choice:** Students should be able to choose their courses from a diverse range of options and have the support required to make well-informed choices.
- **Focus:** Each grade should focus on a small number of topics so that these can be deepened and learning takes place. Some topics may be repeated to reinforce key concepts.
- **Student agency:** The curriculum should motivate students to recognize their previous knowledge, their skills, their attitudes and their values as individuals.
- **Rigor:** Topics enable critical thinking and reflection.
- **Coherence:** Topics should have a logical sequence and progress in complexity according to stages and age levels.
- **Transferability:** Priority should be placed on skills, knowledge, activities and values that can be learned in one context and applied in another.
- **Teacher agency:** Teachers should be “empowered” in knowledge and skills to deliver the curriculum effectively.
- **Authenticity:** Students should be able to link their learning with their environment and a sense of purpose.
- **Inter-relation:** Students should have the opportunity to connect their learning between disciplines and with the reality outside the classroom.
- **Engagement:** Teachers and other stakeholders should be involved in the development of the curriculum to ensure their ownership of it.

The OECD, the World Bank and the 2030 Agenda all agree on implementing a kind of educational recipe as a strategy to increase the competitiveness of Latin American countries and to provide young people with skills and competencies for the labor market.

At the same time, there are many analyses made by the financial institutions that hold educational systems to be responsible for the poverty of adults, who supposedly are in this condition because the educational system did not prepare them for the needs of the market. Along these lines, the IDB has stated that having passed through the educational system has not provided students with skills that are “relevant to a successful career and with the skills required by today’s companies and society” (IDB, 2014, p. 2).



The ministries of education and technical training institutions have responded to these demands through reforms to educational content and a set of public-private partnerships to link the education system with the world of work via projects providing employment competencies within the framework of programs of conditional transfers.

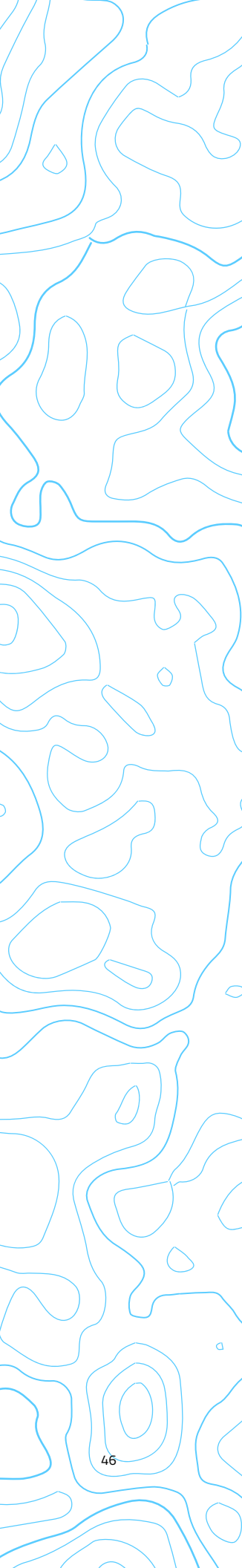
9. By way of conclusion

The OECD defines a strong democracy as one that promotes business and the exchange of goods. One of the main objections of the Latin American Observatory to this view is its firm belief that the main tool to construct social cohesion and strengthen democracies should be robust public policy, with a state that acts as guarantor, financier and implementer. The OECD's presence in the definition of educational policy has been redoubled since the Incheon Conference in 2015, with the launch of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Incheon marks a turn towards establishing and regulating standards and norms, while promoting the strong participation of all actors in the provision of educational services. The Action Plan for Education Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda calls for the private sector to play a "one-on-one" role with the public sector: from participating in the definition of the "relevance" of educational content to ensuring more resources, including cooperation funds and those from "emerging sources", to financing education (UNESCO, 2015, p.14-28).

In Latin America, there is a great deal of awareness about the negative impact of the OECD recommendations on the right to public education, including: stigmatizing educational systems through standardized assessments such as PISA; promoting the participation of the private sector in public policy decision-making and in the sale of educational services; attacking public investment in higher education; and attacking free universal access to education in favor of budgets that are focused and results-based (OLPE, 2018).

In Latin America, the OECD has not limited itself to promoting standardized assessment through the PISA tests, but has also made progress with recommendations for the exclusion of trade union organizations from decision-making forums, for educational budgets to be designated according to results, and for the elimination of public policy focused on ensuring universal free education in favor of implementing systems in which families pay for educational services.

The OECD recommendation to seek "equity and align resources with needs" translates into a welfare policy rather than a universal one. The OECD recommendations for Latin America (OECD, 2016) imply focusing the provision of free education only on the population at greatest risk of exclusion and poverty, and the establishment of mechanisms so that all families that can afford to pay for education must do so. The proposal to align the resources available with those who "most need free education" is a route to turn public educational policy into a welfare-focused policy and not one that recognizes education as a broad universal right. This is a clear reflection of how the OECD still fails to understand that human and social rights, such as public education, are the responsibility of the state, and as such the state must guarantee these in a universal and comprehensive fashion, rather than in a focused and reductionist one.



The recommendations that the OECD makes to Latin American countries most likely would never be proposed to European countries. It is difficult to imagine the OECD recommending that Germany or Norway promote private education or even that they cut budgets for educational institutions according to student performance.

It may even be difficult for educational organizations in European countries to imagine that the OECD has a different face in Latin America, and similarly, it may not be easy to understand why Latin American trade unions insist that the OECD is not an ally to public education, nor is it an entity that is respectful of Latin American education workers, and that it should be noted that OECD documents make no mention anywhere recognizing public education to be a social right.

The OECD favors the installation of external educational assessment bodies, promoting the presence of technical assessors inside the classroom, as well as a reduction in years of the duration of secondary education and the standardization and simplification of educational curricula based on learning focused on employment (OLPE, 2018).

The OECD's positions coincide with the educational agenda of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), whose agendas in turn support Goal 4 on Education in the 2030 Agenda.

Support for the reduction of public investment in education is not limited to World Bank and the OECD, but, as previously described, the IDB also directs countries to reduce the resources dedicated to making public education free. These institutions have a clear impact on public policy in the region. That is why the insistence on reducing the resources available for education, as well as limiting free, universal access to the right to education blur the function of public education as a tool to build integration and equity.

The Latin American Observatory on Educational Policies considers that the World Bank, the IDB and, with increasingly, the OECD act as a global government legitimized in an endogamous fashion, almost as if these were natural actors in educational policy. It is important to continue to pay attention to reforms in public employment, the advancement and sophistication of public-private partnership models, and the new loan conditions of the World Bank and the IDB to finance educational policy in our region, because these can further weaken the public educational system in favor of the commercialization of education.

The persistent alignment between the recommendations of the OECD, the World Bank and the IDB exposes this cohesion of international and multilateral actors around a single

vision of public education, which tends to dismantle the educational system and erase the perspective holding public education to be a right, instead replacing this with a set of courses aimed at employment, tailored to the market and provided under very unequal conditions depending on each student's purchasing power.

Finally, the future scenarios proposed by the OECD are not surprising; they are an exercise in considering different opportunities and business models for the sale of education services. Moreover, placing the emphasis on lifelong education and education for employment, and neither differentiating nor promoting free public education, is to open the door to permanent business and private profit at the expense of the right to employment and the right to insertion in the labor market.



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ANNEX 1

Main OECD policies in Latin America

THESIS	COINCIDES WITH		
	WB	IDB	UN Agend a 2030
<p>1 That countries reduce the scope of free education, such that this is free only for the most vulnerable students, while everyone who can afford to do so, must pay. In other words, free education should not be a universal policy. In addition, other actors should be included as potential financiers of education. This is a kind of experimental policy in educational financing, which puts he stability and institutionality of the education budget at risk.</p>	✓		
<p>2 Increasing the volume of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and, in general, the participation of companies and private groups in the provision of public educational services, with an emphasis on the provision of early childhood services, and even considering private groups as “end users of the public budget”.</p>	✓	✓	
<p>3 Increasing the participation of the private business sector in the design of educational policy and the decision-making related thereto. Specifically, the OECD, in conjunction with the World Bank and the 2030 Agenda, proposes that the private sector participate in the design of the educational curriculum.</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p>4 That countries pay for standardized assessment processes like the PISA tests. The OECD receives up to 3.5 million euros per year for the right to participate in these tests.</p>		✓	
<p>5 That countries implement standardized assessment of teaching staff and that they establish new assessment bodies that are not under the authority of ministries of education.</p>	✓	✓	
<p>6 That countries limit educational curricula to emphasize language and mathematics, and that progress is made in the design of educational offerings by “content units” or independent courses that students can choose.</p>	✓		✓

THESIS		COINCIDES WITH		
		WB	IDB	UN Agenda 2030
7	That countries design educational budgets linked to students by educational institution and/or results.	✓	✓	
8	That countries decrease budgets for higher education and allocate these university budgets to secondary and primary levels, so generating a competition for the educational budget between the different levels.	✓		
9	To achieve progress in digital education options, with priority on self-managed learning, and independent, non-interrelated contents.	✓		
10	To achieve progress in the use of technology and artificial intelligence in teaching, so reducing working hour requirements for teaching staff.	✓		



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