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Introductory Comments

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The Crisis of Neoliberalism and Education

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Introductory Comments

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The thematic section of this issue entitled “The Crisis of Neoliberalism and Education” emerged out of concerns with a democracy threatened by authoritarian forms of populism, traces of social fascism, and fundamentalism, all in the midst of new constructs emerging from the digital world, an uneven distribution of global wealth, and the macro-calamity embodied in climate change. The latter is rooted in the exploitation of nature as part of the dominant western cosmology that is still sustaining the economic system of production.

The contributions in this section begin with a critical analysis of neoliberalism entitled “A Pandemic’s Punitive Pedagogy: Education and the Organic Crisis of the Global Neoliberal Order,” masterfully developed by Ian McKay. He discusses how the global pandemic has illuminated the core contradictions of neoliberalism’s strengths and weaknesses, particularly in relation to education, especially social inequalities and the commodification of what we call education. The article is followed by Naomar de Almeida Filho’s “Ultra-neoliberalism and Higher Education: A Critical (But Hopeful) View from Brazil.” The author embraces a transformative approach. He examines ultra-neoliberalism and the educational crisis of global cognitive capitalism, focusing on the role of the university as a social institution with hope, while proposing a political agenda based on education as a fundamental human right. The paper is grounded theoretically, but also relies on his valuable experience as the former president of two

universities. Carlos Martínez Valle has contributed “*Presupuestos Participativos: Neoliberalizadores o Educativos. Una Evaluación de las Políticas Aceleradas*” (Participatory Budgeting: Neoliberalizing or Educative? An Assessment of Fast Policies). Here, neoliberalism is analyzed as a political concept and the author questions its presumed objective economic character. Martínez Valle construes the concept as referring to a complex, changing, and polycentric program, with a multifaceted character and a capacity to absorb and transform opposing positionings and policies. The author moves beyond critique and calls our attention to education as the social education of the community, which with the support of educational institutions could contest the subjectivization of competencies. Laura Pinto and Levon Blue bring another dimension to neoliberal education in their article “The Heist: Neoliberal Education and the Theft of Time.” The authors question prescriptive policies that attempt to control what is taught, how it is taught, and what is learned, and they call our attention to the notion of time embedded in neoliberal education premises and practices. The authors want the focus on education to be grounded in experiences relevant to learners—not bound to time, but “teaching students how to live well with others in a meaningful way.”

Cristina Pulido-Montes and Luis Lázaro Llorente, in “*Neoliberalismo y Procesos de Privatización “en” la Educación Pública en Inglaterra y España*” (Neoliberalism and Processes of Privatization of Public Education in England and Spain) discuss the impact of neoliberal policies on the privatization of education in England and Spain. In line with the notion of diverse neoliberalism, the authors recontextualize neoliberal policies in their study following the executive direction taken in the two countries. Cristóbal Madero, in “*El Neoliberalismo Educativo Chileno y sus Posibilidades de Derrumbe en una Nueva Constitución: Es Posible?*” (Chilean Educational Liberalism and the Possibility to Overthrow it in the New Constitution: Is it Possible?), takes us to Chile, a neoliberal laboratory of education under dictator Augusto Pinochet. Madero examines the place of education in the constitution of 1980 promulgated under Pinochet; in particular, the normative changes that took place afterwards, namely the subsidies based on demand, provided through vouchers allowing families to choose the school they liked. If parents could not pay, there were provisions within unequal conditions. For Madero, parents have the right to choose and also the right to pay for their children’s education. He closes with the current democratic moment (November 2021), wherein a new constitution is being written by an assembly that emerged from popular mobilizations including secondary students.

This part closes with Peter Glinos’s paper entitled “Historical Analysis of School Choice in Ontario: Freedom and Inequality,” which takes us to Canada. It is a careful examination of the literature and government documents related to school choice in Ontario within the broader history of school choice development in Canada, with particular references to Alberta and British Columbia. Glinos analyzes the debate about school choice and pays attention to issues of freedom of choice as well as social

inequality. He places his analysis in juxtaposition with Milton Friedman's voucher model.¹

There have been concerns around the move to use education as the tool to solve social issues, whether educational or not. The concept of *educationalization* is intended to capture a trend in modern societies to transfer social responsibilities onto the school system. It has carried by and large a negative meaning, although this approach has been problematized.² However, we think that the school as a social institution, and the university, as Naomar Almeida Filho has discussed in his article in this issue and in his work, both play a role in this period of epochal change. Here, we are going back to Paulo Freire in a new context, in the centenary year of his birth, to think of the formation of inquisitive students with transformative minds. In our case, faculties of education in charge of the formation of teachers need to have the courage of mind to go beyond compliance with official agendas to acknowledge other forms of knowledge. They need to rethink pedagogy with a new and critical vision of education that is ethically defensible and sensitive to the complexity of our current experience; and they need to keep in mind a concern with the common good that goes beyond individualism and anthropocentrism, a cosmopolitan world view, and with the implications of the technologization of teaching and learning. Faculties are approaching the situation within the parameters of their missions in dealing with coloniality and opening ways to a diverse world, and they should be praised. Rethinking our vision of education demands that we revisit our understanding of the connections between our formal education, the socio-economic system, and the impact of dominant western ways of knowing. We must acknowledge the complex reality of a world in which democratic pursuits are tainted by dispossession, authoritarian populist solutions, violence, and drugs. It is important to recognize how social mobilizations—on climate change, violence against women, forms of oppression of minority groups, questioning education arrangements, and other issues—within the context of the digital world are, of course, contextualizing our vision.

How as educators do we construe our space in the system in ways that lead to the formation of an inquisitive citizenship disposition, often under depriving circumstances, and persons concerned with making sense of the meaning of life? William Pinar wants to claim that a spiritual component in education will motivate students to confront their own historicity and their encounters with the past, going beyond the presentism promoted by the current screen culture.³

¹ Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," from *Economics and the Public Interest*, edited by Robert A. Solo, copyright © 1955 by the Trustees of Rutgers College in New Jersey, <https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEEFriedmanRoleOfGovttable.pdf>.

² Rosa Bruno-Jofré, "Introduction: Problematizing Educationalization," in *Educationalization and Its Complexities: Religion, Politics, and Technology*, edited by Rosa Bruno-Jofré, 3–26 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2020).

³ William Pinar, "Educationalization as Technologization," in *Educationalization and Its Complexities. Religion, Politics, and Technology*, edited by Rosa Bruno-Jofré, 239–53, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 240.

We think, along with Almeida Filho, that the social role of schools, as well as the relevance of contextual historical mediation and the agency of young students, are often forgotten in North America. Chile, a neoliberal education laboratory, has become a historical case of social movements that started with the 2006 mobilization of secondary students questioning the privatization of schooling, followed by the social explosion of October 2019, also started by secondary students. The latter had profound political consequences, leading not only to gender parity in political life, but to a popular assembly writing a new constitution.

The reader is invited to visit the digital section with its contributions from Laura Pinto and Levon Blue. After engaging in a very useful conceptual clarification of making, makerspaces, and production pedagogies, the authors discuss maker and production pedagogies and the possibilities for either cultivating or silencing criticality. They conclude that criticality takes a holiday when maker-based learning privileges *poïesis* (the experience of production) over other forms of human activities and neglects the goals of education—such as those espoused by Hanna Arendt, Paulo Freire, and Nel Noddings.⁴ Praxis with its transformational component, as in Freire's theory, is largely absent in conventional maker education. The challenge is to explore the potential that makerspaces have for transforming narrow instructionist practices into an intentional and reflective practice of making.

In the selection of articles under “Regular Contributions” the journal issue offers “Chile’s Citizenship Education Curriculum: Priorities and Silences Through Two Decades” by Cristián Cox and Carolina García. It is a powerful article on citizenship education curriculum in secondary education in Chile in the last two decades, examined in relation to the formation of a democratic culture. It argues that the changes came from socio-cultural changes related to rights and participation rather than from governmental ideologies. Cox identifies serious gaps in curricula, such as little or no reference to solidarity, common good, or social cohesion; gaps that have negative implications for progress toward a democratic political culture. Johannes Westberg’s “What Can We Learn from Studying the Past: The Wonderful Usefulness of History in Educational Research” makes a case for the contribution of history of education to educational research. The author puts emphasis on the unique methodological expertise that the historian of education brings, including explanations, comparisons, and ways to examine the uses and misuses of history. It is an encouraging paper for historians of education, whose presence in faculties of education is diminishing dramatically. David Luque has contributed “Los Nuevos Escenarios de la Educación Política Hoy” (The New Scenarios of Political Education Today), which starts with the notion of a close relationship between education and democracy. He analyzes various scenarios: patriotic education, the dynamic of radicalization, education and sustainable development, and education and sexual

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1983); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

orientation. The author argues for a scenario with a combination of diversity, dialogue, and practical life. This section closes with Margaret Susan Thompson's article "The 'Cult of True Womanhood' and American Catholic Sisters: An Example of Creative Subversion," is a fascinating piece of historical research. The author explores the role of Catholic education as taught by sisters in both reinforcing and undermining gender roles; the schools aimed at inculcating in students a social, spiritual, and sexually restrictive code. She observes, inspired by Barbara Welter, that education takes place both explicitly and subliminally.⁵ The sister teachers not only transmitted traditional feminine graces to students, but also taught physics, history, math, etc. The sisters operated their convents as corporate officers would do. Thompson explores the subversive elements in the sisters' educational world.

The journal issue closes with an interview with Professor Maitane Ostolaza from the Université de Nantes (France), interviewed by Professor Jesús Alonso Carballès, Université de Bordeaux-Montaigne (France), on occasion of the publication of her book *La terre des basques: Naissance d'un paysage (1800-1936)*.⁶

⁵ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18, no. 2 (1966): 151–74.

⁶ Maitane Ostolaza, *La terre des basques: Naissance d'un paysage (1800-1936)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018), 336 pages, <http://www.pur-editions.fr/detail.php?idOuv=4705>.