

Presentation of the dossier: Educational research in Latin America: agendas in a time of dispute

A pesquisa educacional na América Latina: agendas em tempo de disputa

La investigación educativa em América Latina y el Caribe: agendas en tiempos de disputa

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The dossier “Educational research in Latin America: political agendas in times of dispute” is a collective effort that brings together discussions from the Pre-congress of the Latin American Association of Education Research (ALIE), held in August 2025, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in collaboration with the Journal Education and Policies in Debates (REPOD), from the Postgraduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Uberlândia (Brazil).

The partnership established for this dossier proposal is based on the objectives that inspired the creation of ALIE and the realization of the pre-Congress: to promote academic and scientific spaces to advance the construction of a Latin American and Caribbean perspective on educational challenges; in addition to proposing a research agenda that would recover the complexity and heterogeneity of knowledge production in the countries of the region.

The Latin American Association for Research in Education (ALIE) is a non-profit institution that brings together researchers, institutions, networks, and organizations linked to research and postgraduate studies in Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its

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purpose is to contribute to the development of Latin American and Caribbean critical thought and research in the field of Education, demonstrating a clear commitment to the right to education, democracy, solidarity, equality, human rights, care for nature, peace, and justice⁴.

ALIE is the result of a collective process initiated in Manaus, Amazonas – Brazil, in October 2023, when a diverse and plural group of associations, networks, and institutions dedicated to educational research in Latin America agreed to promote the creation of a regional organization focused on strengthening knowledge production, academic exchange, and the defense of education as a social right. The Association was formally established on November 21, 2024, during a meeting held at the Institute of Research in Educational Sciences, of the University of Buenos Aires, at which time its Statute was approved and its first leaders were elected: Fernanda Saforcada and Geovana Mendonça Lunardi Mendes, as president and vice-president, respectively, in addition to an organizing Board of Directors composed of 20 representatives from the institutions that participated in its creation.

Among its guidelines, ALIE aims to strengthen open access and the free dissemination of knowledge. In this sense, this first dossier, coordinated by members of its Board of Directors, aims to disseminate part of the research presented at the pre-Congress, which focuses on public educational policies.

The theme of this dossier is centered on the field of knowledge production in Latin America, which is currently configured as a contested space where different political, social, and educational projects confront each other. In recent decades, the region has experienced “pendular movements,” marked by the alternation between progressive and conservative governments (García Linera, 2019), while simultaneously observing the expansion of the extreme right. These transformations have not only reconfigured the meanings attributed to politics and the orientations of public policies but have also influenced the definition of research agendas, the meanings ascribed to education, the different actors participating in the educational field, and the conditions for knowledge production and circulation in the region.

The meanings of politics (Laclau; Mouffe, 1985) are presented as associated with the role attributed to the State in guaranteeing rights, democracy, citizenship, and equality, in contrast to perspectives that focus on the market, the individual, competitiveness, and employability. In this context, a dispute unfolds among actors holding distinct educational projects, involving, primarily, the State – under governments of different political-ideological

⁴ <https://alie.lat/sobre-alie>.

orientations – international organizations, the private sector, trade unions, universities, social movements (with emphasis on indigenous and territorial movements), and non-governmental organizations, to name some of the most relevant actors (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2017).

The presence of private actors in the public sphere is growing, organized into networks (Ball, 2008) integrated by private institutions, think tanks, educational technology (edutech) companies, and governmental agents. These networks actively participate in both agenda setting and policy formulation, as well as in their implementation, introducing discourses of marketization, business efficiency, and performativity; in addition to developing new forms of governance in which there is a shift from hierarchical and centralized forms of government to more horizontal forms, where the boundaries between public and private become diffuse. In this sense, it becomes relevant to analyze, from the different perspectives of educational research in Latin America, the trajectories of educational policies in the face of the reconfiguration of state power in each national context (Ball, 2012).

It is possible to identify a multiplicity of themes in the field of research in which the political agendas in dispute are manifested. Among them, the orientations of educational policies structured both by global agendas and by diagnoses produced educational systems and their main problems stand out.

Another theme present in research agendas refers to the curriculum, understood simultaneously as the materialization of a hegemonic project and as a space for territorial anchoring (Foucault, 2007; Gramsci, 1971). In this sense, it is observed that in the region, categories such as competencies, standardization, quality, and performativity, guided by a managerial logic, predominate. Debates about interculturality and inclusion also persist, highlighting the tension between the formal recognition of educational proposals and the limits of their implementation (Walsh, 2009). For this reason, one of the central discussions focuses on who defines legitimate knowledge. School knowledge is claimed in opposition to community knowledge, national history in opposition to more plural memories, and, in this context, debates between secular and religious perspectives also stand out, in which gender issues and comprehensive sexual education constitute one of the most visible disputes.

Thus, the curriculum is conceived not only as what is taught but as a space for legitimizing a particular vision of the nation that regulates cultural boundaries. This is why the curriculum tends to become one of the main spaces of dispute between dominant social sectors and subalternized groups.

The evaluation, construction, and utilization of indicators also occupy a prominent place on both the political and research agendas. The expansion of international and national standardized tests, monitoring systems, rankings, and incentive and accountability mechanisms prevail in the region and largely guide research agendas. Thus, evaluation becomes the great promise founded on the idea of measuring to improve the system. Within critical approaches to evaluation, a key concern is the question of reducing educational processes to aspects that can be measured or quantified, which tends to pressure teachers, reducing the field of relevant knowledge to the logic of productivity and the market. The emergence of digital evaluation and its implications, such as pedagogical surveillance; technological dependence without critical analysis; and the deepening of significant inequalities in individual capacities and infrastructure conditions for its development, constitute one of the current focal points of concern (UNESCO, 2023).

Another relevant topic refers to the privatization and marketization ‘of’ and ‘in’ education, as well as public-private partnerships. As Ball and Youdell (2007) point out, “exogenous” privatization has been extensively studied in the specialized literature due to the increasing opening of public education services to the participation of private actors, both in terms of their conception and management. Currently, this phenomenon is becoming more complex with the advancement of the so-called “new philanthropy” (Avelar; Patil, 2020), in which corporations and foundations maintained by business groups not only finance projects but also operate through diffuse governance networks that actively dispute the definition of educational agendas and reforms at a global level.

Similarly, “endogenous” privatization occupies an increasingly prominent space in contemporary debates. This modality manifests itself not only through the incorporation of entrepreneurial ideas, methods, and practices aimed at making educational institutions increasingly resemble and be as efficient as businesses (Ball; Youdell, 2007), but also through the formation of entrepreneurial subjects, with subjectivities adapted to the demands of a market characterized by uncertainty and instability (Feldfeber; Caride; Duhalde, 2020).

The assimilation of business rationality by public schools has also contributed to the deepening of the processes of intensification and precarization of teaching work (Olivier, 2007, 2011). Under the imperatives of efficiency and accountability, as well as before the expansion of artificial intelligence in new sociotechnical environments, a colonization of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge is produced, transforming the ways of teaching and learning and the meanings attributed to education.

In this context, accelerated digitalization, boosted in the post-pandemic period, has fostered an orientation of educational policies that privileges connectivity and digital platforms, with the main contradiction being the deep inequalities in terms of digital literacy and limited access to technological devices (CEPAL, 2020; UNESCO, 2021a, 2021b). The desired technological sovereignty clashes with disputes over the control of digital systems and the forms of appropriation and use of student and teacher data.

On the other hand, various social movements compete for the definition of educational policy agendas and guidelines. In different Latin American countries, the construction of educational alternatives developed in the territories is observed, supported by experiences of community education, dedicated training spaces, and pedagogies that value local knowledge and question the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2007).

In this dispute, not only different socio-educational models are at stake, but also the recognition of the structural inequalities that characterize the region and the conflicts surrounding the subjects and institutions that govern education, the rationalities that guide this process, and whose interests they serve. The constitution of the educational research field does not remain oblivious to these disputes.

In this sense, the set of articles that comprise this dossier, which we will present next, reveals the hegemonic disputes, contradictions, and challenges that constitute the contemporary educational field and recovers the complexity of knowledge production in the countries of the region, evidencing distinct theoretical, epistemological, and political perspectives.

The diversity of themes addressed reveals the agendas, policies, and challenges that question the different educational systems analyzed. They also allow us to identify, from theoretical, epistemological, and methodological perspectives, the approaches adopted in educational research in the countries represented in this dossier.

The dossier is structured into two integrated sections. The first presents an interview with the Vice-President of ALIE, Professor Geovana Mendonca Lunardi Mendes, from the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), who shares with readers the process of ALIE's creation and the establishment of research agendas in Latin America, examining the social, political, economic, and epistemological mediations of knowledge production in the region.

The second part consists of a set of 17 articles, eight of which are collaborations from researchers in the region: Argentina (5), Mexico (2), and Uruguay (1). The other nine collaborations are from Brazilian researchers, originating from nine universities across

different Brazilian regions. The contributions include professors and researchers from Basic and Higher Education, as well as postgraduate students.

From a critical-dialectical perspective, reading the articles allows us to present them not only through a thematic approximation but also from the structural contradictions expressed in the context of contemporary capitalism and disputes over the right to education. Considered as a whole, the articles reveal a dynamic of neoliberal reconfiguration of the State in the Latin American context, with implications and challenges that restructure and reconfigure teaching work and teacher training on one hand, and on the other, intensify disputes for rights, democracy, and emancipation.

The works thus reflect the tension between two competing educational projects: one that subordinates education to the demands of capitalist accumulation, instrumental rationality, and neoliberal governance, and another that views education as a social practice aimed at integral human formation, democratization, and the emancipation of individuals. Thus, three axes of analysis comprise the totality of the studies presented below, understood as interdependent dimensions of the same social totality.

1. State, neoliberal regulation, and educational policies

The article by Guadalupe Olivier (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de México), “Contentious politics as a perspective for the study of educational policy”, proposes contentious politics as an alternative to traditional assumptions for analyzing the field of educational policies and advocates for redefining the notion of education and educational policy founded on a state-centric approach, repositioning the State, among other actors, in spaces of political and ideological disputes. The proposal therefore shifts the analytical focus to individuals, organizations, and social mobilization processes in scenarios of political conflict, attributing centrality to them.

The article “Democratization in discourse and practice: normative trajectory of distance education and its relations with regulatory flexibility and market expansion”, authored by Jéssica Cristina Mendes de Godoi Ferreira and Renata Ramos da Silva Carvalho (UEG), presents the tensions surrounding the regulation of Distance Education in Brazil as a mechanism for expanding access to higher education, revealing the contradictions between the discourse of democratization and the materialization of its implementation. The study

exposes the heterogeneity and contradictoriness inherent in the consolidation of policies directed at Distance Education, because of different state projects and market interests.

The authors Marisa Álvarez (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero/Universidad de Buenos Aires), Natalia Gardyn, Sacha Unamuno, and Germán Schiavinato (Universidad de Buenos Aires), in the article “Trends in state financing and its impact on the Argentine educational system from the perspective of the right to education. Continuities and disruptions in the face of the advance of the new right”, invite us to analyze the reality of public funding for education in Argentina, which reveals a sharp decline in public investment over the last decade, amidst the advance of the new right and local and regional inequalities. In this work, financing is presented as a central element for questioning the guarantee of the right to education and the role of the State in reproducing and combating social inequalities.

The articles by Axel Kesler and Julieta Heurtley (Universidad de Buenos Aires); Márcia Aparecida Jacomini (UNIFESP), Monica Ribeiro da Silva (UFPR), Nora Krawczyk, and Sérgio Feldemann de Quadros (Unicamp); and Nayolanda Coutinho Lobo Amorim de Souza and Éder da Silva Silveira (UNISC), based on the educational realities of Argentina and Brazil, focus their analyses on the neoliberal reconfiguration of secondary education policies and the meanings attributed to education and the training of new generations. The article titled “Local expressions and global trends: a comparison between secondary level reforms in Brazil and CABA”, conducts a comparative analysis between the secondary education reforms promoted in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and Brazil, seeking to understand how global trends in the reconfiguration of secondary education are expressed in these two contexts, in response to social and educational transformations unleashed in this context.

In turn, the third article, “The Right to Education in the Context of Privatization in Full-Time High School: Partnerships and the Redefinition of the State’s Role”, focuses on the privatization of full-time high school education and analyzes the partnerships established by the state of Rio Grande do Sul with private organizations. It seeks to highlight the mediations in the process of expanding the participation of these institutions in the public education system, emphasizing how they impact the State’s performance in school management and the organization of pedagogical work in schools.

The contributions of Andrea Beatriz Alvarez (Universidad Nacional de Jujuy) and Nora Zoila Lanfri (Universidad Nacional de Córdoba), in the text “Policies and Expansion of Early Childhood Education in Jujuy, Argentina: Implementation and Strategies of Actors in Rural Contexts”, are directed at analyzing the relationships between the expansion of early

childhood education and the processes of recontextualization of policies by supervisors, teachers, and managers in the rural community of Jujuy, with a view to guaranteeing the right to education.

The work by Myriam Feldfeber (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Nora Gluz (Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento/Universidad de Buenos Aires), and Lucrecia Rodrigo (Universidad de Buenos Aires), “The institutionalization of leadership in teacher education: policies and actors in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires”, critically analyzes contemporary forms of neoliberal regulation over teaching work within the context of policies inspired by New Public Management. The study reveals the extent to which the institutionalization of leadership simultaneously functions as a mechanism of governance, subjectivity production, and commodification of educational practices, highlighting the role of private actors in formulating and disseminating its agenda. Furthermore, it points to a redefinition of teaching work and identity, through the displacement of conceptions founded on pedagogical authority towards a managerial logic based on leadership, accountability for results, and self-governance.

2. Teacher education policies and the reconfiguration of teaching work: between technicalization and precarization

The works of Morgana Bada Caldas (UNESCO) and Naiara Gracia Tibola (UNIPLAC), and of Joyce Mesquita Quirino and Carla Conti de Freitas (UEG), converge in their analysis of teacher education as a contested space between educational projects guided by instrumental rationality; driven by national and international political agendas that shape teacher education and produce pedagogical guidelines favoring practical skills, adaptation, and efficiency. In the first study, entitled “Teacher Education from an International Perspective: An Analysis of the Santa Catarina State Education Plan”, the critique is directed at the influence of international organizations on the formulation of teacher education policies, identifying the predominance of the epistemology of practice as the foundation of teacher education.

In the second text, “Education in Human Rights, Digital Education, and High School Teacher Education: An Analysis of the Tensions Present in Contemporary Educational Policies”, the analysis focuses on the tensions produced by digital education policies, which tend to prioritize technical and operational skills, in contrast to the principles of Human Rights Education. These processes can be understood as forms of disseminating hegemonic

models that redefine the purposes of education and the role of teachers. The studies advocate, albeit through different paths, the need to strengthen a conception of teacher education guided by intellectual autonomy, critical reflection, the democratization of education, and the emancipation of individuals, opposing the reduction of education to a merely technical and instrumental logic.

The research conducted by Bianca Larissa Klein and Andréa Barbosa Gouveia (UFPR), and by Rodrigo Roncato Marques Anes and Rahaby Nayanne Vieira Carvalho (UEG), examines expressions of a singular phenomenon: the subordination of teaching labor to the rationalization, control, and flexibility characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism. The study, “The Career of Teachers in Paraná and Deprofessionalization Strategies: The Case of the Temporary Teacher” highlights the material effects of the precariousness of the teaching career resulting from the hiring of “academic teachers” in the state of Paraná. The authors denounce the processes of teaching deprofessionalization, via the relaxation of training requirements and the expansion of temporary contracts, which lead to the fragmentation of the teaching career and the weakening of teachers’ professional recognition. In the second article, titled “Competent Discourse as an Ideological Instrument of Domination and its Impacts on Autonomy and Educational Work,” the process of subordinating teaching work to the neoliberal logic is approached through the legitimization of what is called “competent discourse.” This discourse, as an ideological mechanism of domination, attributes exclusive authority to technical-administrative knowledge and disqualifies the experience, participation, and critical capacity of school subjects. The works thus reveal processes of deprofessionalization, loss of autonomy, and weakening of the emancipatory dimension of education, and further expose processes of collective fragmentation.

3. Education, Democracy, and Rights: Political Disputes and Inequalities in Latin America

The article by Ligia Ziggiotti de Oliveira (UTP) and Salomão Barros Ximenes (USP), titled “The years that did not end: the use of legal statutes from the military dictatorship in the current persecution of educators in Brazil,” highlights, through an analysis of teaching practices, a fundamental historical contradiction between formal democracy and the material maintenance of authoritarianism. The study investigates the persistence of legal statutes originating from military dictatorship and their contemporary application in the punishment

of educators, especially within state education networks. In this context, teaching freedom emerges as a right under threat by authoritarian provisions that restrict the intellectual autonomy of teachers, criminalize pedagogical practices, and contribute to the weakening of democracy itself.

The studies by Pablo Daniel García (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero) and Claudia De Angelis Moreira (Universidad de Montevideo) converge in their approach to the contradictions between democratization and inequality and between formal and concrete inclusion within the context of Argentine and Uruguayan educational policies. The Right to Education emerges as a central category in both articles; in the first, “Access to higher education in contexts of inequality: a mapping of policies in the region”, the right to Higher Education is analyzed from the perspective of access, retention, and completion conditions, demonstrating that university expansion and massification processes occur in contexts marked by persistent social and territorial inequalities. The second text, titled “Including is not enough: structural mismatches and disputes in initial teacher training for inclusive education in Uruguay), shows that adherence to the discourse of inclusion coexists with insufficient institutional conditions for its realization. Both studies criticize the existing gaps between the principles of educational democratization and their implementation, and they reveal the tension between the universalization of access, retention, and equitable participation.

Finally, the studies by Josimar Lottermann, Laura de Campos Pereira, Geovana Lunardi Mendes (UDESC) and Josefina Guzmán Acuña, Teresa de Jesús Guzmán Acuña, Dora María Lladó Lárraga and Fernando Leal Ríos (Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas - Mexico) are focused on analyzing the mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced in institutional structures and in the consciousness of individuals. Although they address distinct specific areas, the texts seek to understand how power relations, cultural structures, and institutional mechanisms contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities in the educational field, revealing the tension between discourses of equality and practices that maintain forms of exclusion and domination. Sharing the common category of gender, in the Brazilian study “From Global to Local: movements of the anti-gender offensive in the education plans of the state of Santa Catarina”, the category emerges as an object of political and discursive dispute, revealing how certain groups act in regulating the meanings attributed to gender in educational policies, producing mechanisms of silencing and discursive control.

In the text “The perception of academics from a State Public University in Mexico on gender equality,” the category of gender is approached as a structuring element of academic experiences and opportunities. The authors question how the internalization of traditional gender roles leads to the naturalization of female overload, reproducing inequalities even in academic spaces that formally advocate equality.

With this dossier, we seek to contribute to the expansion, deepening, and dissemination of the debate on themes that have challenged Latin American educational systems and their political agendas. We hope that the reflections systematized here will contribute to strengthening knowledge production and fostering dialogue among researchers in the region.

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