



INTRODUCTION

The effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on education in Latin America

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Almost two years after I first talked to Leda Pérez—the editor of *Apuntes*—about issuing a call for papers about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Latin America, we have the great satisfaction of presenting Issue 92 of *Apuntes*, which is dedicated to this very topic. The eight research articles included here were written by 20 specialists from 16 universities and institutions of higher learning in Latin America, the United States, and the United Kingdom. They examine a range of educational phenomena and problematics that are revealing of some of the changes experienced by schools and their communities on all educational levels, modalities, systems, and subsystems in our region due to the sudden and improvised transition to distance education starting in March 2020.

These studies employ various theoretical, analytical, and methodological frameworks both comparatively and in case studies. Their focus ranges from educational and public policy research, analysis of social networks, comparative sociology, and phenomenology. They explore the experiences, perceptions, decisions, practices, actions, and initiatives of subjects, agents, and educational institutions in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, implemented immediately after in-person classes were suspended as a result of mandatory confinement. This body of research makes it possible to analyze phenomena on the micro, meso, and macro levels of education in the countries studied and, given the abundance of experiences forged in other latitudes, they lead us to believe that the effects and implications have not been and nor will they be homogeneous or immediate.

This collection of articles provides specialists, students, decision-makers, authorities, educators as well as the broader public with an exploration of

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the educational phenomena that were created and recreated as the pandemic advanced, with serious and recurrent waves of contagion and death from COVID-19. For those of us with a special interest in education, this issue of *Apuntes* provides information and raises questions about our realities during an exceptional period. Some of the studies included here focus on experiences in one or more countries, at one or more points of time during the health emergency, or among the same population and geographic context while others provide rigorous comparisons between community members—especially professors, students, and administrators—corresponding to schools as well as educational levels and systems in several Latin American countries.

In addition to these comparisons, some articles dialogue with specialists from other countries, regions, and continents who have examined similar educational issues during this health crisis. One example is “Virtual Education During the Pandemic from the Perspective of Peruvian Teachers in Rural Schools” by Daniel Rubén Tacca Huamán, Luis Junior Tirado Castro, and Renzo Cuarez Cordero. The authors use a qualitative and phenomenological methodology to study one of the most frequently examined issues regarding education and the pandemic, focusing on the experiences of teachers. Conversations with experts who have been doing this type of research since 2020 in India, the United States, Norway, China, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Ireland, among others, broadens our outlook and enables comparisons that contribute to the precise identification of the consequences experienced by teachers within various levels and educational systems around the world and, no doubt, of the diverse specificities of the respective empirical cases.

A second characteristic of this issue of *Apuntes* is the opportunity it gives us for a comparative reading of the articles, allowing us to compare and examine feedback from the results of empirical research, thereby amplifying the knowledge and richness of the studies. This is the case of “Perceptions of the Impact of the Pandemic on Teaching Practices in Chile and Peru” by Pablo Andrada and Julio-César Mateus; “Changes in Conditions, Practices, and Relationships between Teachers and Students in Rural Mexican High Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Carlota Guzmán Gómez; “Educational Collaboration Before and During the Pandemic: A Social Network Analysis of Chilean Schools” by Juan Pablo Queupil and Catalina Cuenca Vivanco; “Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Workload of Caregivers: A Case Study of Tabasco University Lecturers Who Worked from Home” by Nélyda Solana-Villanueva, Martín Gabriel De Los Heros-Rondenil, Sandra Carmen Murillo-López; and “Virtual Education During the Pandemic from the Perspective of Peruvian Teachers in Rural schools” by Tacca Huamán, Tirado Castro, and Cuarez Cordero. Applying different

theoretical, analytical, and methodological frameworks, these specialists focus on the study of the experiences, perceptions, and/or practices of the professors whose work was profoundly disrupted by the transition to distance education in the context of a public health emergency.

A third theme of the articles in this issue is related to the effects of the pandemic on the work of teachers, which exposed the historical inequalities between men and women around the world. In countries such as ours, the pandemic brought to light specific inequalities in education, work, and family responsibilities, among other areas. For example, “Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Workload of Caregivers: A Case Study of Tabasco University Lecturers Who Worked from Home” demonstrates that from the beginning of the confinement measures most private and public activities were transferred to the home and, to a great degree, were in the hands of women. “Virtual Education During the Pandemic from the Perspective of Peruvian Teachers in Rural Schools” identifies the challenges and problematics that families immediately had to face when they took on educational responsibilities without having access to the many of the resources, skills, and knowledge that are crucial to guaranteeing continuity in educational services. This task was seen as one of the most important priorities at the beginning of the pandemic although later there were cases that—to varying degrees—sought to assure quality and equity in teaching and learning processes in schools as well as other educational levels and modalities. Here, once again, the studies provide multiple elements for comparison.

While several articles in Issue 92 of *Apuntes* deal with teachers, there are others that explore the experiences, perceptions, and practices of students in different types of schools, levels of education, and systems in our region. The variety of students examined allows us to observe the similarities and differences in the numerous consequences of compulsory distance learning on students. Undoubtedly, learning and performance were undermined by the swift abandonment of classrooms, the lack of organization that accompanied this change, and the uncertainty that prevailed to varying degrees starting in March 2020. In addition, coexistence, participation, the school environment, and the construction of individual and collective identities were also affected by this immediate reconfiguration of daily school dynamics. “Changes in Conditions, Practices, and Relationships Between Teachers and Students in Rural Mexican High Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic” continues this specialist’s study of the unique educational project that was introduced some years ago in Mexico in order to broaden the right to education for adolescents and young people who

do not have the means of attending the last years of high school in the areas where they live. Guzmán's starting point is the work of Elsie Rockwell and Justa Ezpeleta and their recognition of the school as a social and historical construction, whose transformation can be seen when you look at it "from below, from the point of view of the actors that construct it on a daily basis."² This article illustrates how—faced with the limitations, indecision, or paralysis of educational authorities or with a lack of educational policies or their impracticability at the time—school communities and their actors took decisions and acted once the situation changed, taking on new and familiar tasks and responsibilities, which in turn led to changes in relationships between teachers and students. Meanwhile, "Reflections from Education Practice: Learning Experiences for Education in Industrial Engineering in the Post-Pandemic World" illustrates some of the changes that affected university students in the view of their professors and administrators. These experts emphasize that when it comes to the study of technology, not only is it important for students to have access to the necessary devices and equipment, but they must also have previous knowledge of and experience with these devices. In addition, the pandemic showed that it is more and more important to understand how technology is employed and the impact it has on learning and professional performance. The authors add that it is vital for institutions of higher education to reaffirm their commitment to fulfill students' expectations about their studies and their future professional careers, as well as to promote social cooperation and interaction as the basis for learning. Otherwise, it will be impossible in the near future, and after this global health crisis is over, to guarantee student motivation, interest, learning, and skills development in all modalities, whether in-person or remote, synchronous or asynchronous.

The fourth question of importance touched upon in this issue is the impact of the pandemic on the organizational forms of schools, institutions, and educational systems and subsystems. "Reflections from Education Practice: Learning Experiences for Education in Industrial Engineering in the Post-Pandemic World" is interesting in this respect. It examines the ways that students and professors of Industrial Engineering at a group of private universities in Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico were affected by the pandemic. This is a valuable study because it demonstrates that—even in cases where considerable knowledge and experiences had been accumulated before the pandemic regarding the use and application of technology to in-person

2 All translations from Spanish are by *Apuntes*.

teaching and learning—there were unique challenges as distance education unfolded over time. In addition, similar experiences occurred not only in similar fields or institutions of higher education but also in other types of schools, educational levels, and subsystems as well as in other countries. Thus, challenges—whether they be unique or common—have not been confined to the duration of the pandemic but, according to the authors, include changes that undeniably transcend COVID-19. So, while in 2020 we might have thought that the challenges would be of a lesser magnitude or less urgent for those educational levels, programs, and subsystems with previous experience in hybrid and distance education in comparison to the challenges encountered in the education of children and adolescents—in which this experience was lacking—this study demonstrates that all levels were profoundly affected by the same and different factors, with both common and exceptional consequences.

Another article about higher education is “Management and University Organization to Face the COVID-19 Pandemic. Contributions from a Public University in Colombia” by Cristian Bedoya Dorado, Guillermo Murillo-Vargas, and Carlos Hernán González-Campo. It should be noted that this is the only article in the issue that is authored by three experts from the same institution. They carried out a rigorous study of their own university to ascertain the changes it made to its management and organization in order to make the optimal decisions necessary to mitigate or avoid possible negative effects, while at the same time strengthening the positives arising from the pandemic in the fulfillment of its mission. Through interviews with upper level university administrators and an examination of the written record, the authors were able to describe the strategies undertaken, which were based on risk management to prevent transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the implementation of technological tools to apply the in-person model. The article describes the experiences involved in the formulation and implementation of multiple strategies which included—in addition to those that were strictly academic and administrative—others related to economic, psychological, cultural, artistic, sports, health, and other types of support that were offered to the university community.

Fifth, specialists have been developing an interest in understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the different types of educational systems, whether centralized, decentralized, or mixed. It is obvious that educational administrators relied on decisions made by the highest political and health authorities in countries around the world. Nevertheless, during this period some spaces for decision-making and actions were carved out, especially in local and national educational systems. These led school and post-secondary

education administrators to assume a crucial role. “School Autonomy in Mexico During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Unclear Government Policies and Demands from School Communities” by Georgina Hermida Montoya and Arcelia Martínez Bordón explores the complexity of the phenomena related to these issues. The authors note that each of these matters already had a history in every educational system before the crisis and taking this into account was essential to understanding and explaining why there were communities, schools, levels, subsystems and even educational systems that took a more proactive and forceful position during the period of compulsory distance education.

Another aspect of the articles in Issue 92 of *Apuntes* is synchronic and diachronic analyses of “a movie that never ends,” as Tacco, Tirado, and Cuarez note. Although some of the articles deal with situations at a specific moment in time, others investigate issues related to a fixed or selected population during various short-term periods. When research results are analyzed and discussed looking beyond social confinement, it is possible to transcend the immediacy of distance education and identify those problems, challenges, and proposals that should be considered in decisions by educators regarding the future return to school. In this vein, various authors point to the concerns raised by specialists concerning government measures taken both at the beginning of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic and at its greatly desired end. On the one hand, the authors discuss whether the crisis should have been dealt with by homogeneous measures imposed on all types of school communities, schools, levels, and educational subsystems around the world or—as soon as it became clear that social confinement was going to last longer than initially thought—whether different measures should have been adopted to avoid negative consequences for learning, teaching, equity, quality, and the right to an education. On the other hand, according to the authors, the imagined return to schools required starting with the recognition that the pandemic included multiple and multidimensional processes, experiences, and changes that took place over an indeterminate period of time and which disrupted the long-term educational project that societies had imagined for the 21st century. In light of the results of these studies, it is clear just how challenging the returns to schools will be. New competencies and educational models must be constructed together with programs, plans, teacher training, and the design of a variety of educational resources. It is suggested that it is essential to guarantee inclusive, universal, and accessible education, especially for vulnerable groups, through in-person, virtual, and hybrid modalities, with all the advantages that technology provides.

Finally, it is worth noting that almost all the articles in this issue of *Apuntes* are collective efforts, authored by two, three, or four academic researchers, mostly affiliated with different academic institutions in different countries. This aspect, on the face of it inconsequential, has become a distinctive characteristic of academic endeavors since 2020 which—in the face of professional work and development carried out virtually—have led to the creation of new interinstitutional, national, and international networks and research groups as well as strengthening those that existed previously. Thus, the approach to educational phenomena and problematics in this issue exemplifies the emergence and proliferation of considerable empirical research dedicated to the study of the multiple, expected, and unexpected effects of the pandemic on education. The articles contained here constitute rigorous and robust contributions regarding those affected by this global crisis, inspiring more reflections and raising further questions, in addition to imagining possible futures that we will have to construct within our societies. While there are other aspects of these studies that would be worth mentioning—with a firm emphasis on persuading readers to proceed—I conclude convinced that we should continue this dialogue in the space that *Apuntes* has provided us.

