

Book Review / Recensión de libros

Book Review: “Rivas, A. (2015). *Latin America after PISA: Educational lessons learned in seven countries (2000-2015)*. Buenos Aires: CIPPEC-Natura- Instituto Natura”.

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Doctor in Social Sciences, Axel Rivas is a specialist in identification, diagnostics, and the analysis of educational issues from a comparative approach. He is the Primary Investigator of the Program for Education of the Center for Implementation of Public Policies for Fairness and Growth (CIPPEC), where he was director of the Program of Education for 10 years (2002-2012), and professor at the University of San Andrés (UdeSA), the University of Torcuato Di Tella (UTDT), the Pedagogical University of Buenos Aires (Unipe), and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences- Seat of Argentina (FLASCO-Argentina).

He has been a consultant of the International Institute of Educational Planning of UNICEF, UNESCO, Program of the United Nations for Development (PUND), World Bank, and Ibero-American Bank of Development (BID). In his trajectory, furthermore, the author has written more than thirty articles and nine books about educational policy and comparative

education. Among these publications, one can find the book “*América Latina después de PISA: Lecciones aprendidas de la educación en siete países (2000-2015)*.”

This book is the result of the research project *Map of the Educational Policy in Latin America (MAPEAL)*, developed by CIPPEC with the support of Nature between November 2013 and November 2014. The general purpose of the project was to study the educational policies implemented in seven Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay), which had regularly participated in the Program for the International Assessment of Students (PISA) from 2000 until 2012, the last edition of PISA until the end of the project. For this purpose, contexts, educational policies and the results measured by different indicators were analysed, indicators such as the Gini coefficient, international sources, such as The Second Regional Comparative and Explicative Study (TERCE) of UNESCO, PISA and The Study

of the Tendencies in mathematics and Sciences (TIMSS) of the International Association for the Assessment of Educational Performance (IEA), as well as other sources of national character.

The text is structured in seven chapters. In the first one, the author offers the MEPAL project cornerstone, as well as a detailed vision of both the theoretic and methodological framework of the same. It should be pointed out the hard work that involves the fulfilment of more than 100 interviews to specialised guides and political actors implemented in the analysed countries and the processing of multiple statistical sources. In this sense, it is important to point out the design of mixed method in this research, which combines a qualitative and a quantitative view to answer the questions of research.

In the second chapter, Doctor Rivas shows the result of the analyses of Latin American context during the period between 2000 and 2015. This period corresponds to a historical stage in Latin America, with economic growth and social improvement which is reflected in the decrease of unemployment, malnutrition and infant mortality and in the increase of pension, health and non-contributory pension coverage, as well as in the appearance of new middle classes. In spite of these improvements, it seems that social inequality is a difficult obstacle to save for a Latin America which continues to be, nowadays, the most unequal continent of the planet.

The third chapter is a complex chapter where the author accomplishes a mapping of the educational policies implemented in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. But, beyond observing which policies were carried out in the educational field of Latin America during the period between 2000 and 2015, what it is intended is to analyse and reflect on the common and differentiated tendencies of the countries and, in some cases, of its states or provinces. These tendencies are the following: a) The consensus of rights: more

financing, more students, more recognition, b) A renewed centralised governability, c) An ambivalent curriculum between prescription and expansion, d) School books as a shortcut and the exponential growth of digital materials, e) Lightened from outside: new devices of quality assessment, f) The academic systems: major flexibility and divergent exams models, g) Policies to distribute educational fairness in unequal societies, h) Breaking the ice block of teaching, i) The new focus at school: managers and improvement plan, j) The tendency to the passage towards private education and state answers, k) The big technological leap and the one-to-one policies, and l) Challenges: to extend the rights of early childhood, to increase school time and to change the model of secondary education (pages 8-15 – Executive summary).

Due to the complexity of this section, in the fourth chapter the author offers a summary of the intense and varied agenda of Latin-American educational policy during the period between 2000 and 2015.

In the fifth chapter, the director of MAPEAL project presents a description of the results of learning obtained by the seven countries in the international tests SERCE, TERCE, PISA and TIMMS, comparing, furthermore, this information to the results of national assessments of every country. Referring to PISA, it should be noted the opinion of Doctor Rivas about the tendency to talk about rankings of countries. According to the author, the ranking is inadequate due to the fact that the cutback of countries assessed by PISA is not representative of world diversity (page 17 – Executive summary). Additionally, he states that measuring education requires putting it in its context (see page 18 Executive summary), since the conditions and/or starting points are different in each region and, in particular, in each country.

In this sense, Doctor Martinez Rizo, ex general director of the National Institute for Assessment of Education of Mexico, congratulates on reading the book and writes

in the first lines “Finally, a work about the results of PISA tests which doesn’t remain in the ranking and in the complaints little supported! Far from this, the work takes the results of these and other assessments and tries to understand what they say about the educational systems [...]” (page 4).

The sixth chapter deals with the explication of the results. It is about a decisive stage of MAPEAL project, in which he tries to connect what addressed in the previous chapters, that is, Latin-American contexts, educational policies and learning results. It is important to point out that, due to the difficulty that implies this task of connecting, Doctor Rivas states that there are no linear explications, therefore the book suggests a series of explicative hypothesis that invite the reader to reflect. These hypotheses are:

1. The improvement in inclusion and educational quality was associated to the considerable improvements in living conditions of population in Latin America,
2. The devices which focus on learning and results had a major impact than the incremental policies signed under the importance of the “watering and praying”,
3. Text books and basic curricular addressing seem to have created a pliers effect with assessments that motivated improvements in learning,
4. The disadvantaged sectors went from the borders to the centre of the system and their rights were translated in outcome of access and learning,
5. The region improved more in primary than secondary, where the devices of educational policies regulate less the teaching,
6. Ensuring educational careers getting past the repetition seems being associated to improvements in quality and finishing of the studies,
7. The hypotheses of change through teaching and new technologies are too much to be taken into account as

explicative core ideas of the improvements in learning,

8. Chile shows that a progress, which is continuous and arranged in sequence, in different central themes of educational policies had the capability of generating improvements, even from an initial situation above the regional average,
9. Brazil shows that it is possible at the same time to improve educational coverage, flow and quality through policies of rights’ expansion, boosting the local initiative and control of results in a centralized way, and
10. Despite all the above mentioned, there were not many changes in pedagogical organization and the direction of educations in the countries, which reflects the slowness of the rhythm of improvement and opens challenges for the future (pages 25-34 – Executive summary).

The seventh and last chapter of the book is dedicated to future perspectives of education in Latin America. Based on a focus established on common general principles, which will require adaptations according to the contexts, four circles of improvement and educational change are proposed: Students, teaching, curricular contents and schools.

The first circle contemplates educational fairness for students through reforms in dimensions, such as: socio-educational conditions, social integration, early childhood, extension of school time, careers without repetitions, measuring of distributive fairness and connectivity. The second circle contemplates that teaching will transform progressively into a professional challenge, reforming dimensions such as: recruitment, career and salary, specializations, excellent training and teaching diagnosis. The third circle, contents, suggests changes such as curriculum redefinition, establishments of curricular and pedagogical bridges, etc. And, lastly, the fourth circle proposes to consider schools as part of a system which learns in a permanent form. In this sense, it is highlighted the importance of quality

evaluations as key means to know what happens in schools and propose improvements. The fourth circle suggests also reforms in directors as pedagogical experts and in the redefinition of secondary school.

The author realizes a final reflection summarizing the learned lessons: It is necessary to use devices to improve education, more financing and incremental policies are not enough (page 37 – Executive summary). Five dimensions which would involve huge transformations in educational policies in Latin America are proposed (see page 37 – Executive summary):

1. The capability of systemic institutionalization, which leverage the flows and powerful incentives to install practises in schools in a massive way.
2. The orientation towards results and specific effects in practises, which involves mechanisms of assessment and systemic gathering of the actors' visions.
3. Putting in the centre curricular contents, pedagogies and the meaning of education: the devices must have a clear convergence and renewing pedagogical vision.
4. Generating ethical adhesion from teachers (positive pressure), because economical incentives are not enough to obtain the necessary effect of pedagogical identification with changes.
5. Searching for social justice as an aim, through the redistribution in favour of the more disadvantaged ones and the recognition of cultural diversity.



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