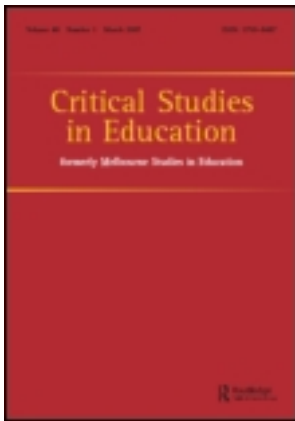


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Jason Beech^a & Ignacio Barrenechea^a

^a Escuela de Educación, Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos
Aires, Argentina

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Pro-market educational governance: is Argentina a black swan?

Jason Beech* and Ignacio Barrenechea

Escuela de Educación, Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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In this article we explore ways in which pro-market discourses have been interpreted in policy initiatives in Argentina since the 1970s. Our argument is that even though pro-market discourses have guided reforms in many aspects of public policies in Argentina, the arena of education has overall been resistant to taking them up. The first part of the article analyses the origins of a strong discursive and symbolic link between notions of ‘public education’ and ‘National State-centred education’ in Argentina and then examines the development of private education in that country. The second section analyses economic change in Argentina and describes the influence that pro-market ideologies had on policies of the military dictatorship of the 1970s. Third, we present reforms implemented during the 1990s, arguing that some principles associated with pro-market discourses were visible only at the level of official rhetoric. Fourth, we analyse briefly recent developments in the Kirchner administrations, which position themselves as being discursively ‘anti-neoliberal’. Lastly, we offer some reflections about the exception of Argentine education as regards pro-market forms of governance and the implications of this for thinking about the global diffusion of this ideology and its effects in practice.

Keywords: Argentina; comparative and international education; educational governance; educational policy; neoconservatism/neoliberalism

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore ways in which pro-market discourses have been interpreted in policy initiatives in Argentina since the 1970s. The argument is that even though pro-market discourses have guided reforms in many aspects of public policies in Argentina since the 1970s, the arena of education has been overall resistant to taking up this view, at least in terms of forms of educational governance. It will be argued that the high value that Argentine society places on ‘public education’ (defined as State-led schools) has acted as a fundamental factor in the resistance to and weakening of pro-market discourses in the education sphere in Argentina.

From the late-1950s, Milton Friedman (1955) started to advocate market reforms in the educational arena, arguing that if schools competed for students in a free market they would have the incentive to improve their quality and efficiency. From this perspective, the role of the state consists of ‘establishing the conditions by which the free play of the marketplace, the laws of supply and demand, and free trade based on competitive advantage

*Corresponding author. Email: jbeech@udesa.edu.ar

would inevitably rebound to the benefit of all' (Arnove, 1997, p. 79). This view gained increasing space in educational discourse at the international level, especially after educational reforms along these lines were implemented in Chile and, later, in the USA and in Britain under the governments of Reagan and Thatcher.

Thus, there is wide consensus in the literature that what are usually referred to as 'neoliberal models of governance' have been diffused globally, invading educational discussions and reforms in many countries of the world (Ball, 1998, 2007; Dale, 2005; Robertson, 2009). Nonetheless, there is no general consensus regarding descriptive aspects of the term 'neoliberalism'. While a vast sector of the bibliography in this article agrees that neoliberal policies usually promote deregulation, privatization and fiscal austerity, competition and market efficiency (Ball, 1998, 2007; Dale, 2005; Robertson, 2009), disagreement arises over the impact of such policies and the specific meanings that concepts are given in different places. In poor countries neoliberalism is usually linked to savage capitalism fostered by international lending donors such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In other wealthier nations, such as the USA and the UK, neoliberalism is promoted as a form of rational governance and self-governance (Ong, 2006).

In the education field, the general trend seems to negatively charge the term neoliberalism. Some authors consider that neoliberalism promotes segregation and perpetrates social inequalities (Puiggros, 2010; Zajda, 2006). Similarly, other authors have considered that rather than focusing on redistribution – as the welfare state did – neoliberalism responds to the demands of the globalized business world (Torres, 2002). Globalization has usually been associated as a catalyst for the diffusion of neoliberal ideologies. Many authors have implicitly correlated an increase in neoliberalism with the loss of national education systems' sovereignty in the hands of multilateral organisations, which have imposed their own agendas (Burch, 2009; Mein & Sandler, 2010; Tarabini, 2010). All in all, it is difficult to understand the real scope of the term neoliberalism. Moreover, it is even harder to escape the negative connotations it has gained over the years.

In this paper, in order to gain concreteness and precision, we have decided to use the term 'pro-market forms of governance' to refer to initiatives in which as many processes as possible are regulated through the market, that is, through monetarily coded competition. The realm of initiatives that have been implemented throughout the years, since the widespread growth of the market-based conceptions of education, has constantly grown. Within reforms that place the market at their centre, the most frequently mentioned in the literature are: voucher schemes, charter schools, decentralization policies, educational innovations introduced by companies and philanthropic groups and the involvement of for-profit companies in education policy and education research (Ball, 2007, 2009).

Even though a prevalence of pro-market discourses can be identified in global educational discourse, concepts such as 'privatization' and 'decentralization' can be interpreted differently in different contexts. Therefore, in order to understand the effects of these discourses in specific contexts it is fundamental to capture processes of recontextualization through which, in the course of institutional implementation, trans-nationally disseminated models are 'interwoven with previous layers of political behaviour, social meanings and culture-specific patterns . . . [that] change their significance and the way they function' (Schriewer, 2000, p. 28).

Furthermore, in order to understand global influences in education policy it is also important to consider that educational systems can be resistant to certain global influences, developing immunological systems that reject specific ideas when they clash with existing cultural and political traditions that are strongly rooted in local culture and not open to

change. This rejection is not always clear-cut and requires careful examination, since global principles can sometimes have an influence on official rhetoric, but are then rejected and/or attenuated by immunological systems that operate at lower levels of the policy cycle.

This article is divided into five sections. The first part analyses the origins of a strong discursive and symbolic link between notions of 'public education' and 'National State centred education' in Argentina and then examines the development of private education there. The second section starts with an analysis of changes in the economic field in Argentina and then describes the influence of pro-market ideologies on the policies of the military dictatorship of the 1970s. Reforms implemented in the 1990s are presented in the third section by arguing that some principles associated with pro-market discourses were visible at the level of official rhetoric but these did not affect the structure of governance of the educational system. The fourth section briefly analyses the latest developments in the Kirchner administrations in Argentina that position themselves discursively as 'anti-neoliberal'. The last part offers some reflections about the exception of Argentine education to pro-market forms of governance and implications for thinking about the global diffusion of this ideology and its effects in practice.

Historical background

From the point of its creation in the nineteenth century, the Argentine educational system was characterized by a strong centralist tradition. Most decisions were taken at the level of the National State, which defined the curriculum in every detail, regulated teacher education, established the text-books that could be used and appointed inspectors to ensure that centralized rules were implemented in practice (Gvirtz, 2005). The overall rationale was that all schools in the Argentine territory should function as if they were one school, teaching the same contents, at the same time, with the same methods and the same materials to every student in the country (Narodowski, 1999). The aim was to homogenise the population, promoting a national identity leading to certain cultural unity in a vast territory with intense regional and cultural disparities (Tedesco, 1986).

This state-centred educational system was extremely successful in attracting most of the school-aged population to primary schools and in promoting a national identity. In the City of Buenos Aires, for example, as early as in 1930, 95% of the population was literate, and 30% of the corresponding age group attended secondary school (Gvirtz, Beech, & Oría, 2008). Public education (defined as State education) was also very important in promoting social mobility and giving the middle classes access to political and economic power.

Thus, given the immense impact that the educational system had on Argentine social structures, in the construction of the modern Argentine nation and the State and, especially, on most of the population, the notion of 'public education' has had a very strong symbolic power that has persisted throughout the years. Manifestations from very different groups in society in 'defence of public education' were and still are very common. But the notion of 'public education' has been given a very specific meaning that has had a significant influence on modes of governance of the Argentine educational system until the present day.

Through a complex discursive regime and an accompanying matrix of practices, 'public' education was construed as being equal to 'state' education in Argentina. The discourse that prevailed conceptually incorporated 'the public' into a centralised notion of state-provided, funded and administered education and displaced 'popular' participation to the margins of the official system (Giovine, 2003; Pineau, 1997; Puiggrós, 1990, 1991;

Tedesco, 2003). The official voice eliminated the idea of a public separate from the State, or a site for civil society at the micro-level of community and school districts. This trend towards a complete centralisation of public action structured key organisational aspects of the Argentine education system and its structural forms of governance. In this way, the public sphere collapsed into the State and the concept of 'public education' was made equivalent to 'National State education'.

Even though more than 70% of Argentine students attend public schools, the private sector has become increasingly important since the 1940s. A period of sustained expansion of private enrolments started in 1942, reaching approximately 25% of the school population nationwide by the 2000s, with some significant peaks of more than 50% and up to 65% in urban districts with a high-middle class population, such as Vicente López and San Isidro. In Buenos Aires City, close to 50% of students attend private institutions.

The State subsidizes private schools in two ways. First, some schools receive direct subsidies from the State that permit, at least in theory, a reduction of fees paid by students. In some cases, like in many *escuelasparroquiales* (Church schools located in economically disadvantaged areas), fees are dropped to insignificant amounts or are even sometimes eliminated. The State's aid in the form of subsidies is substantial: for example, in 2001, 19% of the total economic resources that were destined for education in Buenos Aires City were directly transferred to the private sector without using any public mechanisms to decide which schools should benefit from the scheme (Gvirtz & Beech, 2007). Currently, the State subsidizes approximately 70% of privately managed schools (Wolff & de Moura Castro, 2002). Second, the State gives indirect subsidies, when it does not charge some taxes to private schools.

Until the mid-twentieth century there were a few private schools that were subject to very strong State control. Private schools were not allowed to award educational credentials and they were thoroughly inspected by State personnel. State inspectors could intervene in schools and even take the place of principals. The first important change in the governance of private education goes back to 1947, during the first presidency of Peron, when State subsidies to privately managed schools were legalised. Then, during the 1950s and 1960s, private institutions were allowed to issue official degrees and graduation exams that were solely compulsory for students attending private schools were abolished. Lastly, the National Service for Private Education was created (Morduchowicz, 1999, 2002), giving private institutions more autonomy than State run schools.

More than 50% of students in private schools attend Catholic institutions (Morduchowicz, 1999). Other schools were founded by communities of immigrants, such as the French, British, German, Italian, Basque and Japanese. Lastly, families and individuals have also built their own schools and have inscribed them as foundations or associations, because Argentine Law explicitly bans the existence of for-profit educational institutions. Nonetheless, many school 'owners' are also school principals or members of the board of governors. Since they are able to set salaries, as long as they comply with the minimum wages stipulated by the State, this allows for hidden forms of profit making by school 'owners'.

Therefore, private run schools are an important part of the Argentine educational system. But links between the global diffusion of pro-market modes of governance and the growth of the private sector are not easy to sustain. Enrolments in this type of school have grown steadily since the 1940s as a consequence of political changes that gave more status and autonomy to private schools (mainly as a result of pressures by the Catholic church) and a tendency of the upper-middle classes to opt out from the State-system. Furthermore, the existence of private provision of education that, in the case of subsidised schools, is

financed and regulated by the State can be seen as an indicator of the existence of processes of outsourcing of educational services to private providers before pro-market discourses took a global status, although these schools are not-for-profit institutions.

Pro-market imports into Argentina in the 1970s

Pro-market discourses in education have been in general ‘imported’ from the field of economics. Thus, it is important to consider changes that took place in the economic field in Argentina during the second half of the twentieth century in order to understand how dominant discourses in this field could have influenced educational debates and policy options.

During the 1950s and 1960s, as economics grew as a profession in Latin America, two opposing theoretical approaches dominated the field. Most local economists subscribed to a structuralist school of thought that promoted central planning, state intervention and controls over the economy. Backed by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, economists taking this position read the world system as being divided into an industrial centre and a primary-product export periphery (Biglaiser, 2002). Thus, the solution that was advocated was to have state-sponsored domestic manufacturing of industrialized goods through what is known as import substitution (Biglaiser, 2002).

On the other hand, the ‘neoliberal’ school advocated free trade and the use of market mechanisms to promote economic development. This view was strongly promoted in some countries of the region (notably Chile, Argentina and Colombia) by the Department of Economics of the University of Chicago. Under the leadership of Professor Arnold Harberger, the Chicago School had a very strong influence in the region, especially in Chile where the economic policies of Pinochet followed its proposals. Influence was exerted through what is known as ‘the Chile Project’. On the basis of an agreement between the Universidad Católica de Chile and the University of Chicago, many Chilean economists were trained in Chicago. These so called ‘Chicago Boys’ took control of the Economics Department of the Universidad Católica and, later, of the National Ministry of Economy (Biglaiser, 2002; Valdés, 2008). In this context, Pinochet’s educational policies introduced market mechanisms (school vouchers being the most salient one) into the educational field. Thus, Chile became a worldwide laboratory for pro-market models of educational governance.

In 1962, Harberger and his colleagues made an effort to extend the ‘Chile Project’ to Argentina. An agreement was signed between the Universidad de Cuyo in Argentina, the Universidad Católica de Chile, the University of Chicago and USAID to develop what was known as the ‘Cuyo Project’. Between 1962 and 1967, 24 Argentine students were trained in Chicago. The economics curriculum was changed in Cuyo and Chilean and American professors taught the main courses. However, from the point of view of Chicago economists the program was not as successful as in Chile. Among the reasons for this failure were the relative unimportance of the Universidad de Cuyo at the national level and the ideological survival of structuralist views among Argentine economists.

Nevertheless, the influence of the ‘Chicago Boys’ in Argentina did reach national economic policy in 1976 when Martínez de Hoz, a Chicago trained economist, was named as Minister of Economy by the military regime. He implemented a series of pro-market reforms that are described by some Argentine academics as a prelude to what is known as the ‘Washington Consensus’ (Canitrot, 1994; Frenkel, 1982; Rapoport, 2000). As will later be discussed, in the 1970s a persistent increase in poverty rates and in the gap between

the income of rich and poor started in Argentina (Gasparini & Cruces, 2008). This trend continued well into the beginning of the 2000s.

However, pro-market reforms were not implemented in education. There was a move towards some sort of ‘decentralization’ as financial responsibilities for all primary schools were transferred from the National State to the provinces (Hanson, 1998). What motivated the dumping of financial responsibility onto the provinces was the crippling economic situation the country was facing (the dictatorial regime rocketed external debt and wasted most economic reserves). But the changes that were introduced did not represent an empowerment of local communities: school autonomy was not fostered and decision-making was still made at the level of the National State, itself controlled by the authoritarian military regime.

Pro-market discourses and reform during the 1990s in Argentina

By the 1990s, countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand were fully implementing pro-market reforms. This was also a time in which globalization became a dominant theme in the social sciences and in political discussions (Giddens, 2000). A technological revolution and the shrinking of space and time allowed for more contact between academics, political leaders and technocrats defining and implementing education policy in different countries. This facilitated and accelerated the possibilities of transferring policy ‘solutions’ from one context to another, especially when there was a generalised feeling that as a result of the processes of economic and cultural globalisation most countries in the world shared a set of similar challenges.

In this context, international agencies became a significant source of authority (and financial resources in the case of the WB), defining, promoting and legitimising an education policy agenda. Agencies such as UNESCO and the WB had a very strong influence on reforms that were implemented in most of the countries of Latin America in the 1990s and that followed very similar principles: decentralization, school autonomy, curricula based on the notion of competencies, the professionalization of teachers and central evaluation systems (Beech, 2006, 2011).

However, apart from inevitable processes of recontextualization of foreign influences, in Argentina, as in other Latin American contexts, it is very important to take into account the possible gap that could exist between official rhetoric, legislation and the actual practices that shape educational governance. As Larrain (2007) explains:

The big gap that sometimes exists in Latin America between a clearly established legal system and its practical enforcement is also related to a cultural feature that derives from colonial times and which is well captured by the saying ‘*se acatapero no se cumple*’ (it is obeyed but not implemented). This is a kind of double standard, whereby the practical unwillingness to comply with a norm does not question its validity or legitimacy, but, on the contrary, proclaims respect for it. Principles are transgressed, but in such a way that they are simultaneously recognized, thus keeping the appearance of respect for authority that is so important in Latin America. (p. 50)

Under the strong influence of international organizations such as the IMF and the WB, a new phase of pro-market reforms in Argentina started with the government of President Menem in the 1990s. In 1989 Argentina was going through a severe economic and social crisis. With a monthly inflation rate of over 200% (Cisneros, 1998) and salaries depreciating by the hour, rioters took to the streets and the situation became unsustainable for the government (Palermo & Novaro, 1996). By July 1989 President Alfonsín had resigned.

Menem, who had been democratically elected but was supposed to take office only in December, assumed the presidency six months in advance.

The new government blamed the ‘interventionist state’ and Argentina’s closed economy for the crisis. Consequently, the opposite route – a smaller state and an open economy – was presented as the only possible option for overcoming the crisis. The ‘modernisation’ of the state was launched through a series of pro-market reforms, following the recipes of international organisations (Repetto, 2001). The new vision of the state was expressed in President Menem’s (2000) inaugural speech:

We are going to refund the state putting it at the service of the people, and not at the service of bureaucracies . . . I come here to announce that we will adopt a resolute policy of administrative decentralisation. Everything that can be done by individuals themselves will no longer be done by the National State.

This vision was put into practice through a number of privatisations (roads, trains, airports, communications, post, oil, gas, electricity and water companies, amongst others) and through a great number of reforms: constitutional reform, reform of the state, liberalisation of international trade, flexibilization of labour laws, tax reform, economic reform and educational reform (Palermo & Novaro, 1996; Repetto, 2001).

In such a context, educational reform implemented in Argentina in the 1990s took the ‘crisis’ of the educational system as a starting point and proposed a complete reformulation of the system through an all-embracing reform. The ‘refoundation’ of the Argentine educational system was launched through the *Ley Federal de Educación* that was passed in 1993 (Beech, 2006, 2011).

These reforms have received much criticism from left wing academics and, especially, from teacher unions for being ‘neo-liberal’ (Puiggrós, 1996, 1999, 2000). However, criticisms are based on an overall ideological stance against the government of Menem (that did implement general pro-market policies), rather than on a detailed and specific analysis of reforms in educational governance and their practical effects.

On the contrary, we suggest that ‘pro-market’ models of governance in Argentina were barely discussed as options and were not implemented. For example, notions of school vouchers, Public-Private partnerships or the commercialization of public education through the involvement of for-profit private companies (Ball, 2007; Robertson, 2009) were not considered to be relevant policy options in Argentina. Some think-tanks such as Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericana (FIEL) (1993, 1998), among others (Narodowski, 1999), promoted some versions of these options, but they did not gain much space in public discussions and, in general, they were not implemented in official reforms (with the exception of an experimental local version of charter schools that has been implemented in the Province of San Luis). Furthermore, Argentine legislation explicitly prohibits for-profit educational institutions. The remaining part of this section offers some examples of how certain changes in governance that at a very superficial discursive level could be seen as pro-market, were attenuated or even rejected in practice.

One of the aspects of reform during the 1990s that could be associated with pro-market forms of governance was the emphasis placed on the notion of decentralization. This principle had much visibility in the official rhetoric of reform and responsibility for all secondary schools and non-university higher education was transferred to the provinces (Rhoten, 2000). However, the notion of decentralization can be subject to very different interpretations. In the case of Argentina, the locus of power shifted from the national state to provincial states, but provinces tended to replicate the traditional centralised, vertical and

hierarchical form of educational governance, without much devolution of power to municipalities or schools. Furthermore, the ‘provincialization of education’ expanded educational state bureaucracy, since each of the 24 provinces had to create new posts to perform some of the functions that had previously been in the hands of the national state (Llach, 1999).

Another central proposal within 1990s educational reform was the strengthening of educational institutions by providing a certain degree of autonomy for schools, so that some decisions could be made at the institutional level. In return, schools were required to present to authorities their own ‘Institutional Project’. However, Institutional Projects became another bureaucratic document that the central administration required from schools. Far from fostering the participation of teachers and teamwork, Projects were in most cases written by principals with the sole objective of presenting documents to their superiors (Gvirtz & Beech, 2007).

Furthermore, state-schools are subject to so many laws and regulations that principals are constantly making decisions that are on the margins of regulations in order to be able to run schools, acting within the ‘gaps and interstices’ in the norms (Frigerio, 1991, pp, 26–27; Petrucci, 2004). School principals cannot hire or fire teachers who are appointed by provincial states and imposed on schools. They do not manage a budget and do not have much formal power. For example, in the City of Buenos Aires, State-centred regulations establish the exact lunch menu that has to be offered to students and the specific bureaucratic procedures that have to be followed if a change is to be made. In September 2002 the Legislature of the City of Buenos Aires sanctioned a *law* authorising a school to use the equivalent of US\$ 1230 that had been given to them as a ‘transport subsidy’ to ‘reconstruct toilets’. The request had been made in May of the same year. In 2003 a joint Resolution of the Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat of Finance accepted the donation of a plaque that had been given to a school by its community in celebration of its 75th anniversary. The Resolution notes that the Historical Institute of the City of Buenos Aires had no objection to the text inscribed on the plaque and that consequently the school was authorised to display the gift that had been given to them in 1999 (Petrucci, 2004). School principals cannot even decide to hang a plaque on a school’s walls – this is a decision that has to be made by the Secretary of Education herself together with the Secretary of Finance, in consultation with the Historical Institute.

These examples illustrate the rigid, bureaucratic, centralised and hierarchical structure of governance of the educational system that persists in Argentina. Reforms during the 1990s have not given autonomy to schools. On the contrary, most decisions related to the provision of educational services have been moved from the national to the provincial level, but they are still being taken by the State.

In addition, the logic of the finance system has not changed: schools do not receive or manage any funds directly and teacher salaries and most other expenditures are paid directly by the State. As has been shown above, school principals have to go through very complicated bureaucratic procedures if they want to change the established use of the few funds they receive. The prohibition of for-profit educational institutions has been kept and the logic of the teacher’s statute that regulates the teaching profession has not been changed: there are no mechanisms of control over teachers, who are not subject to any kind of evaluation and notions such as performance-based pay have not even been seriously discussed as an option.

Another initiative that was central to the policy agenda of the 1990s was the creation of a National System of Evaluation (SINEC) within the structure of the National Ministry of Education. Evaluation schemes are usually regarded as fundamental components of pro-market forms of governance. The *raison d’être* of these systems is to measure the

performance of students in order to develop systems of accountability. Unlike what is currently happening in other countries such as the USA or Chile, SINEC tests are not really high-stakes tests. During the first years of implementation some rankings were published, but this was highly criticized by teacher unions (CTERA & IIPMV, 2000). Nonetheless, positions in the rankings did not have any consequences and after a few years rankings were no longer made nor published. Some prizes were given to those schools that scored the highest. This was highly criticized because SINEC only evaluated a sample of schools and consequently institutions with the highest scores were not necessarily the best performing schools in the country (Gvirtz, 2002). After that, for many years, the results of evaluations were published by 'region'. Each region (Northeast, Northwest and so on) included several provinces. Since the educational system is managed by provincial states, no person or institution is accountable for regional results. Consequently, the ways in which the results of SINEC evaluations were analysed and presented did not offer elements for performance-based accountability in the educational system. Not even schools that participate in the evaluations can have access to their own results in order to use them as a basis for improvement projects. Thus, even though an evaluation system was created, most of the characteristics of this type of system that could be associated with pro-market forms of governance have been rejected or diluted in practice.

Many aspects of the Argentine educational system were changed with global reforms of the 1990s that were strongly influenced by international agencies' universal model of education (Beech, 2011). Yet, the overall structure of governance of the educational system has not been affected in practice. The Argentine educational system is still very centralised (now at the provincial level), bureaucratic and hierarchical. There are a number of principles visible such as decentralization, school autonomy, the professionalization of teachers and a central evaluation system that in global discourses and in many educational systems are strongly associated with pro-market forms of governance. But in the case of Argentina these principles, which have influenced legislation and official rhetoric, have been interpreted within the existing logic of the system and have been resisted or attenuated in practice. In this way, decentralization has become a highly centralised provincialization, school autonomy has only been declared but not really promoted nor attained and the evaluation system is quite marginal to the educational system, since its results are not given any significant use.

Of course the introduction of these concepts and practices even in their weak form could be seen as an opening up of opportunities for pro-market modes of governance to be deployed in the future. But, for the moment, the notion that the reform of the Argentine educational system was 'neo-liberal' is difficult to sustain, especially if it is compared to radically market-oriented initiatives in places like Chile, the UK, the USA, China and elsewhere.

The educational system has been an exception to the pro-market logic that dominated the overall economic and social policies of the 1990s in Argentina. One of the possible explanations for such an exception can be found in the high symbolic value that Argentine society gives to the notion of 'public education' understood as State-run education. In that sense, the success of the educational system up until the mid-twentieth century has probably played an important role in making the system impermeable to structural change in its form of governance. This symbolic aspect should be combined with other more concrete issues. For example, it was clear, throughout different speeches of Menem that the pro-market reform bloc was headed by the President himself (Schugurensky, 1997). Nonetheless, policy formulation does not imply the end of the policy cycle. The policy needs to be implemented and in order for that to happen it needs to be bought-into by key

implementers. It might also be the case that within governing calculations, the reform of the educational system was not a priority for the Menem administration and, consequently, they were not willing to confront teacher unions and public opinion in order to deploy highly unpopular reforms in the educational sector, as they did in the economic sphere and in labour regulations. Nevertheless all of these links with the impermeability of Argentine education to pro-market forms of governance need to be further explored.

What is clear is that even without pro-market modes of governance, Argentine education has suffered many of the ills that are associated with pro-market political strategies, such as segregation according to social class and an achievement gap between the more privileged sectors of the Argentine society and the low income sectors (Narodowski & Nores, 2002).

The Argentine educational system has endured a progressive *de facto* school segregation based on social class, generating implicit subsystems of education (Narodowski & Nores, 2002; Neufeld & Thisted, 1999; Veleda, 2008). This segmentation by social class happens even within the State sector (and obviously within the private sector, where fees determine directly who can access which school). In this way, some schools have been labelled as ‘stigmatized schools’; they are discredited and associated with a low quality education. Thus, these institutions are avoided by those who have more resources and possibilities to choose a school for their children – mainly the middle and higher classes (Neufeld & Thisted, 1999). Resources are unequally distributed between schools that cater for the underprivileged and middle-class schools that tend to have better buildings, computers, laboratories and other resources. School performance is also strongly correlated with socio-economic status. In this context, it is not surprising that Argentina is one of the countries with the highest dispersion in results in international assessment tools such as PISA and TIMSS. The uneven inter-schools spread of results show that Argentine students are exposed to very different learning environments. Thus, the Argentine educational system is characterized by increasing segregation based on social class and marked inequalities.

Economic indicators for Argentina have followed similar trends between the 1970s and 2000s. External debt grew tremendously during that period. In 1973 the debt was 4.89 million dollars, Menem started his presidency in 1991 with 62,200 million dollars and by the end of 1999 the debt had risen to 146,219 million dollars. Poverty indices also increased. In 1980 the index of poverty in Argentina was almost 10% and the level of extreme poverty or indigence was close to 2% (Gasparini, Marchioni, & Sosa Escudero, 2000). Since then, these indices have consistently increased, reaching their peak in 2002 when 56% of the population was below the poverty line.

As Gasparini and Cruces (2008) describe:

To some extent, the dramatic increase in income inequality experienced by Argentina between the mid 1970s and the mid 2000s is easy to understand. The country experienced in three decades most of the phenomena that are linked to increases in inequality in economic theory: serious macroeconomic crises; hyperinflation; high unemployment; repressive dictatorships; processes of deep trade liberalization; episodes of sudden and rapid capital accumulation, technology upgrading and modernization; weak labour institutions; and unequalizing demographic changes. (p. 4)

This situation suggest that even though forms of governance in education did not follow pro-market ideologies, the educational system has been affected by the overall neoliberal stance to social and economic policy and a degradation of the social structure in Argentina that has gained momentum since the 1970s and culminated in the most severe social, political and economic crisis ever in 2001.

Reactions against the market ideology

In 2003 Menem won a first round of elections with only 24% of votes. That meant he had to compete in a second ballot with Nestor Kirchner who had been voted second. However, aware that he was viewed very negatively by most of the population and that he had no chance of winning, Menem withdrew from *ballotage* and Kirchner was automatically made President.

The Kirchner administration has defined itself discursively against Menem, ‘the 1990s’ and ‘neoliberalism’. Some of the privatizations of the 1990s have been reversed with the nationalization of Aerolíneas Argentinas, postal services, retirement and pension funds and the water company. Kirchner has also made a strong move to minimize Argentina’s link to international credit organizations such as the IMF.

A new National Law of Education was passed in 2006, replacing the Ley Federal de Educación of 1993. In line with the overall discursive political positioning of the government, this new Law and other educational initiatives were rendered as ‘antineoliberal’ and as a return to the values of ‘public education’ as a fundamental principle. Some changes were very tangible, like a sustained increase in teacher’s salaries and in investment in education and in science, the recreation of technical education (that had been almost eliminated during the Menem administration) and a recent project to provide three million secondary students with a netbook each. Other changes were more symbolic, like the reform of the structure of the system, abandoning the 6-3-3 model adopted by the Ley Federal de Educación and returning to a more traditional division between primary and secondary education. However, these reforms have not dealt with the structure of governance of the system that has overall remained untouched. This is another indicator that the reforms of the 1990s did not really define a pro-market model of governance for the educational system.

At times in which pro-market reforms in educational governance have gained momentum and have entered a third phase in which the participation of for-profit corporations in the global market of education is promoted in global policy spaces and is being deployed in many educational systems, Argentina seems to be moving in the opposite direction, consolidating its impermeability to pro-market forms of governance in education.

The recently sanctioned Law of National Education establishes that ‘the National State will not sign bilateral or multilateral free trade agreements that imply conceiving education as a lucrative service or promote any form of commodification of public education’ (Art. 10) (Argentina, 1993).

All political signals seem to indicate that pro-market reforms have no space under the current administration. Yet, as has been mentioned, official rhetoric and legislation should not be taken for granted as descriptors of practices. Philanthropy groups and for-profit companies, through their Departments of Social Responsibility are increasing their participation in charitable projects, which are often linked to State-provided education services for underprivileged students, generating a form of public-private partnership (Gvirtz & Oria, 2010).

Philanthropy has been steadily gaining momentum in the financing of education systems, both in the developing and the developed world. Nonetheless, at this stage, its contribution to changes in governance that are promoted by pro-market reformists should not be overestimated (Ball, 2010). Philanthropic actions are being carried out by individuals, by the private sector or companies (Burch, 2009). A new term, *philanthrocapitalism* refers to expectations funders have with regards to returns on their donations. Philanthropists, either individuals or corporations, rely on evaluation systems, based on the advice of the for-profit private sector, in order to receive information about their donations (Ball, 2010). In addition, ‘for-profit companies such as Intel and Microsoft engage in charitable activities in the

developing world, express commitments to equalising global disparities and see providing their products as part of this endeavour' (Ball & Youdell, 2008, p. 66).

Argentina is not a total stranger to the increasing participation of for-profit companies and philanthropic groups in education reforms. *Conectar Igualdad* is a new programme aimed at providing all secondary school students with a netbook and schools with connectivity. It is implemented through an articulation between different sectors of the Federal State. Nonetheless, for-profit companies, such as Intel, are working closely with the government and assisting in different aspects, such as logistical know-how and teacher training programs. The assistance that for-profit companies could offer, might, at least extraofficially, end up affecting policy setting and priorities. After all, the more dependent States become on companies, the more influential the latter will become in education policy (Ball & Youdell, 2008). Still, these are the first shy steps towards public-(for-profit)private associations in Argentina.

The participation of for-profit firms in issues related to education has raised some international awareness. In fact, Argentina has signed the GATS agreements and in addition, it allows for-profit firms to make donations at the higher education level. Ball and Youdell (2008) have described 'a plurilateral request on higher education has been tabled at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) by New Zealand supported by 5 other countries, targeting Argentina and 13 other countries for access to the delivery of private higher education services' (p. 70). The GATS is mainly about non-discrimination and free trade. That is to say, countries should treat foreigners in the same way they treat their own nationals (Scherrer, 2005). Even when there are certain areas that countries can reserve for their own national suppliers, this is so when the provision of the service is carried out only by the State.

Therefore, philanthropy, participation of for-profit companies in educational initiatives and the request against Argentina in the WTO are some signs that indicate that the resistance of Argentina to pro-market forms of governance could be weakening, but for the moment (2010) these signals are weak and dispersed while the symbolic power of the notion of 'public education' as 'state run education' is still strong and widespread.

Some concluding remarks

As a conclusion we would like to offer a methodological and a political reflection based on the analysis of the case of Argentina that has been offered. Overall, the literature about global influences and 'neoliberalism' or 'pro-market' ideologies has been very prolific with studies that analyse in detail how these discourses are diffused and how they are adopted and adapted in different parts of the world. In other words, education experts have accumulated 'white swans' like the Chilean experimental version and other similar initiatives implemented in countries such as the USA, England, Australia and New Zealand, Sweden, Colombia, India and Bangladesh. The emphasis on this type of cases contributes to a reading of the world in which the global status of pro-market forms of governance is taken for granted as a pervasive and all-encompassing trend. Following Popper's claims about the importance of looking for evidence that falsifies our theories, we suggest that in studies of globalization of education we need to analyse more cases of resistance to global trends in order to refine our theories about global influences, by developing a better understanding of the cultural, political and educational immunological systems that reject and attenuate global influences in certain circumstances.

Finally, in political terms, the Argentine case highlights problems created by the binary opposition between keeping the state-centred bureaucratic and hierarchical model

of educational governance or implementing pro-market reforms. Under this binary opposition, the Argentine system has been almost paralysed and the structure of governance has been virtually untouched, resisting global influences that were seen as having potentially negative effects on the educational system, but at the same time keeping a form of governance that is clearly obsolete and generates, through more subtle mechanisms, similar social problems to the ones criticised in pro-market options. In that sense, in terms of educational governance, Argentina is an exception to neoliberalism (Ong, 2006) that has not created the possibility for the flourishing of a more socially inclusive system. On the contrary the opposition to pro-market ideologies has paralysed the Argentine educational system in a conservative position.

As it has been shown, there are some signs that Argentine impermeability could be weakening. Will the Argentine system be able to further resist? Does it make sense to 'resist' global changes when the current form of governance of the educational system is crumbling? Maybe the solution to the problem is to think outside of this artificial binary opposition and to construct an alternative view from other points of departure.

Notes on contributors

Jason Beech has a PhD from the Institute of Education, University of London. He is Director of the School of Education at the Universidad de San Andrés in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he also teaches Comparative Education. He is a Researcher of the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina (CONICET). He is co-editor of the Journal *Revista de Política Educativa*. His main interests are the transfer of specialised knowledge about education in the global educational field and conditions of reception in different local contexts. He recently published the books *Going to school in Latin America* (with Silvina Gvirtz, Westport, CT, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008) and *Global panaceas, local realities: International agencies and the future of education* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2011).

Ignacio Barrenechea has a MA in International education from the George Washington University. He is a PhD Candidate at the Universidad de San Andrés in Buenos Aires. He is a consultant for the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires in issues related to education policy and comparative education.

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