

# Other Voices in Education

Global Situation Report

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## Pandemic, Vaccination and return to face-to-face classes in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Caracas, Venezuela

# Pandemic, Vaccination and return to face-to-face classes in Latin America and the Caribbean

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## The current situation

In 2011, the landing of the fourth industrial revolution was announced in Hanover Germany, it demanded a reengineering of the system on a global scale. This made a direct impact on school systems foreseeable, with new tasks and educational performance defined by the capitalist world-system; Those who most quickly reacted to this trend were the large technology corporations.

In the middle of the World Education Forum (WEF), held in 2015 in Incheon, South Korea and organized by UNESCO, the CEOs of the technological world announced a turn to virtuality in the short term, as an expression of the fourth industrial revolution in classrooms. Most governments left it in the hands of the IT and algorithm transnationals, opening the way to a new model of educational privatization. But it was needed an event on a planetary scale to impose this turn in an accelerated manner.

During the first quarter of 2020, the entire world was shaken by the spread of COVID-19, a pandemic for which there was no identified cure or elaborated vaccine. The progression of the pandemic forced the closure at different scales of airports, ports, commercial and productive activity and of course impacted the school systems of the world.

Throughout the world, the pandemic exposed the enormous existing inequalities, to which were added the differences in access to computers and the Internet. Not only did many schools in low- and middle-income countries not have access to the internet or a computer per student, but millions of communities and teachers lacked the means to effectively continue the pedagogical link in this new dynamic. Those governments that neglected their responsibility to guarantee the minimum conditions to develop the teaching-learning processes under quarantine conditions (computers, internet, digital educational content, creative distance pedagogies), transferred to families and teachers the obligation to buy equipment, access internet plans and pay for proprietary virtual platforms. The world witnessed a new form of global privatization and stratification between those who could access this model and for those ones who found it inaccessible.

Teachers had not been trained to work in virtual environments and with digital contents. Universities and teacher training centers lacked the experience and support capacity for virtual large-scale processes and extended in time.

The vast majority of Ministries of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean lacked their own virtual platforms, repositories of digital educational content, and educational cloud architecture.

The year 2020 was one of contingent pedagogical experiments, with enormous creative commitment from teachers. However, the hegemony of private platforms was evident and they are not neutral, on the contrary, they contain a reproductive, banking epistemology of a new type, which expresses new forms of curtailment of critical thought. Multiple voices warned about it but there is lingueeprecariousness in the approach to

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alternative proposals in virtual environments and digital content. Most of the teachers had to adapt to the formats and performances of existing technological developments.

This does not hide the problems that in the short and medium term the rearticulation of this whole range of experiences will generate, in a context of growing tensions for school systems. Obviously, the economic variable and the huge profits obtained by corporations in the digital world make it foreseeable that the educational model tested in the pandemic intends to continue in one way or another in the post-pandemic.

**“The huge profits obtained by corporations in the digital world make it foreseeable that the educational model tested during pandemic intends to continue in one way or another in the post-pandemic ”**

During the health crisis caused by COVID-19, governments presented proposals for temporary intervention that were effective to varying degrees. In the end, given the lack of updated and realistic official statistics on current enrollment, the empirical evidence seems to show that we are on the verge of a serious educational problem in terms of prosecution and inclusion. The negative impact appears to be strongest in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Getting out of the current educational situation will require a collective effort from all sectors of society in the post-pandemic.

Attempts to return to the classroom have been marked by what are called hybrid or bimodal teaching models, which show a significant change in the existing school culture until February 2020. In a global society in economic crisis, in which the technological sector proved to be the best adapted and the one who obtained huge profits, it is foreseeable that tensions will continue to produce a twist on the teaching-learning perspective of the technological world. Cognitive capitalism or capitalism of platforms became a concrete reality in education, on which urge a discussion, reflection and creative and contextual construction of resistances. The outbreaks of the pandemic have raised fears about the risks of returning to the classroom. Many school systems that had opened school doors were forced to revert to preventative quarantine models. In the midst of this confusion, we find many teaching unions, parent and student societies proposing the return to educational virtuality as a just preventive measure against new strains of COVID-19, a demand that is not always accompanied by demands for universal access to computers and Internet. Virtuality without these democratic demands for transition widens invisibly the circle of exclusion.

## **Latin American and Caribbean countries which suspended face-to-face classes due to the pandemic**

Starting March 2020, we all participated in an unprecedented event in our lives. When we in Other Voices in Education (OVE) warned, since 2015, that world society was

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going to a Global Pedagogical Blackout (GPB) marked by the abrupt transition to virtuality, even to the younger generations it seemed an unlikely scenario in the short and medium term. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the suspension of face-to-face classes in almost the entire continent and the world and allowed the introduction of the paradigm of educational virtuality on a planetary scale. One hundred and sixty-nine (169) Million Students were affected by total closures in 30 Countries of the Region.

Suddenly, millions of children and young people were summoned to unknown teaching-learning models. Virtuality, autofill primers, bimodal education, or other testings created epistemic chaos in schools around the world. This contained cognitive dimensions, but also economic and social dimensions. It was not only about learning, but about paying for the tools and means required to carry out this new teaching-learning model. The teachers' unions and associations responded faster using 2020 passed between fears of contagion and hopes of obtaining an effective vaccine, between

attempts to maintain the pedagogical link and new forms of exclusion, privatization and school stratification. After months of trial and error, problems continued to guarantee a quality, critical, creative, emancipatory and liberating education in a pedagogical context as particular as that of the pandemic. In November 2020, 10 countries in the region had one hundred fourteen million (114,000,000) students affected by school closings and the inability to access face-to-face classes. A lower figure than the one registered in March of that year, which still did not imply a reduction of fifty percent.

Educational Closings by 06/04/2021



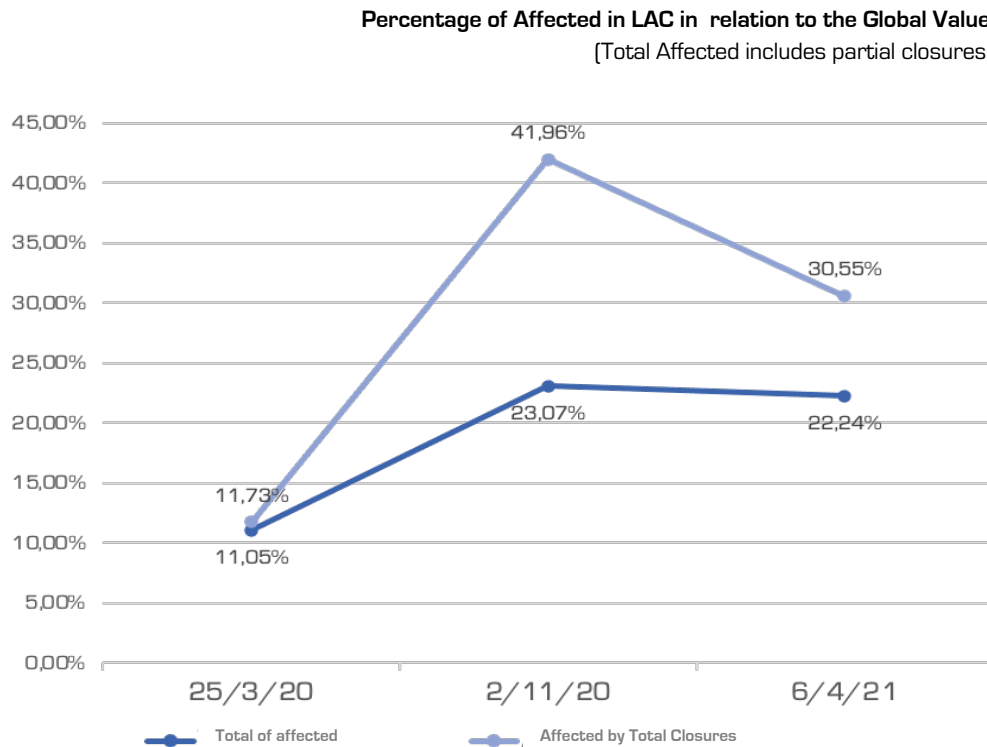
Educational Closings by 25/03/2021



April 6, 2021, the number of students outside classrooms had decreased in LAC, however, the figure was still alarming. Fifty-four million students (54,000,000) from 10 countries were not attending schools and secondary schools in the region.

If we analyze the impact of school closings; this has varied at different times this year, and we can see the drama of the numbers.

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Source: UNESCO

LAC has been the most affected region throughout the pandemic; with just 7.8% of the Global population, students affected by the total educational closures represent 30% of the world student population. A figure that in November 2020 was above 40%.

The explosion of a new wave of pandemic forced the closure of schools in Argentina by April 15, something that had happened weeks ago in Uruguay and Chile.

Contrary to this, the pressure from businessmen to reopen classes did not cease. On April 13, 2021, the President of the Republic of Panama issued an Executive Decree by which he ordered the semi-face-to-face opening of schools that met a set of requirements. Something similar had happened in Venezuela where a month ago the possible return to face-to-face classrooms with a biosafety protocol was announced, but the rebound in the pandemic forced the measure to be reversed.

The emergence of much more aggressive COVID-19 strains generated in April 2021 a new tension regarding the return to virtual classes at home, semi-presence or openness. Everything seems to indicate that the trend is towards a new temporary closure of schools in many countries, even in those ones where teachers have been partially vaccinated. The vaccination of teachers will surely generate a new tension, to the extent that students and staff that contribute to

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the educational process have not been vaccinated.

## Priority for Teacher Vaccination in Latin America and the Caribbean



## Some educational situations generated by the suspension of face-to-face classes

- ⇒ Imposition of fear to sociability between students, teachers and families, the meeting, the hug without being able to develop an adequate emotional mediation about it. Even worse, the comings and goings between classrooms opening in person and after closing, all this aggravated the fear of meeting;
- ⇒ A cultural attack on sovereignty of the peoples, occurred because it was imposed the educational model of large technology corporations ;
- ⇒ The neoliberal paradigm of educating society landed and got possession. The most governments in the region transferred families, students and teachers the responsibility to guarantee the minimum conditions for the development of processes school teaching-learning (computers, devices, internet, data plans, digital educational repositories);
- ⇒ For those students who were not able to access virtual mode teaching imposed a car perception of exclusion. This self perception of impossibility to continue learning in virtual environments it will surely negatively impact

- school performance, pursuit education, tuition and the encouragement to see education as a tool to get out of poverty;
- ⇒ The idea that is possible to build school systems improved with the incorporation of the virtual education to classrooms. Although the vast majority of students, families and teachers reject the model of only virtual education, most agree that in the immediate future the virtual platforms and the digital content will be a permanent component of pedagogical work school;
- ⇒ In some countries such as Colombia, began a legislation on the modality of supported homeschooling in virtual platforms, digital content and face-to-face accompaniment in the place of residence;
- ⇒ Large corporations built a niche market school which they did not have before the pandemic, made up with the segment of students, teachers and families who assumed the experience of virtuality was successful. Therefore, agreements of these corporations with ministries of education, governments and



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private education sectors multiplied successfully. Now they have a more solid material and cultural base to start fighting educational hegemony on a planetary scale;

- ⇒ Virtual education showed its ability to generate new forms of educational privatization;
- ⇒ It was installed on a global scale, the distinction between innovative teachers and traditional ones, digital native and immigrants, as these are linked and they appropriate the technological,

virtual and digital tools for using in school systems. This new reality will be added to the pre-existing pressures to break with teaching stability, precarious work of the teachers and use part of the teacher payroll budget for the realization of agreements with the technological transnationals. Furthermore, this odious distinction between innovative and traditional teachers, natives and digital immigrants, threat with breaking the unity of the magisterium.

## Internet connection in the region and its impact on exclusion

Schooling in the period 2020-2021 has been marked by little regularity in the face-to-face meeting in the classrooms, hybrid or totally virtual models. A clear indicator of the scope and effectiveness of these initiatives and effectiveness is given by the connection and penetration of the internet in the different territories. Let's see how the internet connection is in the region.

Percentage of Internet connection in Latin America and the Caribbean  
(By country)



Source: ITU

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## Internet connection in Latin America and the Caribbean Impact on the education sector



Source: ITU, World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF

As it is shown, at least 35.7% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean do not have an internet connection. A significant data indicates that at least 43.4% of students up to secondary level in the region do not have internet

**“at least 43.4% of students up to secondary level in the region do not have internet coverage”.**

coverage. That is, both teachers and students had difficulties or could not access to the virtual education model. This reality makes universal connection and free access to the internet a democratic demand of first order. The educational Contextualization can not be based on differentiation

departures regarding the minimum conditions for teaching learning processes. Just as in the recent past there was a fight for desks and classrooms with common conditions for all, school libraries with equal access and school spaces that did not deepen the differences of social origin, class, gender, race or ethnicity, today a school world divided between those who have access to the internet and those who do not, this would only deepen inequalities and exclusions. The fulfillment of the right to education in each country has a clear indicator in the universal and free access to the internet.

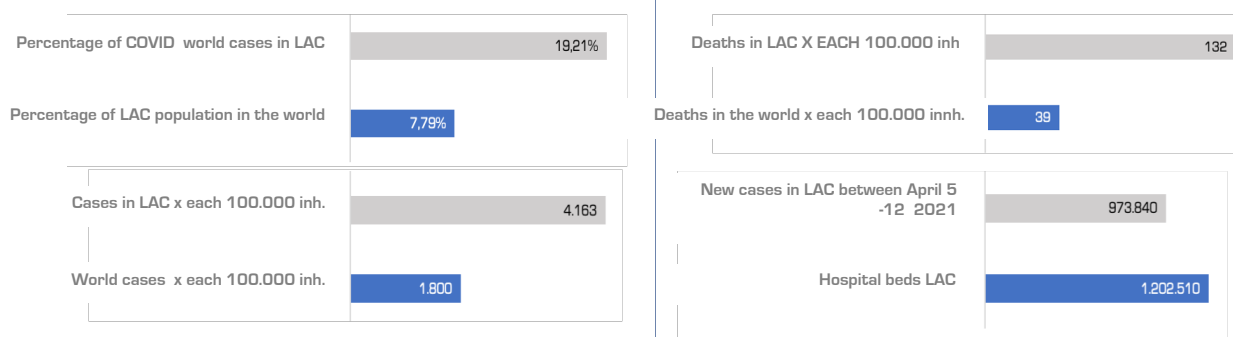
## Situation of the pandemic

Currently, the pandemic has affected almost every territory on the planet. To the extent that a region expresses higher levels of inequality and inequity, COVID-19 expresses itself with greater force. Latin America and the Caribbean have a population

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of almost 660 million, of which, according to ECLAC figures, poverty today reaches 209 million (33.7%), of which more than 80 million human beings live in extreme poverty. For this reason, LAC has been the region most heavily affected throughout the pandemic worldwide; Being just 7.8% of the Global population, students affected by the total educational closures represent 30% of the world and even they got worse reaching more than 40% in November 2020. The region has a death rate of more than three times higher than the global number, as their cases expand at a dizzying rate, with a slow process of access to vaccines, while their health systems collapse.

## LAC, the most affected region on the planet by the Pandemic



Source: WHO. Data 04/12/2021

## Projections of the vaccination of teachers in Latin America and the Caribbean

The return to full face-to-face classes is conditioned by the vaccination of teachers and students. In Puerto Rico, it was offered to vaccinate 100% of teachers and staff that contribute to the educational event, of which 85% voluntarily attended; Vaccination began, first for students over age 16 and now those over 12 years of age are being vaccinated, as well as university students. Despite this, given the outbreak of the pandemic, classrooms only opened for two weeks in March 2021 and should have been closed until May 13, when 27 of the 800 existing schools were reopened. This happens just two weeks after the end of the school term.

In Panama, progress is being made with 27,604 vaccinated teachers out of a total of 43,000, an activity that was carried out starting with the oldest and those at risk; student vaccination has not started. In Panama, face-to-face classes are still suspended, although a focused return is announced in some educational centers.

Uruguay, a country that had registered low levels of contagion in 2020, shows a very important explosion of infections and deaths per capita in 2021, which led to temporarily suspend presentiality. In Uruguay vaccination is optional, not mandatory. Of the 79,000 (2020) / 73,000 (March, 2021) teachers (basic, intermediate and non-university tertiary), 71% have been vaccinated to date while 29% chose not to. Uruguay is the country with the highest levels of contagion expansion in the world; in a

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country of 3,700,000 people, the level of daily infections reaches 3,500-3,800 and the number of deaths is 65. An important and curious fact is that the teaching unions of that country have not demanded vaccination of teachers or compliance with the biosafety protocols (which are stated) for the return to face-to-face classes. Another important fact is that while teachers of Uruguay are returning to the classrooms, the University of the Republic where the children of the ruling elite are trained has preventively established the indefinite virtuality, which shows the class accent in the approach to the pandemic.

Costa Rica is one of the countries that returned the earliest to face-to-face encounters. However, the explosion of infections in recent months has generated demands from the teachers for the return of virtuality as a preventive measure to stop the spread of COVID-19. The cases of teachers who die from being infected multiply. On May 11, 2021, the Costa Rican Human Rights Association and the National Association of Educators and Educators (ANDE) released a public letter to President Carlos Alvarado, in which they demand the return to virtuality; It is striking that this statement does not pose democratic demands for transition such as universal access to the internet and the provision of devices so that everyone can access this modality. In the absence of official data, at the end of this report, ANDE reported that it is conducting a national investigation to determine the number of infected, deaths and vaccinated belonging to the teaching profession of that country.

Brazil, a country where denial of the effect of the pandemic has determined public policies, there are no official data on the number of vaccinated teachers. The percentage of vaccinated in Brazil is 17% (first dose) and 9% (with second dose). The National Association of Higher Education (ANDES) reports that Brazil has 390,000 university teachers and the number of vaccinated in the sector should be slightly higher than the national average, because many teachers belong to prioritized sectors (over 60 years and health professionals).

Chile has about 250,000 teachers, of whom 9 out of 10 have been vaccinated. With the outbreak of the pandemic in 2021, face-to-face classes were suspended, including the elections for the Constitutional Convention. There is currently a slow return to the classroom, with approximately 20% of schools open, mostly from the private sector.

Colombia has about 330,000 teachers in official preschool, primary, elementary, and middle school institutions. FECODE estimates that about 55,000 of that number have been vaccinated, mainly those over 60 years of age. According to data from the teacher's benefit fund, in the last year about, a thousand teachers have died from COVID-19, but also from diseases such as cancer, aneurysms and other heart-related ailments. In the third of May, the mayor of the city of Bogotá intensified the pressure to return to presence with the so-called "gradual, progressive and safe return", a model by which students do not

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all go to educational institutions; while some are in the classroom, others follow classes virtually. The synchronous or simultaneous face-to-face-virtual activity is determined by the connection capacity of schools and students.



Argentina has a federal education management system. This implies differentiated and not always complementary approaches between the central government, the province and the city of Buenos Aires, as well as with respect to other regions. There are currently 1,057,136 teachers of which 35.5% belong to the province of Buenos Aires. At the end of April 2021, Minister Trotta reported that the number of vaccinated teachers reached 502,000, specifying that

in the province of Santa Fe 81.1% of the teaching and auxiliary personnel have been vaccinated, while in the province of Buenos Aires at 52% and in the city of Buenos Aires only at 14.1%. The Ministry of Education, in many cases with justified resistance from the teachers' unions, implements an alternate and partial presentiality, which consists in one group of students goes a few days and another group the rest of school activity. The reappearance of the pandemic has accentuated the differentiated approach in the territories, with respect to the return or not to the presentiality, as the epidemiological traffic light behaves. At the end of April, 18 districts of the country were in alternate face-to-face classes and the province of Buenos Aires had classes in 96 of its districts; However, the data varies from week to week, according to the behavior of infections, which until May 15, 2021 reached 27,000 daily. In the city of Buenos Aires, politically governed by the "macrism" and opposed to the central government of Peronist orientation, attendance in initial and primary education is considered mandatory. The government of the city of Buenos Aires is imposing a compulsory return to teachers over 60 who have a single dose of the vaccine and is studying missing students whose families decide not to send them to classes for fear of contagion.

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The wave of infections of April 2021 forced in many cases to extend or close schools again and now begins to raise the need for vaccination of 100% of teachers and students for a reliable return to face-to-face classes. Let's see what the current vaccination projections are.

Until April 12 of this year, only 56 million doses had been provided to the LAC population. As we can see, the vaccination process is going much slower than expected.

There are no statistics or official projections on the vaccination of students, despite the fact that the new strains are especially aggressive with age groups below the average number of infected. Some laboratories are beginning to receive certifications regarding the use of their vaccine among adolescents, boys and girls, but the projections of its application in these age groups are not encouraging in the short term. Meanwhile, the maintenance of the pedagogical link seems to be oriented towards the permanence of virtual and hybrid models

## Back -to- school problems amid low levels of vaccination and the pandemic all around the world

- ⇒ The most schools do not have the conditions of infrastructure, equipment and funding to comply with protocols of biosecurity that demands the presence in schools. This educational modality requires a vaccination of 100% of students, teachers and staff that contribute to the educational process.
- ⇒ There is no collective school culture of prevention. Those who have worked in classrooms with boys and girls know that the body contact, the mischief play is part of healthy behavior of students, for which there is no guarantee that they comply with it unless for the development of an authoritarian school model. Something like that occurs with adolescents for whom showing the face and the gaze constitutes an identity trait and for whom to force them to wearing a mask all the time can generate rebellious behavior and resistance to the contrary of biosafety protocols.
- ⇒ This model requires dividing the group of students in two, three or more groups depending on the enrollment handled by teachers. It implies attend in a differentiated way, in person and virtually, to students which means to double the teacher work. Not spoken to hire more teachers or raise salaries of educators. In the latter case it would be a problem of work overload, difficult compliance for those with an hourly workload complete and could not double the day.
- ⇒ It is practically non-existent the technological infrastructure in schools and secondary schools to be able to provide simultaneously face-to-face classes to a group while others follow them virtually. Also, there are no guarantees that students to whom corresponding virtual modality have computers and internet connection. On the other hand, the lack of curricular flexibility and obsession with a part of the bureaucracy to comply with the program for the year, hinder a pace of adequate learning in the modalities hybrid or bimodal.
- ⇒ Teachers working conditions are changing dramatically in the last year, which requires a review of the collective bargaining and salary agreements to effectively accompany the increasing effort of teachers. However, there is a risk that the bimodal and / or by groups formats affect important educational achievements such as the working day with a maximum of 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week.
- ⇒ It has not been worked on didactic proposals, evaluative planning and pedagogical management adjusted to this type of teaching-learning mode and so we are dealing now with an improper transfer of face-to-face dynamics or virtual educational practices that combine both processes.
- ⇒ The social security mechanisms of the teaching

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workers must be improved, especially with regard to hospital medical care in case of contagion and prevention or biosecurity, assuming the nation states the costs of these treatments.	equipment and free internet for those who demand
⇒ The bimodal or hybrid model is promoted in back-to-work contexts of many families, which complicates the care situation at home of students whose group is not assigned to attend school. This can generate serious problems in the guarantee of essential rights for the youngest.	⇒ It is necessary to implement censuses immediate to determine actual capacity of teachers to advance these models. The data that this query shows must serve as a basis for the implementation of endowment programs for those who require it
⇒ These models demand financial support from the State to families in matters of endowment of	⇒ As we have seen, this modality requires a set of procedures and measures that demand a significant investment from Nation states to guarantee a proper implementation, otherwise, exclusion and school dropout will be exponentially multiplied .

## Main situations students will encounter when returning to hybrid, bimodal or partial presentiality.

- Recognizing themselves with their peers, something especially complex in adolescence. This acquires special relevance when students meet again who could or could not maintain the pedagogical link during the year 2020 and the beginning of 2021.
- Being able to resume daily routine and performance of the face-to-face classroom after a year of educational singularity at home.
- The uneven development of digital tools and the differentiated possession of equipment for virtual connections, which tends to break with the equalizing role of the classroom.
- The non-uniform learning of technological dynamics in a school that is going to be stressed to incorporate these processes in the daily life of education.
- A relationship with the teacher, influenced by the pedagogical relationship that was maintained during the quarantine.
- A discourse of innovation and educational change that haunts the school from its edges.
- The pression of the installation of a discourse based on cognitive capitalism stating that most professions are obsolet . When students face the difficulty of identifying where to study these new training offers, this may lead to the conclusion that it is not worth the effort to continue studying in such complex situations..
- For those who could not sustain the pedagogical bond during the pandemic, the encounter with those who did can be traumatic, as they perceive themselves as excluded or lagging behind in learning. This can lead them to reject the return to the classroom. For this reason, contingent care programs

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for these sectors of the population must be established.

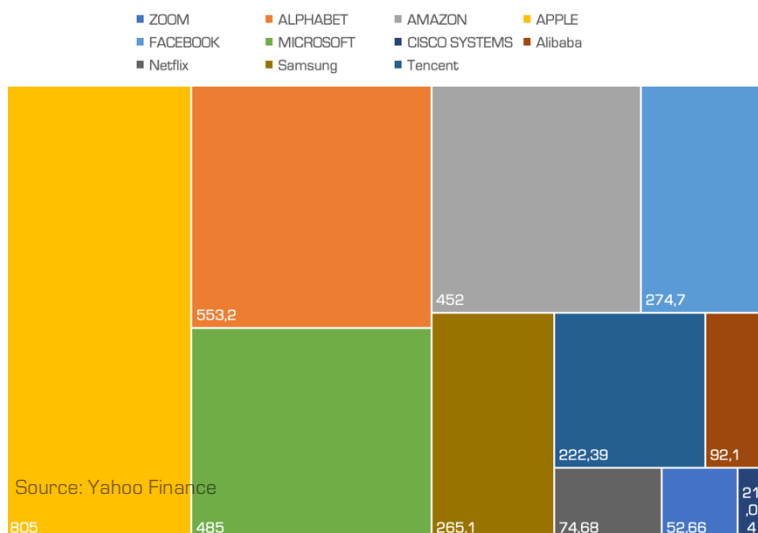
## Main problems that teachers will encounter when returning to presentiality

- Devalued salary during the pandemic, in the face of renewed demands for expenses associated with new teaching-learning modalities
- School systems that will try to continue with the tendency to unload on teachers, students and families the responsibility of adapting schools to the demands of cognitive capitalism in the 21st century
- The tension between the pedagogical tradition and the ephemeral call for educational innovation. We point out ephemeral because many times not even the educational authorities are clear about the change in progress
- Extended working hours that exceed eight hours a day
- Lack of places to go to update pedagogical practice. Most teacher training centers have a discourse about it, but they show difficulty regarding how to teach in a practical way, according to this new discourse. If this problem is not solved quickly, it can enhance conservative and immobilizing imaginaries about pedagogical practice.

## Impact on the economy and / or capitalism of the platforms

It is said that there is a global economic crisis as a result of the pandemic. It is noted that most companies have seen their profits plummet or are in the red. However, that was not the case for the large technology corporations who made a fortune with the pandemic and the move to virtuality of education systems.

Market Capitalization of Technology Companies



The market capitalization of eleven technology companies reached a value of 3.2 Trillion dollars during the pandemic - and continues to rise - in contrast to the drop in Global GDP of 4.5 Trillion dollars. The striking of this is that incredibly a good part of these companies are directly linked to educational environments, and virtuality. One of the most emblematic cases was the ZOOM



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company that provides videoconferencing services, which went from being another company to a global player.

## Final words

The educational reality of 2020 and so far in 2021 showed that students, teachers and families continue to bet on face-to-face education. This situation must be used to open the way to a critical, emancipatory educational model of social justice. The vindication of the face-to-face school and the human encounter to learn together cannot be confused with the acceptance of the reproductive school. The new face-to-face school must break with the educational model at the service of capital, generating a dialectical encounter between pedagogical knowledge, tradition and epochal innovation. Only in this way it will be able to keep away the offensive of the technological corporations on schools, which intends to impose the progressive hegemony of the virtual in the teaching-learning processes.

All face-to-face public education be able to resist in this new offensive of transnational technological capital will depend on the correlations of force that are built. In this sense, the teachers' unions and guilds have proven to be the most dynamic sector of resistance to the new privatization offensive. All efforts and agreements they could achieve and articulate with other unions and society will be decisive for the future of public, face-to-face, free and popular education in coming years.

Resisting does not mean denying or looking the other way regarding the acceleration of innovation and its impact on education. It is about constructing autonomous, emancipatory pedagogical proposals from educational centers in these new contexts.

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