
GLOBAL MICRO-LENDING IN EDUCATION REFORM: Enseñá por Argentina and the neoliberalization of the grassroots^(*)

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The phenomenon of travelling education reforms is by no means new. In fact, mass schooling itself can be understood as a modern political reform that travelled from central Europe to the rest of the world since the late 18th century (Tröhler 2011). Education policies around the globe have always taken inspiration from what was transpiring in other places, and discourses that came to constitute the pedagogical common sense would not have been possible in a vacuum. The very mobility of geographical borders makes unclear the boundaries between what is considered local and what is not.

This article delves into one such travelling reform. By examining the workings and underlying assumptions behind Enseñá por Argentina [Teach For Argentina], one specific program that takes part in the larger and expanding network of Teach For All, I examine the ways in which a global push for redefining teaching and teacher education encounters local characteristics and histories, thus producing something different. My focus on the Argentine program will serve two interrelated purposes. First, it helps us to better understand the production of a particular kind of neoliberal subject, the social entrepreneur who functions as the engine for change. Second, the study engages in questions about the transferability of models in socially, politically, and pedagogically diverse contexts, through what I call policy micro-lending, of teacher education and of particular artifacts within it to organizations that channel discourses about change coming from the grassroots.

A combination of discourse analysis and ethnographic methodologies is used to address the main questions of this research: How does this model of teacher education bred in the U.S. in the early 1990s become a *reasonable* option in current-day Argentina? What does this mean for the production of subjects involved in a “global” reform movement that is yet inextricably tied to the locality of its production?

^(*) I would like to thank my Research Assistant, Erica Colmenares, for her invaluable help in transcribing and coding the interviews, as well as in serving as a sounding board for the ideas presented in this article.

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BACKGROUND

Teach For All is a global network “of independent social enterprises that are working to expand educational opportunity in their nations by enlisting their most promising future leaders in the effort. [It] aspire[s] to the vision that one day, all children will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education” (Teach For All 2012). Founded in 2007 at the Clinton Global Initiative,¹ Teach For All seeks to support local social entrepreneurs as they bring the model pioneered by Teach For America in the U.S. and Teach First in the U.K. to each country. By October 2012, Teach For All included programs in 25 countries in five continents, each year incorporating more programs to the network.² “Teach For All is working to maximize [the programs’] scale, impact, and strength through capturing and spreading best practices and fostering connections among the organizations’ teachers and alumni so that they can learn from each other across borders” (Kopp and Farr 2011, 214).

Steven Camicia and Barry Franklin (2011) suggest that the emergence of Teach For All is a good illustration of the interplay between democratic and neoliberal cosmopolitan discourses in current education reforms. The network strives to include all of humanity into a vision of quality education, and targets underserved populations around the globe by channeling human and financial resources (along with universalist understandings of quality and the good life) while simultaneously being guided by ideological underpinnings that prioritize free-market mechanisms as the most efficient, if not the most desirable way, of attaining those goals. The tensions produced by this mix of democratic and neoliberal discourses, enhanced and reshaped by the translation of this particular model of teacher education into a very different setting, are present in Enseñá por Argentina.

Enseñá por Argentina started training its first cohort of teachers before the end of 2010 in Buenos Aires, following programs in Chile (2008) and Peru (2009). As part of their mission statement, Enseñá por Argentina’s website³ explains: “We want to build a movement made up by young professional leaders committed to educational quality in our country. For that purpose, we select, train, and accompany them so that they teach for two years in schools with poor educational

¹ The Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) (<http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/>) is a non-partisan organization that serves mainly as a networking space for world leaders to bring ideas into concrete action and promote change. The CGI conducts annual meetings simultaneous to the UN annual assembly. The CGI is a part of the Clinton Foundation, established by former U.S. President Bill Clinton (for a critical analysis of the CGI, see Ball 2012, Chapter 4).

² The countries included in the network are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Colombia, Estonia, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Spain, United Kingdom and United States.

³ <www.ensenaporargentina.org>.

performance. We want to contribute to the reduction of educational inequality and to form a network with this educational mission within their future professions and areas of influence.”⁴

Enseñá por Argentina combines the features common to all Teach For All programs with some specific qualities that make it somewhat different. Among the former, the teacher education model stands out. One of the keys of this model, following the lead of Teach For America, lies in what takes place before the training actually begins, specifically in the selection procedures of the corps members.⁵ This focus on the selection process aims at overcoming one of the main difficulties that these programs conceive in terms of the teaching force: the fact that the teaching profession tends to appeal to low academic performers (Ganimian 2011). Consequently, Enseñá por Argentina seeks to select top university graduates (following a rubric developed by the program) from a variety of fields, for the most part – yet not exclusively – without any previous pedagogical course work.⁶ Corps members are young and, through an online application, a series of essays, interviews and meetings demonstrate an affinity towards the goals of the organization. Another commonality across all programs in the Teach For All network is the establishment of a teacher education pathway that is distinct from traditional ways and/or settings in which it has been taking place. The preparation of teachers within the network usually consists of a five-week intensive seminar during summer,⁷ after which corps members are sent to “vulnerable” schools as teachers of record, earning the salary equivalent to their “traditionally-educated” peers with the same experience and coursework. During the two years that individuals are committed to the program, they continue to receive graduate education from a partnering university; upon finalizing their two-year commitment, the university grants them teacher certification if they did not have one before.⁸ Thus, Enseñá por Argentina is not the organization formally granting certification.

In general, each local “Teach For...” program is funded by public-private partnerships. While this does not apply to every program in the network – as a matter of fact, Enseñá por Argentina seems to be funded exclusively by the private sector, with 52% of the funding coming from local companies and foundations, 42% from international sources, and 6% from individual

⁴ All translations are mine.

⁵ I will use the phrase “corps members” throughout the article, although within Enseñá por Argentina they are referred to as “Pexas”, a pseudo-acronym signifying “professionals of Enseñá por Argentina”.

⁶ These criteria apply at least to the cohort observed for this study, which started in the program at the end of 2011.

⁷ Argentina is one of the few locations in which corps members do not live together under the same roof during the Summer Institute.

⁸ Since the program is extremely young, at the time of writing this piece, the first cohort had yet to finish its two years in the classroom. Therefore, it is impossible to know how many corps members decided to stay within the teaching profession.

donors,⁹ – most programs have some kind of support through grants from the governments of countries in which they are working. Teach For All provides opportunities for the local programs to contact multinational corporations in search of funding. DHL, Microsoft and IBM, for instance, sponsor many such programs (corporate sponsors for the Argentine program include DHL, Dow Argentina, JP Morgan and DirecTV).

However, the extent of the network's contributions to each program is not merely financial contacts. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Teach For All model lies in its professional development network. Support for local programs is provided online via a *synergies* system, which allows participants to share experiences, advice, and resources, as well as offline through exclusive conferences (open only for members of the network, as well as other invited guests) and site visits. In this way, the network shares pedagogical models, best practices, and common understandings about the values of education and the preferred methods for assessing the programs' success.

CONTEXT OF ARGENTINA'S SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

In order to understand how the local context interacts with global reforms, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of some of the characteristics of Argentina's secondary education system (7th-12th grades).¹⁰ According to the latest available data (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología 2010) roughly two thirds of secondary schools in the country are public, while the other third is private, with 72.2% of the students attending public schools. In the Province of Buenos Aires, where most of Enseñá por Argentina's corps members are deployed, 58% of high schools are public. Within the private sector, 21% are religious schools, 60% of which receive full subsidies from the state for serving low-income populations (Mezzadra and Rivas 2010). This latter category is where most corps members are currently deployed.

The last available census (2001)¹¹ indicates that the national school enrollment rate for grades 7-9 is 78.4%, and for grade 10-12 it is 53.6%, pointing to an enormous drop-out issue. In the Province of Buenos Aires, the school enrollment rate for grades 7-9 is 86.5% and for grades 10-12 it is 60.6%.

⁹ This general breakdown can be found at <http://www.helpargentina.org/en/ensenaxargentina>, although no further detail is provided. Although the form is signed by the CEO and dated April, 2012, when presented with this draft, the program contested these numbers by stating that the funding situation had changed and that it did not only come from the private sector. However, they declined to provide more information on this matter.

¹⁰ Enseñá por Argentina only sends corps members to secondary schools.

¹¹ <www.indec.gov.ar>.

As for Argentina's teaching force, the last census (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología 2004) indicates the following in regards to the percentages of certified teachers in teaching positions:

Traditionally, there have been two main paths to becoming a teacher in Argentina. Most secondary school teachers attend teacher education institutes that are not related to a university, usually known as *profesorados*. While the structure and content of these institutes have changed over time – making it extremely difficult to know exactly how many years teachers spent attending them – the course of studies in these centers tends to be shorter than the other main pathway, which is through a university. Universities offer their graduates the possibility of attaining teaching certification by taking some pedagogical courses at the end of their course of studies. This extension usually takes a year to complete. Thus, an individual with a *licenciatura* (bachelor's degree) in biology might take extra courses for a year in order to obtain a teaching certificate in biology. According to a 2004 teacher census, no more than 13% of teachers attained their certificates exclusively through this path, which tends to take at least 5 years to complete (Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología 2004).

One final piece of information in regards to the profession that is relevant to this research is how teachers are usually hired in Argentina. In order to get a full-time teaching position within a public school, teachers have to participate in a public examination [*concurso*] in which they are assigned points for seniority, as well as for the amount and quality of education and professional development received. As vacancies appear, teachers seeking a teaching position sign up for the examination. The one with the highest score gets the job. When teachers are hired through this process, school principals have no say in the matter. This, of course, makes it difficult for young, inexperienced teachers to get a job within the public system.¹² Private schools, on the other hand, have full autonomy to hire whomever they want, regardless of seniority or certifications.

Educational quality is quite a sensitive topic. On the one hand, there is a National Assessment Program [ONE, Operativo Nacional de Evaluación] which has assessed students with more or less regularity since 1993, with the last assessment having taken place in 2010¹³. The public results¹⁴ are separated by districts and categorize student performance as high, medium or

¹² It is difficult, yet not impossible. It is easier to find work in the poorest districts; however, a majority of teachers would rather not work in those areas. Also, when a position is not filled, the teacher's statute allows for an exception to the examination by granting principals the power to hire in order to fill the position. This tends to happen for last-minute substitute jobs, which makes it hard for teachers to plan their lives around it.

¹³ To see the results, go to www.one.educ.ar

¹⁴ Some results are made public, while others require a password which I did not have.

low in mathematics, language (Spanish), science and social studies. The results for the end of mandatory schooling (i.e., 12th grade) indicate that the percentages of low performers are 30% in math, 26.3% in language, 30.1% in social studies, and 34.3% in science. For this census, the public results do not discriminate between public and private schools. However, the 2005 assessment program did, and it indicated enormous inequality between these two types of schools.

Argentina has also participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009, ranking quite low, with Panama and Peru being the only other Latin American participating countries with lower performances. Both sets of results, the national and the international, have been controversial. While the current administration and its allies have praised the advancement showcased by comparing the newest results to previous years in the national assessment,¹⁵ critics have pointed to the persistent inequalities in the system.¹⁶

FRAMEWORK

The analysis presented in this article focuses on the tensions that emerge when the meaning of notions such as “reform”, “teacher”, “teaching”, “learning”, and “grassroots”, among others, are taken as if they were universal and easily transferable. Yet when they are juxtaposed with the ways in which those same notions have been socially and politically constructed in different settings in different time periods, they produce unexpected results and resistances. In that sense, this piece could be seen as part of a broader set of scholarship within the field of comparative education that studies what has been termed *policy borrowing and lending*:

From Ulaanbaatar to Berlin, from Anchorage to Cape Town, the similarities have grown to the extent that policy makers unscrupulously refer to these reforms as ‘best practices’, or ‘international standards’, in education, *as if* there existed a clearly defined set of standards, policies and practices that are universally shared. Nevertheless, *imagined globalization* in education has affected agenda-setting as significantly as the *real* pressure to harmonize or align the education systems with systems in the same region, or in the same ‘educational space.’ (Steiner-Khamsi 2011, 4).

¹⁵ <<http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-183224-2011-12-13.html>>.

¹⁶ <http://www.perfil.com/ediciones/2011/11/edicion_626/contenidos/noticia_0067.html>.

TABLE 1
PERFORMANCE IN THE 2005 NATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM EXPRESSED
IN PERCENTAGE POINTS. SOURCE

Private	23.8	40.2	35.9
Language			
	Low	Medium	High
Total	51.8	35.8	12.5
Public	60.1	31.6	8.3
Private	35.6	43.8	20.6
Science			
	Low	Medium	High
Total	47.0	38.5	14.5
Public	50.2	37.4	12.4
Private	40.6	40.9	18.5
Social Studies			
	Low	Medium	High
Total	36.9	42.4	20.7
Public	42.8	41.0	16.2
Private	25.5	45.1	29.5

Fonte: <http://diniece.me.gov.ar/images/stories/diniece/evaluacion_educativa/nacionales/resultados/ONE05.zip>.

The framework provided by policy borrowing and lending disrupts the idea that reforms travel only or mainly for technical-rational reasons, with countries learning about what works and what does not from others and then merely importing the best practices to the local settings. Instead, this lens centers its attention on the political and economic reasoning underlying not only the fact that policies travel, but also the mechanisms and networks through which they do (Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow 2011; Phillips and Ochs 2003, 2004; Ball 2012). This is why “the terrain under scrutiny should be the local policy context. It is this context that provides the clues for understanding why a borrowed reform resonates, what policy issue it pretends to resolve, and which policy actors it managed to mobilise in support of reform” (Steiner-Khamsi 2011, 5).

Many studies within the framework of policy borrowing and lending tend to look at policies being pushed by multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, in order to spread a particular vision of the world (e.g., see Jones 2004; Morrow and Torres 2000). Because of the enormous financial weight that these organizations have in developing countries, the reforms being pushed often become conditions for aid, and the linkages between policy and economy become evident. However, as will be seen in the analysis section of this article, the influences of this particular worldview, which many scholars have termed neoliberal, do not always travel in this manner.

This neoliberal worldview includes sets of principles that organize and provide meanings to contemporary life, by “economizing” the social sphere and creating new opportunities for profit (Ball 2012). It is important to note that “neoliberalism is not one discourse exerted through fixed strategies and hierarchical applications of power that move uncontested; rather it is an overlay of multiple discourses or a hybridity that embodies a complex scaffolding of techniques and knowledge” (Popkewitz 2000, 27). While the body of literature about neoliberalism is vast and encompasses a multiplicity of disciplines and foci, my work draws mainly from the scholarship that employs neoliberalism as a lens to understand the production of particular kinds of subjects (e.g., see Foucault 2008; Peters 2009) as willing, self-governing, entrepreneurial selves. That is, I focus on “what Ong calls neo-liberalism with a small ‘n’ – which is reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality” (Ball 2012, 3).

The dissemination of the neoliberal worldview is carried out through a number of mechanisms and strategies. One such medium is what Stephen Ball terms Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs), which are “‘communicative structures’ organised around the ‘shared values’ of their members” (Ball 2012, 13). Teach For All could be seen as such a TAN. Research on Teach For All, the organization founded in 2007, is scarce and vague, as indicated in the review by Andrew McConney et al. (2012), which concluded: “Despite the remarkable success and spread of the approach, important questions nevertheless remain about [Teach For All]’s longer-term impact for students, schools and unquestionably for teachers and the teaching profession” (p. 48). McConney and colleagues’ review presents a problem that is telling of the approach of the literature, in that it uses the acronym “TFA” sometimes for Teach For All, and sometimes for Teach For America. Much of the available literature analyzes Teach For America and mentions Teach For All simply as an offshoot, implying that the findings about the first one are transferable to the second one (Ball 2010; Zeichner 2010; Winstanley 2012). My research points to the need to understand the particularities of each program in conjunction with the broader framework of the Teach For All network in order to more adequately grasp the localized production of the new teacher.

Understanding how the TANs connect the different nodes that compose them, I would argue that a useful tool is the concept of micro-lending. The discourses of micro-lending point to the attempt to change the logic of a system seen as failing – teacher education and schooling writ large

– through a relationship of limited trust with local, small-scale social entrepreneurs.¹⁷ In the same ways as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as Kiva,¹⁸ seek support for small business in poor countries or regions as a way to boost economies from the ground up without actually questioning the capitalist system that creates those inequalities in the first place, the ways in which Teach For All lends the model born from Teach For America to local social entrepreneurs – and with it, several artifacts such as the rubrics for recruitment and assessment, and the pedagogical framework of Teaching as Leadership – relies on the good will of those involved to change what is seen as a problem without an examination of the underlying causes of the issue. What is more, the ways in which the problem is framed leads “logically” to the proposed solution, a point I will come back to later on. In this process, Teach For All becomes an “international policy broker”, providing “conduits for the movement of generic policy ideas, and for the insinuation of particular forms of knowledge and for establishing relationships inside the state for representatives of business” (Ball 2010, 132).

METHODOLOGY

The study of Enseñá por Argentina is grounded upon two stages of fieldwork. During the first stage of fieldwork in January/February 2012, I observed the Summer Institute taking place in Buenos Aires and interviewed all of the participating staff using a semi-structured format.¹⁹ Besides observing the classes that corps members took during the Institute, I also engaged in daily informal conversations with all corps members, the staff and two volunteers.²⁰

¹⁷ According to Rankin and Shakya (2008), “[t]he basic tenets of neoliberalism are embedded within the idea of microfinance: setting markets free, putting people to work, deregulating institutions, achieving efficiency, and celebrating the self-reliance and resilience of the family unit” (p.50). Furthermore, the authors maintain that the fact that grassroots NGOs draw actors both from the core and the periphery, and are funded by multilateral donors, “further de-centers accepted geographical accounts of neoliberalism being exported to the rest of the world from the ‘heartlands’ of North America and Western Europe. Local circuits of ‘grassroots neoliberalism’ have thus been connected in wider circuits of information sharing, knowledge production, and policy formation” (p.61).

¹⁸ Kiva is a non-profit NGO that seeks to alleviate poverty by connecting micro-lenders to small businesses and entrepreneurs in poor settings. For more information, see www.kiva.org.

¹⁹ The interviews included six individuals: the CEO, the person in charge of school placements, the two people in charge of organizing and leading most of the Summer Institute (along with teacher supervision), the recruiter, and an individual sent by Teach For All to help with general organization. For the interview protocol, see online appendix.

²⁰ Because of its consequences in terms of the analysis, there is a turning point in my research that needs to be made explicit. After my first visit to the Summer Institute, I sent one of the founders of the program a draft of a paper I was about to present at the Comparative and International Education Society annual meeting in March 2012. Upon reading what I intended as a description of my observations and my time with the program, the leadership team of Enseñá por Argentina decided to not allow me any more contact between myself and the staff as well as to prohibit me from using in publications any of the interviews with staff that I had conducted up to that point. The interviews I had with the corps members were not included in this restriction.

For the second stage of fieldwork, I contacted the whole cohort of corps members whom I had observed in January (seventeen individuals), telling them about the decision of the organization to discontinue the program's participation in my research project (see footnote 21) and asking for volunteers to grant me interviews about their experiences. Nine people expressed interest, and I interviewed them in June 2012. By that point, eight of them were in the middle of their first year as teachers,²¹ and the other one had just quit the program after not being assigned any teaching hours.²² Each semi-structured interview lasted about an hour. During the interviews, I asked corps members about their previous education, their experiences in the field prior to joining the program, their motivation for wanting to teach, their experiences at the different stages of Enseñá por Argentina, their new roles as teachers, their sense of readiness to take on the role of a classroom teacher and their future plans, among other emerging themes.²³ The nine interviewed individuals presented a variety of perspectives about the program: two of them were very enthusiastic about their experiences so far, two had mixed feelings and the rest were quite critical of the program. The interviewees had diverse backgrounds in terms of their education and socio-economic status. Because of my limited contact with the remaining corps members who declined to be interviewed, I cannot say how representative the sample was. At the time of the Summer Institute, when I had informal conversations with all corps members, most of them seemed enthusiastic about the program, including the ones that became more critical later on.

After transcribing the interviews, my research assistant and I coded them using emerging categories of analysis (e.g., conception of teacher, conception of teaching, notion of change, role of the self) that would contribute to an understanding of the ways in which this type of reform travels and the ways in which it generates particular problems, questions and subjectivities. The analysis of the interviews was then cross-referenced with my field notes and a discursive analysis of other texts that present Enseñá por Argentina's and Teach For All's perspectives, such as policy documents, websites and pieces featured in mainstream media.

While the idea of categories emerging from the data would seem to invoke Glaser and Strauss' (1967) classic Grounded Theory approach (see also Bryant and Charmaz 2010), the epistemic assumptions underlying the analysis differ, in that the data are not seen as telling anything by itself, with a neutral researcher merely pulling categories that are just there to be harvested.

²¹ The academic year in Argentina goes from March to December.

²² Most public and private secondary school teachers are hired by the hour; thus most teachers are known to be "taxi" teachers, that is, having to commute between schools in order to achieve a full-time salary. In this particular case, Enseñá por Argentina had not found any hours for this corps member to teach.

²³ See interview protocol in the online appendix

Instead, data, subject and categories of analysis are all understood as constituted and constitutive of discursive practices that have embedded in them power relations outside of which the researcher cannot set him/herself. In this sense, as the researcher I am also part of the system of thought that, through *discursive practices*, disseminates a set of principles that include certain objects and excludes others. These principles of exclusion and choice “designate a will to knowledge that is anonymous, polymorphous, susceptible to regular transformations, and determined by the play of identifiable dependencies” (Foucault 1977, 200).

Thus, the speech and other texts analyzed for this investigation are understood as discursive practices in the Foucaultian sense, and the questions guiding this research lean towards interrogating the conditions of possibility for those discourses to exist and to be seen as *reasonable*, while at the same time participating in the production of objects that were not there before (like the notion of a global education reform movement, universal best practices, or the social entrepreneur). This focus on the productive aspect of power relations and discursive practices adds a dimension that had been rarely present in the literature on policy borrowing and lending. Studying the ways in which objects are produced engages in the operation of deconstruction of said objects, in order to open up the possibilities for a different present.

FINDINGS

The Role of the Individual and the Allure of the NGO

“We want the protagonists of our programs to experience the transformation of their students so that these professionals then realize the transformation of education at a national level” (Enseñá por Argentina 2012). With this statement of purpose, Enseñá por Argentina positions itself as part of what is perceived to be a needed transformation of education on a large scale. While in that same statement the organization acknowledges that the issues of quality and inclusion in education are systemic problems that need a transformation coming from all spheres with the commitment of all, the discourses position the individual having a central role as an agent of change in this reform. Change is the responsibility of the individual corps members—and the program’s alumni—and the narrative about large-scale change starting from the actions of a few is also one of the main appeals of the discourse of micro-lending.

What I am terming here “micro-lending” could be understood as a subset of what Ball (2012) describes as “new” or “venture philanthropy”:

What is 'new' in 'new philanthropy' is the direct relation of 'giving' to 'outcomes' and the direct involvement of givers in philanthropic action and policy communities. That

is, a move from palliative to developmental giving...The 'new' philanthropists want to see clear and measurable impacts and outcomes from the 'investments' of time and money. In this way, the business perspective is brought to bear upon social and educational issues and problems. (Ball 2012, 69-70)

For instance, one of the main funders of the Teach For All network is New Profit Inc., which has given \$3 million plus \$1 million of pro bono work to the organization.²⁴ New Profit Inc. defines itself as “a [US-based] national venture philanthropy fund that seeks to harness America's spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship to help solve our country's biggest social problems.”²⁵ Ball argues that venture philanthropy is grounded on three principles: “‘bringing non-profits to scale’ by committing large blocks of funding over long periods of time; emphasizing evaluation and performance management; and fostering ‘investor-investee’ relations on the basis of consultative engagement” (2012, 70). All of these principles are present in the relation between New Profit Inc. and Teach For All, according to New Profit’s website. But these principles are also present in the linkage between Teach For All and Enseñá por Argentina, and this is where the notion of micro-lending enters the fray.

The notion of micro-lending serves to highlight the fact that these programs are not part of the policies that are pushed on developing countries as conditions for large-scale aid, but they work in a different manner. Structural adjustment policies on the macro level recommended by international financial organizations, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have come under intense and largely public scrutiny in the last decade (e.g., see Morrow and Torres 2000; Stiglitz 2003) as their effects on the receiving nations have been for the most part nothing less than catastrophic. While these critiques have not led to the disappearance of these strategies, a different discourse has emerged in an attempt to blend democratic and neoliberal cosmopolitan ideals (Camicia and Franklin 2011). Teach For All mobilizes the sensibilities embedded in the language of the grassroots movements by shifting the locus of change away from international financial entities and state-level policies and onto NGOs and individual leaders who understand themselves to be agents of change against a stagnant status quo. Arjun Appadurai (2000) channels the idealism present in the language of the grassroots movements by terming them “globalization from below”, describing NGOs as the most common kind of institutions that compose the grassroots globalization. NGOs are:

²⁴ <http://www.teachforall.org/aboutus_supporters.html>.

²⁵ <<http://www.newprofit.com/cgi-bin/iowa/about/index.html>>.

concerned with mobilizing highly specific local, national, and regional groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution... There is also a growing consensus on what such grassroots efforts to globalize are up against. Globalization (understood as a particular, contemporary configuration in the relationship between capital and the nation-state) is demonstrably creating increased inequalities both within and across societies, spiraling processes of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between finance and manufacturing capital, as well as between goods and the wealth required to purchase them. (Appadurai 2000, 15-16)

Teach For All mobilizes the ideas that Appadurai ascribes to grassroots movements by focusing on the production of the entrepreneurial individual that will carry on educational reform “from below”, with calls for social justice and responsibility, this time not necessarily critiquing capitalism, but economizing the social sphere in order to make change more “efficient”. After attending the annual Teach First/Teach For All conference in London in 2012, Andreas Schleicher, Deputy Director for Education and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Secretary General, expressed:

What struck me most is the vision of social transformation behind all this work – extending from teacher leadership through school leadership, policy and political leadership, up to community organisation. The work of these organisations can complement the OECD's efforts to design and implement policies by challenging the teaching profession and education systems from within.²⁶

The aspect of individual-led change is a central element in the appeal of the Teach For All model for potential recruits. Drawing from a sense of frustration with both governmental bureaucracies and large institutions, programs affiliated with the Teach For All network, such as Enseñá por Argentina, see themselves as transformational agents from the ground up, apolitical actors whose willpower and outside perspective will lead to a better tomorrow. Enseñá por Argentina mobilizes these discourses in search of that particular audience: the individual who sees participation in NGOs as a civic commitment that serves both as a sense of social change and as a space in which small-scale actions do not get lost in the vastness of large-scale movements.

²⁶ <<http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.fr/2012/09/a-lesson-in-teaching-from-grassroots.html>>.



Figure 1. La Nación.

Figure 1 presents an ad that was published in one of Argentina's main national newspapers, *La Nación*, on May 16, 2012. The ad states: "We seek leaders. Give your career a different start. Transform children's education. Become an agent of change in their lives. Give them a future with more possibilities. Work for social change. Join this challenge." The ad then refers its audience to the organization's website and Facebook page, where the central ideals of Enseñá por Argentina are explained. The image of a colorful, dirty young woman evokes the common Argentine "ritual" of celebrating college graduation by being bombarded with flour, eggs and finger paint after the last exam. Youth, personal commitment, a shift in one's life path, and the challenge to work for social change all converge in a discourse aimed at appealing to the dissatisfied citizen that wants "things" to change and to have a role in that change, but distrusts large bureaucracies as a path to achieve them. And in the case of many of the interviewees, this message seems to resonate well.

Four of the corps members interviewed for this study mentioned specific elements from the ad and the narrative about NGOs as among the main reasons for enrolling in the program. Micaela,²⁷ for instance, said that she was interested in "high school education, and in [the organization] being an NGO. I had already worked with NGOs... but always as a volunteer. Therefore, I was interested in something a bit more formal, and in being in a context that was neither private [i.e., for-profit] nor the state, something like a third sector." Ana, after telling me that she had never considered teaching as a long-term profession, adds that what she found appealing from Enseñá por Argentina was that: "It seemed like a challenge, to teach in difficult contexts... I wanted to try it, to see if I could do it." Dina mentioned that, after seeing ads, she thought: "I want to work here because it's a job that I would like to do...it seems that it has the

²⁷ All names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

intention of wanting to help.” Finally, Ricardo expressed that “truthfully, the idea of teaching classes in high-need schools was very attractive...because the idea of being able to help, to lend a hand, appealed to me.”

As a counterpoint, but also grounded on some of the same assumptions about NGOs presented by Appadurai as “grassroots globalization”, Dina expressed her frustration towards the workings of Enseñá por Argentina by stating that, after checking the program’s website, she thought it would be something she would like to do because “it seems to have the intention of helping..., but you don’t imagine what it really is when you get in.” After being asked what she is referring to, Dina replies: “That Enseñá por Argentina really looks like an NGO, and when you get in, you realize it is an absolutely vertical [*verticalista*, as in hierarchical] organization. That is, you either align yourself with them or you align yourself with them [implying there is no other choice], you can’t voice your opinions... it works like a large Yankee multinational corporation.”

The idea of NGOs serving as vehicles for social change just by being NGOs, that is, not involved in state bureaucracies yet able to channel the energies of many into a common effort, serves as the undercurrent for the appeal of Enseñá por Argentina, but also as a source for disappointment in the ways in which it functions. However, the idea of the NGO serves not only as a label for the way in which the program functions and the role it assumes in education reform, but also as a way of distinguishing itself from the unionized sphere of the public schools. Within the realm of this NGO and the discourses that shape it, individual teachers are understood as agents of change that are differentiated from traditional teachers in that they assume the responsibility of change without relying on *easy ways out*: “When faced with the inevitable challenges that plague the under-resourced schools where the achievement gap is at its worst, teachers must respond not by giving up or making excuses but instead by asking, ‘How am I going to navigate these challenges for the sake of my students?’” (Teaching As Leadership 2012).

This view of the teacher is represented by what Enseñá por Argentina calls the “transformational teacher” [*docente/profesor transformacional*]. In reference to a common stereotype about unionized public school teachers, it was clearly stated during the first class on the first day of the Summer Institute that the program was not about training the kind of teacher that takes leave every day and misses class without justification. While the transformational teacher was never concisely defined during my visit to the Summer Institute, what was clear was what it was not: the traditional teacher who does not care about students’ learning. Inequalities in education seem to be the result of bad, uncaring, or uncommitted teachers, and it is only through the action of young, willing and committed individuals that those inequalities can be reduced or eliminated. For

instance, a “case study” commonly circulated among Teach For America recruits, Ms. Lora’s Story,²⁸ narrates the encounter between a teacher on her way to becoming transformational and a traditional, non-caring public school teacher, Ms. Franklin. While Ms. Franklin has low expectations for her “troublesome” students and encourages Ms. Lora not to worry about them, Ms. Lora never gives up and accomplishes the unthinkable: measurable success with students that were lagging behind.

The Will to Change

Within Enseñá por Argentina’s framework, the single most important ingredient needed for educational and social reform is will. Societies, schools and classrooms stick to the status quo because individuals do not have enough will to change. Teachers do not reach all children when they do not want to, or when they do not want to badly enough. Students do not succeed because they are not motivated, and the teacher’s role is to engage them at the motivational level. Will supersedes pedagogical content knowledge, structural inequalities, lack of resources, or disconnections between teachers and communities. In other words, will overpowers any “excuses”.

The ways in which the importance of will is expressed in the program are multiple. On the one hand, the way Enseñá por Argentina is structured as a teacher *training* organization speaks to a dismissal of teacher preparation. Robert Bullough and Andrew Gitlin (1994) refer to teacher *training* as programs which emphasize “the technical aspects of teaching practice divorced from educational aims and purposes” (p. 67). Borrowing the model from Teach For America, the heightened focus on the selection process invokes the idea that people without a background in pedagogy or the field of education, but with a good academic performance and demonstrated passion for change, already possess what is needed to teach. The five-week Summer Institute – the only preparation corps members receive prior to their entrance in classrooms as teachers of record – dismisses the complexities of teacher education (Darling-Hammond 2000) in favor of a focus on techniques that allows the teacher to channel the will to change in the most efficient and/or effective manner.²⁹ For instance, at the beginning of the Summer Institute, each corps member is given one packet of materials [*Cuadernillo de Formación*] that serves as a reference for the content of the classes. The packet is divided into three modules: “Planning with a Vision”, “Leadership in Teaching and Classroom Management”, and “Constant Assessment and Continuous Improvement”.

²⁸ <http://www.teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Ms.Lora_.Story_.pdf>.

²⁹ The fact that corps members, who do not possess a teaching certification prior to their involvement in the program, are enrolled in a certification program for the duration of the program is of little importance, since this still indicates that, by the time they complete the actual certification, their contracts are over. Corps members are still being placed as teachers of record with very limited preparation.

Among these modules, planning in five steps, backward design, strategies leading to improved performance in tests, and appropriate techniques to formulate learning goals take center stage, displacing the role of inquiry, philosophical and sociological interrogations of the role of schooling and education, historical understandings of the conditions that have led to inequality, and curricular questions about knowledge and power, among many others.

This lack of a broader understanding of teacher knowledge is also reflected in the person leading Enseñá por Argentina. While he taught in a secondary school for three years, the CEO did not go through a teacher education program. His background is in marketing and finance, and before leading Enseñá por Argentina he established a foundation that gives grants to poor high school students to attend college. The main motivation for the CEO to participate in the founding of Enseñá por Argentina was a discontent with the status quo in terms of education inequities, and a will to change the situation. “Like many of the CEOs in the network, I left behind a secure, corporate job and found visionary people who were willing to set aside some comforts – to do something important for our country.”³⁰ For him, limited knowledge about teaching, almost no involvement in public schools, and no scholarly research in teacher education on his part would have just been *excuses* for not engaging in change efforts. In fact, in an interview he gave for a TV show, he mentioned his status as an outsider to the educational system as a key element in the paradigmatic change proposed by Enseñá por Argentina: “It is a big virtue, and advantage, to be able to articulate [the reform] from the outside [of the system].”³¹

Finally, negative attitudes that jeopardize the will to change are seen as a threat to the program, and individuals displaying them are swiftly disciplined. During her interview for this study, Olga tells the story of an essay on education and being a teacher which she wrote as an assignment right before the Summer Institute took place:

So, I started my monograph saying that it was not easy being a teacher in Argentina in 2012, that it was not a job where you would get up in the morning, get to your office and turn on the heat, that teenagers are not an age group easily accessible and understandable, and that it was a job that 80% of the population would tell you is difficult and even unhealthy nowadays. But that, nonetheless, I still place my bet on it, because this is my vocation, because I love what I do... When [an Enseñá por Argentina staff member] provides me feedback, she tells me that I’m a negative person, a fatalist, that she did not like combative people. Oh, because I had said that I would like for them to explain to people how the school system works... that if you

³⁰ <http://www.teachforall.org/newsletter/oct2012/get_to_know_a_ceo.html>.

³¹ <<http://diazdecrisis.com/2012/07/20-de-julio-2012/>>.

work in public schools you won't get paid until the third month... a lot of administrative stuff. And she told me that she and, by implication, the program did not want any combative people.

Relying on the will to change as the central ingredient for reform seems to imply, for Enseñá por Argentina, a distancing from any critical thought that could at some point be used as an *excuse* and thus diminish the will. The comments made towards a group of *combative* (as the criticized corps members jokingly called themselves) corps members who expressed concerns about the program point to the need to keep the will untarnished by the negative seeds of questioning.³² Dina, for instance, reports that after expressing some doubts about her readiness to teach a subject in which she had little expertise, she was told: "We chose you among 2000 people and if you feel like that, it is because you want to feel like that. It is not our fault." Nuria felt somewhat uncomfortable after a manager from one of the sponsors, DHL, came to the Summer Institute to lecture on the similarities between the logic of schooling and that of the corporate world: "[Enseñá por Argentina's staff] asked me if I had felt uncomfortable. I told them 'yes, but not so badly that you had to take me out of the room and interview me on this'... interviewing me immediately after this happened was a way of silencing me, of closing up the debate, of questioning my permanence in the program..."

One recurrent issue throughout the analysis of Enseñá por Argentina is how the discourses shaping the program are able to channel real concerns that are currently circulating in the pedagogical arena and turn them into binaries in which Enseñá por Argentina positions itself as the solution. For instance, the rule mandating teaching positions be filled by public examination is the one rule posing the toughest challenge to Enseñá por Argentina in terms of its founding mission ("to provide all children and youth in our country with a quality education"³³); due to the examination requirement, corps members are not allowed to work in public schools unless they have a previous teaching degree. As a result, Enseñá por Argentina mainly sends its members to the remaining kind of schools serving a low-income population: private religious schools, subsidized by the state, but not subject to the same hiring rules that govern public schools. Returning to the statistics provided in the introductory section, this would leave roughly 5.3% of schools available for placements.

³² This argument about wanting to preserve the purity of positive intention could also serve as an explanatory lens for the reaction that the program had towards my research (see note 13).

³³ <<http://www.ensenaporargentina.org/web/index.php/site/modelo>>.

This situation, in conjunction with the frustration that many young teachers feel when they realize how difficult it is to enter the public school teaching force, allows for the establishment, by Enseñá por Argentina, of a binary between those who possess the will to change (but are usually tied by bureaucracy) and those who can live with the status quo. Enseñá por Argentina positions itself as an organization with the power to channel that will towards a reform that, through the use of broad, vague statements, appears to be universal, yet is highly particularistic.

“The Children Come First”

One of the slogans that was repeated throughout the Summer Institute was: “The children come first.” This phrase, which seems almost commonsensical in terms of prioritizing the needs of children and future generations, assumes different meanings when juxtaposed with the grid of discursive practices that surround Enseñá por Argentina.

One of the consequences of placing children “first” is that the needs and rights of teachers recede into the background. One illustration of this point took place during the Summer Institute, when a corps member from the first cohort, who was about to enter her second year in the classroom, came to visit the new recruits to share her experiences. She claimed that her main goal for her first year as a teacher was to never miss a day of class, because her students need her and they come first. She had decided that even if she was sick or confronting an issue in her personal life, she had made the commitment to never miss a day, and she had accomplished it. This was received by a big round of applause. While this person’s commitment to her students is certainly commendable, what was missing from that conversation was any reference to the set of rights that teachers, as workers, have historically struggled for and achieved in Argentina (Gindin 2011). The right to take leave when sick, for example, is part of the teacher’s statute, as is the school’s responsibility to find a substitute. It is important to mention here that only public schools are mandated to adhere to the teacher’s statute. In a similar vein, Emilia reported the following during my interview with her:

One time I had an exam at my university and I wanted to ask for a day off to study,³⁴ but they didn’t give it to me in the private school [that Enseñá por Argentina assigned me to]. In the public schools [where I was working at prior to my involvement with Enseñá por Argentina] they did. So, when they did not give me the day off, I spoke with the people at Enseñá por Argentina and told them: ‘Hey, they don’t want to give me the day off to study and this is part of my professionalization as a teacher.’ And

³⁴ The right to take a day off to study is also part of the teacher’s statute.

they told me that it was alright, that the children came first... that they did not believe or expect me to be one of those teachers that go around demanding [teachers'] rights.

This proposed solution to the problem can only be understood by analyzing how the problem was framed in the first place. Stating that “children come first” as a way of defending children’s rights to a quality education is made possible by the underlying assumption of a conflict of interest between children and adults. For Enseñá por Argentina, it would seem that one either puts children first, or one puts adults/teachers first. Prioritizing teachers’ rights, then, is read as sidelining the children’s best interests in selfish and uncaring ways.

Once again, Enseñá por Argentina is channeling a real concern. According to a recent report that looks at the 13 most-populated districts in the Province of Buenos Aires,³⁵ 37.8% of teachers requested no leave in 2010, while 62.1% of the teachers did request at least one day of leave during that period (Mezzadra 2011). The study, which utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, also mentions the main causes of the high absenteeism rates: mental and physical illnesses, attending to sick family members, spread of the teaching load among many distant schools, transportation issues, teachers’ work ethic and motivation, response to learning by students, and principals’ leadership, among others. Enseñá por Argentina mobilizes the issue of motivation and commitment to establish a binary that appeals to the corps members’ ideals, yet leaves out all the other causes for absenteeism, including structural issues.

Teaching as a Mission

One of the pillars of the idea of placing the children first, as seen by the examples above, is that of understanding teachers not as workers, but as people who are willing to give themselves fully to a vocation or a calling. One of the guests invited to lecture during the Summer Institute, a theologian who used to work at the Universidad Católica Argentina [Catholic University of Argentina], presented corps members with a choice: one could either view teaching as a mere job, or one could view it as a mission. The mission would imply giving oneself entirely to a higher cause, framing education as a fundamentally spiritual task. The problem with education nowadays, he claimed, lies in people whose source of meaning has dried up, thus stating that the problems in education can be solved by individual teachers finding that meaning again. Using a cartoon (Figure 2), this speaker called for a return to the idea of the teacher as a shepherd. Stating that most teachers have given up on their jobs, the spiritual teachers –he claimed – are the ones who consume

³⁵ There is no current study of absenteeism at a national level.

themselves in order to consummate themselves, like a candle. Change, he concluded, is in the hands of the teacher.



Figura 2. Dialogue: “Do you mind if I sit? Sometimes I feel nostalgia for my job” “What do you do?” “I’m a school teacher.” Legend at the bottom: “Teachers sometimes act as shepherds, others as parents, others as psychologists and every now and then as teachers.”

While the connection between Enseñá por Argentina, the Catholic Church, and the religious undertones of the enterprise will need to be explored in further depth in a different article due to the complexities inherent in these linkages,³⁶ it is worth noting here that understanding the teacher as a shepherd and teaching as a mission guided by a higher calling has historical, political and philosophical implications. Historically, Hunter (1994) points out that: “All Western states developed mass education systems through the bureaucratic adaptation of Christian pastoral pedagogy to the needs of social training” (p.173). Drawing from Foucault’s (1982) investigations of pastoral power, Hunter exposes the ways in which modern schooling mobilizes the teacher as shepherd to instill a sense of morality in students, who learn to discipline themselves as part of the national flock. Whereas discourses stemming from religion have never left the field of education (Tröhler 2009), especially in regards to its themes of salvation and redemption (Popkewitz 1998),

³⁶ While Enseñá por Argentina appears on paper to be a secular organization, some of the characteristics that link it with what could be called a Catholic common sense are: the fact that most, if not all of the staff come from an active Catholic background, including having attended Catholic universities; the strong ties to the Vicariate in charge of Catholic schools in Buenos Aires; the high percentage of corps members that are active in their churches; and the partnership that Enseñá por Argentina has established with Universidad Austral, a Catholic University with strong ties to Opus Dei, to grant teaching certificates through their masters degrees (<http://www.austral.edu.ar/la-universidad/opus-dei/>).

the overt callback to an idea of teachers as shepherds following a vocational calling, in conjunction with the construction of its opposite (i.e., the teacher for whom teaching is a mere job) serves to instill in corps members a sense of non-reciprocal duty. In other words, while teachers are to give their all for the children, the transcendental nature of their calling precludes them for asking for anything in return.

Relevant here are experiences recounted during interviews by three corps members that highlight the tension that emerges between conceiving teachers as individuals who follow a transcendental calling (and thus cannot or should not demand anything in exchange), and the conception of teaching as a political task, where the work is accompanied by a struggle for recognition and claims for rights that are needed for the establishment of a more equal society. These three women, when writing a required introductory essay after the initial meeting on what it means to be a teacher, quoted Paulo Freire. However, one of the staff members leading the Summer Institute criticized them, indicating that the Brazilian pedagogue represented a view of education that was different from the one that Enseñá por Argentina supported. Emilia, for instance, after having cited Freire, was told that she “was using a theoretical line that is too strong. I [Emilia] told them that, ‘yes, I mean, for me education is a political task. I have no doubts about it.’ And well, they told me that their system was different, and that I would have to try to adapt.” Similarly, Dina reported that a Summer Institute staff member informed her that “the theoretical currents that we are going to use have nothing to do with Freire, they are North American, and you may feel uncomfortable if Freire is important to you.” Finally, Olga used a photo of Freire in a *favela*, and was told by the same Summer Institute staff member that the image was “too violent”, and that she should have a more positive image of schooling.

However, this is not to say that Enseñá por Argentina does not express a concern for the well being of children from low-income families. Providing everyone with a quality education is at the center of the program’s mission. The point being raised here is about the underlying assumptions behind the basic understandings of teaching and the teacher, and the effects that those assumptions have on the production of a particular kind of teacher. If the teacher is *not* seen as a political actor, and if teaching is *not* regarded as political action (as alluded to by the three corps members in the interviews), then what remains is a focus on two aspects: the aforementioned will to change (not in socially and/or politically constructed terms, but as individual motivation) and the more technical side of teaching, such as planning in five steps, backward design, and quantitative learning assessments – all of which were prominent during the Summer Institute.

The narrative surrounding micro-lending requires the idea of grassroots reform to be non-controversial. If politics can be defined as the continuous struggle to define meanings and directions for the social body, then the consideration of the reform led by Enseñá por Argentina as apolitical requires the assumption of a consensus that overrides that struggle, or that considers politics as an obstacle for promoting a change with which, without question, *everybody agrees*. The figure of the shepherd, linked above to the role of the teacher, reemerges as a particular understanding of the role of Enseñá por Argentina:

that conception of the political [as shepherd] reproduces the conception associated with representative government, a trustee or stewardship notion of acting on behalf or in the interests of others with the tacit assumption... that the vast majority of the "others" had an "interest" but not a coherent, that is, well-informed opinion about how to protect or promote it. (Wolin 1996, 35)

By channeling the discourse of social change through the kind of grassroots organizations that – as argued by Ball (2012) – economize the social sphere, Enseñá por Argentina acts on behalf of an apparent majority who *knows* what is wrong with the system: schools that do not teach, (unionized) teachers that do not care, and a lack of accountability on everyone's part. Yet the claim for the apolitical nature of this enterprise is political precisely because this commonsensical knowledge – these problems that everyone knows – is very much contested, not only in terms of the solutions, but also in the very way in which the problems are framed and posed.

CONCLUSIONS

Ball (2010) defines the neoliberal subject as “malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled – essentially depthless” (p. 126), as the individual becomes “an enterprise, a self-maximizing productive unit operating in a market of performances” (p.126). Ball's definition oversimplifies the constitution of the neoliberal subject by opposing qualities that, within current discourses, are not necessarily exclusive. In some ways, my analysis shows that Enseñá por Argentina seeks to produce subjects who are malleable *and* committed, flexible *and* principled. By borrowing the language of grassroots change grounded on the will of individuals participating in NGOs, Enseñá por Argentina engages in a narrative of educational reform seen as apolitical, in the sense of it being commonsensical to the point of becoming uncontestable.

Children come first in the attempt to bring a quality education for all through the formation of transformational teachers. Each one of these “ingredients” – children first, quality education, and transformational teachers – combines democratic and neoliberal cosmopolitan ideals (Camicia and

Franklin 2011), morphing into a blend that becomes unique when it gets deployed in different settings, with different histories and political idiosyncrasies, and slowly becomes *common sense*:

Within all of this, ‘reform’ ideas or forms of ‘improvement’ which seemed radical, even unthinkable, become more and more possible, then normal and then necessary—in part through what I call a ‘ratchet effect’ (Ball, 2008). Over time practices that are ‘fragmented, repetitive and discontinuous’ (Foucault, 2004, p. 4) become ‘totally inscribed in general and essential transformations’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 139): in this case in the ‘*firming-up*’ or *enterprising* of the public sector, and indeed of the state itself. Two aspects of change are involved here; one is endogenous (meaning that we are *changed*) and the other is exogenous (meaning we are *replaced*). (Ball 2010, 129)

This is precisely the “paradigmatic change” to which educational reformers advocating for the Teach For All model, including Enseñá por Argentina, refer. In positioning the individual teacher at the center of the reform movement, yet removing her or his status as a political actor, education reform is transformed from a political act in which the direction and meaning of change are part of a struggle and negotiation, into an apolitical matter of the will to change, overpowering the lack of will by those less committed. Yet, this move is clearly political, in that it attempts to turn real conflict into undisputable reasonability, so that one particular understanding of teaching and teachers becomes *reasonable* as the universal understanding everyone knows.

Enseñá por Argentina mobilizes the resentment against both the State and all large-scale efforts to improve society to appeal to an audience who wants to take an active role in said change and see concrete effects of their participation, but distrust the “political” side of organizations. Enseñá por Argentina becomes the solution to particular problems that the program itself frames in specific ways: the difficulty for young people to enter the teaching force in public schools is portrayed as resistance to change on the part of large bureaucracies; high rates of teacher absenteeism are read as lack of care for children; low standing in national and international testing is turned into a problem to be solved by specific *best practices*. In this process, a new object is produced: the transformational teacher, the subject whose will to change is unburdened by bureaucratic challenges, who is armed with optimal teaching techniques, and who will accomplish educational and even social reform guided by the ethical standards *everyone knows*. The emergence of the type of reforms represented by Enseñá por Argentina never happens in a void, yet the self-referential nature of the ways in which problems are framed should not be disregarded.

As opposed to previous efforts that imposed policies by demanding their implementation as condition for aid (as highlighted by the literature on policy borrowing and lending), these educational NGOs are the recipients of micro-lending efforts that export the idea of reform not

coming for the top, but emerging from the bottom up. However, tension builds when the call for grassroots reform from transnational organizations that consider their assumptions to be universal encounters the particular histories of the people and places from which the grassroots programs are born. In the case of Enseñá por Argentina, the resulting attempt at education reform becomes an outsider looking in, with serious difficulties making sense of *how* nobody else can see what for them is obvious: the need to change.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the workings and underlying assumptions behind Ensenã por Argentina (Teach for Argentina), one specific program that takes part in the larger and expanding network of Teach for All, by thinking about the ways in which a global push for redefining teaching and teacher education encounters local characteristics and histories, thus producing something different. My focus on the Argentine program will serve two interrelated purposes. First, it helps us to better understand the production of a particular kind of neoliberal subject, the social entrepreneur who functions as the engine for change. Second, the study engages in questions about the transferability of models in socially, politically, and pedagogically diverse contexts, through what I call policy microlending, of teacher education and of particular artifacts within it to organizations that channel discourses about change coming from the grassroots.

Submetido em: setembro de 2014

Aprovado em: dezembro de 2014