

Neoliberal Pedagogy of Economics in Peru (1945-2000)

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Abstract

In this presentation, my subject matter is the role of “pedagogy” in neoliberalism. While the centrality of ideas is a known fact in the discussion on neoliberalism, being the intellectual thought collectives the hallmark of this movement, there is less focus on “pedagogic” zeal of neoliberals. Although less visible with the current conflation of neoliberalism with technocracy, neoliberals – throughout the decades – have tried to posit themselves as those who make the economy clear and accessible to the informed citizen. Organizations like the Foundation for Economic Education, created by Lawrence Reed (an animated by Harry Hazlitt) in the midst of the businessmen revolt against the New Deal, embodies this attitude, framing their proselytizing objectives in a pedagogic proposal, many times opposing the rising economics profession (driven, at that time, by the Keynesian revolution), trying to reach audiences beyond academia and university. These early attempts in the 1940s have only grew larger in the following decades, reaching the well-known influence in leading universities (Chicago) or even creating universities with the sole purpose of advancing the liberal creed (like the Francisco Marroquin university in Guatemala).

My perspective here will be to see this process from the Peruvian experience with neoliberalism. While side-lined in comparison with other well studied regional cases like Chile, Peru exhibits not only a current resilient neoliberal regime, but also a long history of liberal policies and important neoliberal figures. In that sense, besides showing the links between the general pedagogical project of the neoliberal movement and the Peruvian case (being the FEE and Hazlitt influence direct), I will show the specific strategies and institutions use to advance the neoliberal interpretation of the economic problems. While the temporal arc will encompass from 1945 to 2000 (focusing mostly in the two periods of more activity, 1945-1968 and 1978-1995), of more importance for this presentation will be the variety of institutions and spaces where the neoliberal pedagogy was carried on (that move from daily press to high school textbooks) as well as the specific discursive strategies.

This presentation hinges on an extensive archival work, made mostly in Lima, but also in distinct archives worldwide (digital and physically). While Pedro Beltran’s *La Prensa* and *Ultima Hora* newspapers are central sources, I also analyse the output of organizations like Alianza Nacional (political party), Centro de Documentación Económico-Social (Non-Governmental Organization), the Office of Economic and Social Research (department inside the Chamber of Commerce of Lima), the Ministry of Education, the Central Bank, and the want-to be inheritor of this neoliberal institutional ecosystem in the nineties, Carlos Boloña’s Instituto de Economía de Libre Mercado (IELM) embedded in his educational investments (Instituto and then University San Ignacio de Loyola). Alongside explaining this Peruvian story, I expect that this in-depth analysis of the form of diffusion of neoliberal ideas also illuminates a theoretical dialectic in the heart of neoliberal thought: while on the one side there is these pedagogical practices of clarifying the economical in contrast to “abstruse” expert talk, on the other side, neoliberal doctrine also precludes a total access to the economy as an object of knowledge, due to the sublime complexity of the market. How to understand this apparent contradiction?